

Random House pulls novel about Muhammad: Author said goal was to expose Muhammad's feminist underpinnings

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Random House is defending its decision to pull a new novel that explores the personal life of the Prophet Muhammad, citing concerns about offending Muslims and inciting violence.

The New York-based publishing giant consulted with security experts and Islamic scholars before halting publication of *The Jewel of Medina*, which was scheduled to hit stores August 12.

Sherry Jones, the book's author, has said her goal was to expose the feminist underpinnings of Islam's founder by offering details of his relationships with women. The novel traces the life of A'isha, one of Muhammad's wives.

Jones and Random House agreed to the termination in May. Controversy flared over that agreement after it was criticized in an August 6 *Wall Street Journal* column. Under the agreement, Jones will be allowed to shop her book to other publishers.

"In this instance we decided, after much deliberation, to postpone publication for the safety of the author, employees of Random House, booksellers and anyone else who would be involved in distribution and sale of the novel," said Thomas Perry, deputy publisher.

The controversy has fanned out overseas as well. A Serbian publisher pulled 1,000 copies of the book from shelves after an Islamic organization denounced it.

Literature about the Prophet's life has been the subject of high-profile condemnations in recent years. In 2005, a series of Danish cartoons critically depicting Muhammad incited riots and death threats. Twenty years ago novelist

Salman Rushdie became the subject of a worldwide fatwa after publishing *The Satanic Verses*, which some Muslims considered blasphemous.

Rushdie told the Associated Press that Random House's decision to pull *The Jewel of Medina* was "censorship by fear." -*Religion News Service*