

Opinion

My right to question the motives of Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf's locating the mosque near ground zero

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By NAT HENTOFF

The angry national debate over Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf's intention to build a Muslim community center and mosque two blocks north of the 9/11 Ground Zero horror 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 investigating the motivation of Imam Rauf's choice of this site of mass murder for the mosque.

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 in Rauf's plan for a Muslim community center and mosque near Ground Zero.

Rauf, interviewed on CBS' "60 Minutes" (Sept. 30, 2001), was asked, "Are you in any way suggesting that we in the United States deserved what happened?"

Rauf answered: "I wouldn't say that the United States deserved what happened, but the United States' policies were an accessory to the crime that happened. ... In fact ... in the most direct sense, Osama bin Laden is made in the U.S.A."

Rauf had no comment when Mahmoud al-Zahar, co-founder of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), strongly supported the Imam's project near Ground Zero.

Despite Hamas' suicide bombers and endless rockets fired into Israeli residential areas, Rauf refuses to acknowledge it as a terrorist organization. How else would it be characterized?

This imam — widely lauded in the media as "a moderate" Muslim — is not reticent, however, in his commitment to Sharia (Islamic law), which regards women as less than fully human.

In the Arabic newspaper Hadi el-Islam in 2007, 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."

Rauf promotes the spread of Islamic law through his "Sharia Index Project."

I would greatly appreciate it if Imam Rauf explained (maybe Pelosi will ask him) more fully what he meant when he said in a 2004 book he wrote: "America's Constitution and system of governance uphold the core principles of Islamic law."

Imam Rauf was recently sent on a State Department-financed tour of Arab nations in the Middle East. He has been on four such State

Department tours, two under George W. Bush.

Does our State Department include Sharia as being consistent with our Constitution?

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

There's another part of the First Amendment in addition to the free exercise of religion: The press is free to inquire about the reasons for Rauf's fixation on locating his Islamic center and mosque so close to Ground Zero and his advocacy of Sharia. And free to inquire why the terrorist organization Hamas also enthusiastically supports the site near Ground Zero.

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