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Pols Clueless on Ground Zero Mosque

By **Nat Hentoff**

The angry national debate over Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf's intention to build a mosque two blocks north of the horror of 9/11 at Ground Zero has been further fueled by supporter Nancy Pelosi declaring, "I join those who have called for looking into how ... this opposition to the mosque is being funded."

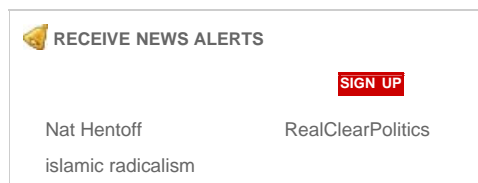


If one of her sleuths knocks on my door, this opponent will readily state that I need no outside funding as a reporter who is deeply investigating the motivation of Imam Rauf's choice of this site of mass murder for the mosque. I will add that, of course, all American Muslims have their First Amendment right to exercise their freedom of religion in their place of worship. There have been other mosques in New York City built without opposition. That freedom is not at stake here.

As for Rauf's inflammable site choice, however, one of a growing number of construction workers pledging they will not work on this mosque (New York Daily News, Aug. 20), Dave Kaiser, a blaster, explains:

"I wouldn't work there, especially after I found out about what the imam said about U.S. policy being responsible for 9/11."

Imam Rauf said was interviewed on CBS' 60 Minutes (Sept. 30, 2001) by Ed Bradley. (I have the transcript.) Asked how he felt as a Muslim "knowing that people of your faith committed this act," Imam Rauf spoke about Muslim reaction throughout the world "against the policies of the U.S. government, politically, where we espouse principles of democracy and human rights and where we ally ourselves with oppressive regimes in many of these countries."



"Are you in any way suggesting that we in the **United States** deserved what happened?" Bradley asked.

"I wouldn't say that the United States deserved what happened," Rauf answered, "but the United States' policies were an accessory to the crime that happened. ... Because (the United States has) been an accessory to a lot of - of innocent lives dying in the world. In fact, it - in the most direct sense, Osama bin Laden is made in the U.S.A."

Were the heads of government in **Iran**, **Hamas** and **Sudan** also "made in the USA?"

Imam Rauf has refused to call Hamas a terrorist organization and had no comment when, on Aug. 15, Mahmoud al-Zahar, its co-founder, strongly supported the Imam's mosque near Ground Zero, saying, Muslims "have to build everywhere" (Associated Press, Aug. 16). Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., said the support by Hamas of the Imam's mosque carried no weight because "Hamas is a terrorist organization."

Why, yes, it is, Imam Rauf, with its suicide bombers and endless rockets into **Israel**. How else can suicide bombers be characterized?

This imam - widely lauded in much of the press as "a moderate" Muslim - is not reticent, however, in his firm commitment to Sharia (Islamic law), which regards women as far less than fully human. In the Dec. 9, 2007 Arabic newspaper Hadi el-Islam, Rauf insisted:

Throughout my discussions with contemporary Muslim theologians, it is clear an Islamic state can be established in more than just a single form or mold. It can be established through a kingdom or a democracy. The important issue is to establish the general

fundamentals of Sharia that are required to govern.

I would greatly appreciate it if Imam Rauf explained, maybe Pelosi will ask him, more fully what he meant in his 2004 book, "What's Right With Islam is What's Right With America." In it he declares: "American Constitution and system of governance uphold the core principles of Islamic law." Rauf says Sharia law is a core principle of Islamic law. Does that also include a core principle of our Constitution?

This 2004 book's title in the English-language edition yields to a different title for non-English-speaking readers in **Malaysia**, reports Andrew McCarthy ("Rauf's Dawa from the World Trade Center Rubble," nationalreview.com).

This alternate title in Malaysia brings us right back into the civil war here about the imam's mosque near Ground Zero: "A Call to Prayer from the World Trade Center Rubble: Islamic Dawa in the Heart of America Post-9/11."

What does "dawa" mean? McCarthy explains: "Dawa, whether done from the rubble of the World Trade Center or elsewhere, is the missionary work by which Islam is spread. ... The purpose of dawa, like the purpose of jihad, is to implement, spread, and defend Sharia. ... through means other than violence and agents other than terrorists."

As of this writing, Imam Rauf is on the State Department tour (financed by us) of Arab nations in the Middle East. He has been on four such State Department tours - two under George W. Bush. Says State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley (New York Post, Aug. 20):

"I wouldn't be surprised if he talks about the ongoing debate within the United States, as an example of our emphasis on religious tolerance and resolving questions that come up within the rule of law."

Does our State Department include Sharia as being within our rule of law?

At the end of that news story, we are told that Rauf "is not allowed to fund-raise on the trip." Yet, in the Aug. 18 New York Post, Geoff Earle and Tom Topousis report that "in an interview overseas, he (Rauf) said 'he would also tap Muslim nations for help.'"

I would not be surprised if **Saudi Arabia** ultimately becomes a generous contributor, but not quite in the agreement with the State Department's "emphasis on religious tolerance."

New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg charges that opponents of Imam Rauf's mosque "should be ashamed of themselves" and are bigots.

Me, too, Mr. Mayor?

If you want to join Speaker Pelosi in investigating me, your honor, I'd be glad to oblige. I'm just doing my job as a reporter. I wish more reporters had gone beneath the shouting on both sides. There's another part of the First Amendment in addition to the free exercise of religion: The press is free to investigate the reasons for Imam Rauf's fixation on the 9/11 location of his mosque.

And why does this location make Hamas glow?

Nat Hentoff is a nationally renowned authority on the First Amendment and the Bill of Rights. He is a member of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, and the libertarian Cato Institute, where he is a senior fellow.