# Trial of Hamit Coskun signals renewed threat to free speech in the UK



The ongoing trial of Hamit Coskun, charged with the incendiary act of burning a Koran outside the Turkish consulate in London, underscores a disconcerting trend towards undermining free speech in the UK. Coskun, arrested on February 13, 2023, allegedly protested against President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's administration by holding a burning Koran aloft, provoking significant outrage and debate over the relationship between public order and religious sensitivities.

Coskun, a 50-year-old Turkish asylum seeker with Kurdish and Armenian heritage, vehemently denies the charges, framing his actions as a necessary protest against a regime he argues promotes radicalism and sharia law. His defence attorney, Katy Thorne KC, contends that this prosecution represents an alarming resurrection of blasphemy laws, abolished as recently as 2008 in England and Wales and in 2021 for Scotland. By criminalising the act of burning a Koran, the prosecution risks creating a precedent in which religious texts, particularly those of Islam, are treated with undue legal protection.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) initially characterized Coskun's actions as causing harassment, alarm, or distress to Islam, but revised this framing amid a fierce backlash from advocates of free speech and concerned politicians who warned of impending restrictions on expression. Conservative MP Robert Jenrick hailed this revision as a triumph for free speech, highlighting the urgent need to defend democratic values from encroachments.

Prosecutor Philip McGhee's position argues that Coskun’s actions breached free speech protections, posing a "clear threat to public order," citing the strategic timing and location of the protest. This interpretation, however, raises alarm among critics who see it as a misrepresentation of free expression limits, insisting that peaceful protest against any ideology or government should remain uncontested.

Beyond legal ramifications, the implications of this case resonate within societal fears of national cohesion in a multicultural setting. Coskun’s protest and the subsequent violence he faced—reportedly being attacked with a knife—highlight the volatile intersection of strong political opinions and religious convictions, posing a significant risk to public safety.

Rallies in support of Coskun from advocates of secularism and free expression emphasize the dangers a successful prosecution poses to the concept of self-expression itself, which could anchor a new de facto blasphemy law within the judicial system. The National Secular Society has expressed concerns that this case could catalyse serious consequences for those who dare to dissent against religious ideas.

Stephen Evans, chief executive of the NSS, warns that a conviction would threaten the bedrock of free expression, fostering an environment conducive to suppressing legitimate criticism of religious symbols. Additionally, a spokesperson from Humanists UK cautioned that measures akin to blasphemy laws would severely endanger apostates—individuals abandoning their religion who could face persecution as a result.

As Hamit Coskun's trial progresses, it serves as a pivotal moment for the discourse surrounding freedom of speech and the potential dangers of legislative regression regarding blasphemy laws in the UK. The verdict of this case could profoundly impact the nature of public dialogue surrounding religious beliefs for years to come. The current trajectory suggests a worrying trend under the new government, raising concerns about its commitment to upholding the foundational principles that permit robust debate and dissent.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14756995/britain-risks-blasphemy-law-man-accused-burning-koran.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.breitbart.com/europe/2025/05/10/uk-prosecutor-backtracks-after-attempting-to-charge-quran-burner-with-blasphemy-law-that-doesnt-exist/> - The UK Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) initially charged Hamit Coskun with causing harassment, alarm, or distress to the 'religious institution of Islam' after he burned a Quran outside the Turkish consulate in London. Following backlash from free speech activists and politicians, the CPS revised the charge to more accurately reflect the alleged offence, acknowledging the previous charge was 'incorrectly applied'. Conservative MP Robert Jenrick welcomed the CPS's decision, emphasising the importance of resisting attempts to reintroduce blasphemy laws in the UK. ([breitbart.com](https://www.breitbart.com/europe/2025/05/10/uk-prosecutor-backtracks-after-attempting-to-charge-quran-burner-with-blasphemy-law-that-doesnt-exist/?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.thejc.com/news/politics/quran-burner-blasphemy-laws-cnhlk1n7> - Senior MPs, including former Liberal Democrat leader Tim Farron, have expressed concerns over the decision to charge Hamit Coskun for burning a Quran outside the Turkish consulate in London. They warn that such actions could lead to the imposition of 'de facto blasphemy laws' in the UK. A video circulating online shows Coskun being attacked with a knife after his protest, highlighting the tensions surrounding the incident. ([thejc.com](https://www.thejc.com/news/politics/quran-burner-blasphemy-laws-cnhlk1n7?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.lawgazette.co.uk/news/quran-burning-case-threatens-back-door-blasphemy-law/5122978.article> - The National Secular Society has published a legal opinion warning that the prosecution of Hamit Coskun for burning a Quran outside the Turkish consulate in London could lead to the back-door reinstatement of a blasphemy law in the UK. Human rights barrister Akua Reindorf KC stated that the charge against Coskun is 'plainly defective' and that convicting him would suggest the reintroduction of blasphemy laws. ([lawgazette.co.uk](https://www.lawgazette.co.uk/news/quran-burning-case-threatens-back-door-blasphemy-law/5122978.article?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.newarab.com/news/uk-man-charged-burning-quran-amid-blasphemy-law-criticism> - Hamit Coskun, 50, was charged with causing 'harassment, alarm, or distress' after burning a Quran outside the Turkish consulate in London. He stated that his protest was in solidarity with Salwan Momika, an Iraqi refugee who was killed in Sweden after burning multiple Qurans, and against Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The charges against Coskun were altered following backlash, with the CPS acknowledging the previous charge was 'incorrectly applied'. ([newarab.com](https://www.newarab.com/news/uk-man-charged-burning-quran-amid-blasphemy-law-criticism?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/man-admits-assault-koran-burning-turkish-consulate-london-knightsbridge-b1222348.html> - Moussa Kadri, 59, pleaded guilty to assaulting Hamit Coskun after he burned a Quran outside the Turkish consulate in London. Kadri denied possession of a bladed article during the incident. The case has been sent to Southwark Crown Court, where Kadri will stand trial for the weapon charge and be sentenced for the assault. ([standard.co.uk](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/man-admits-assault-koran-burning-turkish-consulate-london-knightsbridge-b1222348.html?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.gbnews.com/news/koran-burning-protester-hamit-coskun-charges-cps-rewritten-london-turkish-consulate> - The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) amended the charge against Hamit Coskun, who burned a Quran outside the Turkish consulate in London, after backlash from free speech activists and politicians. The CPS acknowledged that the previous charge was 'incorrectly applied' and substituted a new charge to more accurately reflect the alleged offence. Conservative MP Robert Jenrick welcomed the CPS's decision, emphasising the importance of resisting attempts to reintroduce blasphemy laws in the UK. ([gbnews.com](https://www.gbnews.com/news/koran-burning-protester-hamit-coskun-charges-cps-rewritten-london-turkish-consulate?utm_source=openai))