

How About a Mosque at Ground Zero?
Posted On:December 31, 1969

The proposal to build a large Islamic Cultural Center that includes a mosque two blocks from the ruins of the World Trade Center (ground zero of the Islamist attack) is very divisive. Is this a test of American tolerance, as Newsweek Editor Fareed Zakaria claims? Or is this the same as if the Japanese wanted to build a theme park at Honolulu?

Ground Zero's National Importance. Just a visit to Ground Zero (which I have done) evokes enormous sadness and anger. For the World Trade Center, a symbol of our country's and New York's openness to the world, to be attacked by fanatics whose religious beliefs promoted suicidal violence against a perceived enemy of Islam, finally forced us to recognize that we were at war.

The bodies not recovered from that horror may still lie even blocks away from Ground Zero, as we are told by the families of these victims. Ground Zero, for most of us, is sacred ground. And yes, a small number of Muslims were among the victims but 100% of the terrorists were Muslims doing it in the name of Islam.

The Proposed Islamic Center. The partners behind this project are Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, said to be a moderate Muslim clergyman; Sharif El Gamal, a wealthy American real estate developer born to a Polish mother and Egyptian father; and Daisy Khan, a Kashmiri-born interior architect and wife of Imam Rauf. Clergyman Rauf and his wife have long careers promoting moderate Islam, and publicly promoting ecumenicalism, a modern religious development of religions working together to find common values and practices. What could be wrong with building an Islamic center intended by the developer to parallel Jewish Community Centers and YMCA's?

The Advocates of this Center. It appears that most of the non-Muslim advocates of this center (Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Andrew Cuomo, Fareed Zacharia, and President Obama) cite principle: the principle of religious tolerance. They believe that nothing could showcase America's religious tolerance more than by permitting such a center near Ground Zero, the opposite of Islamic intolerance. They really believe that such a show of tolerance would impress the Muslim world.

Opponents of the center include Newt Gingrich, Sarah Palin, Rick Lazio, and a covey of outraged Tea Partiers; unfortunately more heat than light, although they are right in finding the project in bad taste and insensitive.

The families of those murdered on 9/11 are divided on this issue some want to demonstrate American decency but others note that our tolerance will not improve Islam's intolerance. However, I think that the issue goes beyond liberals and conservatives.

Some Other Considerations. How can a Muslim cleric sincerely support equality for women? How about tolerance toward Hindus (polytheists) and even Muslim Sufis (both groups have tasted Islamist violence)? I have serious reservations about the cleric and his wife's moderation in the face of some obnoxious public statements by both.

Do we have here smiling front men (and women) but something else behind the curtain? Unfortunately, these considerations have nothing to do with our laws, regulations, and planning departments. The center will probably be built as is the huge mosque next door to the London Olympic center. But will we regret this later?

My Recommendations. Our international law is flawed when an American Embassy was invaded (in Iran) and torched (in Pakistan) with obvious government collusion and the other embassies did not close and leave. Diplomatic law, like international law, must be reciprocal to work. The same applies to religious toleration. I would love to see more Islamic Centers and mosques built in the US and Europe when Christian and Jewish centers and houses of worship are permitted in Muslim countries. Just try that in the money capital of Islamist propaganda, Saudi Arabia.

Democracies need to be tolerant and all-inclusive but are not required to be suicidal. If these moderate Muslims show some sensitivity by moving the mosque elsewhere, we could really trust that they are not, like the USSR of old, trolling for useful idiots in our free society to support their unfree one. Let's think about it a little more.

683 words

Dr. Laina Farhat-Holzman is a historian, lecturer, and writer. You may contact her at Lfarhat102@aol.com or www.globalthink