# CPS redefines charges after Koran burning sparks blasphemy law fears in UK



A recent incident outside the Turkish consulate in London, involving the burning of a Koran, has ignited significant debate regarding free speech and potential blasphemy laws in the UK. Hamet Coskun, a 50-year-old man from Derby, allegedly set fire to the Muslim holy book during a public demonstration in February, an act that led to his initial charge of “racially aggravated harassment” directed at Islam itself. Critics, including Shadow Justice Secretary Robert Jenrick and the National Secular Society, expressed deep concerns that such a charge could represent the reintroduction of blasphemy laws by stealth—laws that had been abolished in Britain nearly two decades ago.

Following these criticisms, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has revised the wording of the charges against Coskun. He now faces allegations that, while burning the Koran and making inflammatory statements—characterising Islam as “a religion of terrorism”—he was motivated by hostility towards Muslims rather than targeting the “institution of Islam.” This change, while still retaining the essence of the charges against him, underscores the ongoing tension surrounding religious expression and its potential conflation with illegal conduct.

The incident did not merely provoke legal discussions; it escalated dramatically when Coskun was attacked by another individual wielding a knife, resulting in charges against the attacker for actual bodily harm and possession of an offensive weapon. Such violence illustrates the volatile reactions that acts of religious provocation can precipitate and highlights the divisive nature of public discourse related to faith and identity.

The legal implications of Coskun's actions warrant serious consideration. A CPS source reiterated that blasphemy laws do not exist within the legal framework of England and Wales today. However, the agency also stated that it will keep all ongoing cases under review. While upholding this separation, the pressures and fears around potential reintroduction of blasphemy-style charges raise questions about the boundaries of free speech in a multicultural society.

Coskun has maintained his innocence and contends that his actions were a form of political protest rather than a personal attack against individual Muslims. His insistence that he did not aim to harass but instead to critique reflects a broader discourse on the lines between legitimate political expression and hate speech. The situation brings forth a critical dialogue: one about the responsibilities of individuals in a democratic society to navigate the delicate interplay between provocation and respect for diversity.

As this case progresses through the courts, it serves as a reminder of the complexities surrounding freedom of expression in relation to religious sensitivities. Lawmakers and advocates promoting secularism will continue to watch closely, urging vigilance against any regression to laws that could curtail such freedoms under the guise of protecting religious institutions. The discussion is not simply confined to legal jurisdictions but is emblematic of the broader societal struggle to preserve a balance between expression and respect in increasingly pluralistic communities.

The incident’s heightened awareness may lead to a broader examination of how Australia, Canada, and other Western nations reconcile freedom of speech with the need for social cohesion in diverse societies. As such, it invites a global reconsideration of both the legislative and societal approaches to speech that challenges deeply held beliefs and identities.

In this evolving landscape, it is crucial for all stakeholders—including citizens, lawmakers, and religious communities—to engage constructively and thoughtfully to foster a society that can uphold both freedom and respect.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: Lead article
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Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14697539/Man-set-fire-Koran-Turkish-consulate-Islam-London.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/turkish-knightsbridge-kensington-and-chelsea-derby-metropolitan-police-b1211344.html> - This article reports on the charges against Hamit Coskun, 50, from Derby, who allegedly burned a Koran outside the Turkish consulate in London. The incident led to a confrontation where Coskun was attacked by a man wielding a knife. Coskun has been charged with a religiously aggravated public order offence, while Moussa Kadri, 59, from Kensington and Chelsea, has been charged with causing actual bodily harm and possession of an offensive weapon. Both individuals are scheduled to appear in court.
3. <https://www.thejc.com/opinion/a-blasphemy-law-by-the-back-door-is-bad-news-for-all-of-us-pk1cbqu0> - This opinion piece discusses concerns raised by the National Secular Society and Shadow Justice Secretary Robert Jenrick regarding the potential creation of a de facto blasphemy law in the UK. The article highlights the case of Hamit Coskun, who was charged with religiously aggravated harassment after burning a Koran outside the Turkish consulate in London. The author argues that such charges could lead to the reintroduction of blasphemy laws, which were abolished in Britain 18 years ago.
4. <https://www.stratford-herald.com/national/man-denies-religious-aggravation-charge-after-burning-of-koran-139442/> - This article reports on Hamit Coskun's denial of charges related to burning a Koran outside the Turkish consulate in London. Coskun, 50, from Derby, has been charged with 'intent to cause against religious institution of Islam, harassment, alarm or distress.' The incident occurred in Rutland Gardens, Knightsbridge, and was captured on social media. Coskun appeared at Westminster Magistrates’ Court, entering not guilty pleas and was released on conditional bail pending a trial on May 28.
5. <https://www.turkiyetoday.com/world/man-burns-quran-outside-turkish-consulate-in-london-119278/> - This article reports on an incident where a man attempted to burn the Quran outside the Turkish Consulate in Knightsbridge, London. The authorities are investigating the event, which sparked strong reactions on social media. The man, believed to be of Turkish origin, had notified the public in advance about his protest. The article also mentions that the protestor had previously described Islam as a 'religion of terrorism' on social media.
6. <https://www.gbnews.com/news/koran-burning-turkish-embassy-london-charged-knifeman> - This article discusses the charges against Hamit Coskun, 50, who allegedly burned the Koran outside the Turkish embassy in London and was subsequently attacked by a knifeman. Coskun has been charged with a religiously aggravated public order offence and pleaded not guilty at Westminster Magistrates’ Court. Moussa Kadri, 59, of Kensington and Chelsea, was charged with causing actual bodily harm and possessing an offensive weapon. Both men are scheduled to appear in court.
7. <https://www.opindia.com/news-updates/kurdish-activist-hamit-coskun-burns-quran-outside-turkish-consulate-london-attacked-with-knife-details/> - This article reports on an incident where Kurdish activist Hamit Coşkun burned a copy of the Quran outside the Turkish consulate in London and was subsequently attacked by a knife-wielding individual. Coşkun was injured during the attack and was admitted to the hospital. The police arrested the attacker for grievous bodily harm and possession of an offensive weapon. The article also notes that Coşkun had previously described Islam as a 'religion of terrorism' on social media.