

Archive

Anger Remains in Pakistan, Afghanistan Despite Newsweek Koran Story Retraction

By Benjamin Sand

October 31, 2009 03:24 AM

Pakistani protesters burn a U.S. flag during a protest in Peshawar, Pakistan, May 15, 2005

Newsweek magazine's retraction of its story alleging U.S. soldiers desecrated copies of the Koran has done little to cool the anger of many Muslims in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Muslims in both Afghanistan and Pakistan say they still believe U.S. soldiers in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, abused copies of Islam's holy book in a bid to get terror suspects to talk.

U.S. officials say investigations have uncovered no indication the events took place and stressed such abuse would be reprehensible and contrary to U.S. policy. *Newsweek* magazine on Monday retracted its story making the allegations.

But despite the U.S. statements and *Newsweek's* retraction on Monday, some Muslim leaders in Pakistan say they will still carry out mass protests planned for next week.

Syed Munawar Hasan, a leader of an Islamic political group that opposes the government and is an outspoken critic of the U.S.-led war against terrorism, says he cannot accept U.S. denials because he thinks the United States does not respect Islam.

"So this is [the] attitude that the U.S. government is taking, so how can we change our opinion until they change their priorities and policies?" he said.

Last week, Pakistan's senate issued a resolution condemning the alleged abuse, and on Monday the government said the retraction would not close the issue.

Pakistan is demanding a thorough investigation and says the findings should be made public.

In neighboring Afghanistan, violent anti-American protests sparked by the Newsweek story left 17 people dead and at least one hundred injured last week.

U.S. military leaders have vowed to improve relations between the coalition forces and the Afghan public.

U.S. Army Colonel Gary Cheek says they intend to strengthen ties with local and religious leaders throughout the country.

"We will redouble our efforts to communicate with the Afghan people and let them know we are here for their security and to rebuild their country and with their trust and confidence we will continue to move Afghanistan forward," he said.

Community leaders in Afghanistan have criticized many U.S. military practices there, as well as the continued detention of Afghan citizens at the U.S. navy base at Guantanamo Bay.



By
Benjamin Sand