

## Barack Obama, religious freedom, mosque, ground zero

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“As president I believe that Muslims have the right to practice their religion as everyone else in this country... This is America and our commitment to religious freedom must be unshakeable. All faiths are welcome in this country” [declared President Obama last week](#) in reference to the proposed construction of a mosque just a few blocks from the site of the worst Islamic terrorist attack in this country’s history.

The next day, [a presidential spokesman reiterated the same point about the importance of protecting the free practice of religion](#) . “Just to be clear, the president is not backing off in any way from the comments he made last night,” White House spokesman Bill Burton said in a statement. “It is not his role as president to pass judgment on every local project. But it is his responsibility to stand up for the constitutional principle of religious freedom and equal treatment for all Americans.”

Now, if only Obama practiced what he preaches. Is the president as big an advocate of religious pluralism and liberty in other countries as he is its defender here in the United States? Not really.

As [Doug Bandow pointed out in a recent column](#) , the President has moved at a glacier pace to name a candidate to fill the post of ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom and “the U.S. National Security Strategy didn’t even mention religious freedom as a ‘value.’” Thomas Farr analyzes the administration’s lack of focus on religious liberty here.

There was some good news recently, however, [when Secretary of State Hillary Clinton spoke out about Iran’s conviction of seven members of the Baha’i faith to 20 years in prison](#) . Sadly, in the case of Iran policy this is a little condemnation coming very late in the process, but including religious persecution as part of highlighting human rights violations in other countries is better than nothing.

But as [Victor Davis Hanson](#) makes clear, “to build a church in Mecca would mean death on the spot (to visit Mecca as a Christian or in general as a non-Muslim is a suicidal act). Why would not reform-minded Muslims seek first to change the hearts and minds of bigots in the Middle East, before testing the patience of liberal-thinking Americans?” And why similarly, why wouldn’t our president take the opportunity of discussing the controversy over the mosque as a teachable moment about the greatness of America for protecting religious liberty in contrast to so many other societies, especially Muslim societies?