

Cordoba House becomes a national political issue

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"The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam. That's not what Islam is all about. Islam is peace. These terrorists don't represent peace. They represent evil and war." - George W. Bush

As you have probably heard, President Barack Obama **is supportive** of the so-called "Ground Zero Mosque," a community center equivalent to a YMCA, which will also include a mosque, currently the subject of hot debate in our national dialogue:

President Obama delivered a strong defense on Friday night of a proposed Muslim community center and mosque near ground zero in Manhattan, using a White House dinner celebrating Ramadan to proclaim that "as a citizen, and as president, I believe that Muslims have the same right to practice their religion as anyone else in this country."

[...]

"I understand the emotions that this issue engenders. Ground zero is, indeed, hallowed ground," the president said in remarks prepared for the annual White House iftar, the sunset meal breaking the day's fast.

But, he continued: "This is America, and our commitment to religious freedom must be unshakable. The principle that people of all faiths are welcome in this country, and will not be treated differently by their government, is essential to who we are."

Below is a round-up of news stories and reactions about the "Ground Zero Mosque" that have popped up across the Internet the last few days. Starting off with the signs that the issue is **going to be used in congressional races** in the coming months:

"There is no win for Obama here," [Julian] Zelizer said. With the public focused on unemployment and the economy, the mosque "will not be a turning-point issue," though it might play into fears about "Democrats not being tough enough on terrorism," he said.

This probably why Sen. Harry Reid (D-NV), who is in a tough battle for re-election, is **openly breaking with Obama on the issue**:

In a statement, Reid said the first amendment protects freedom of religion and he respects that, but the mosque should be built somewhere else.

Critics have said the location of the mosque is insensitive because the terrorists who struck were Islamic extremists.

Over at *Time*, Mark Halperin asks Republicans **not to make the "Ground Zero Mosque" a national issue**:

Yes, Republicans, you can take advantage of this heated circumstance, backed by the families of the 9/11 victims, in their most emotional return to the public stage since 2001.

But please don't do it. There are a handful of good reasons to oppose allowing the Islamic center to be built so close to Ground Zero, particularly the family opposition and the availability of other, less raw locations. But what is happening now — the misinformation about the center and its supporters; the open declarations of war on Islam on talk radio, the Internet and other forums; the painful divisions propelled by all the overheated rhetoric — is not worth whatever political gain your party might achieve.

It isn't clear how the battle over the proposed center should or will end. But two things are profoundly clear: Republicans have a strong chance to win the midterm elections without picking a fight over President Obama's measured words. And a national political fight conducted on the terms we have seen in the past few days will lead to a chain reaction at home and abroad that will have one winner — the very extreme and violent jihadists we all can claim as our true enemy.

Christopher Preble **notes** that while almost 2/3 of Americans question the judgment of putting this mosque so close to Ground Zero, that a majority of Americans recognize that it's the property owners' right to do so:

*Though 64 percent of Americans think a mosque near Ground Zero is "inappropriate", 60 percent of all respondents in the same survey, including 57 percent of Republicans, believe that the organizers have a right to build in that location, and presumably would not favor a government prohibition on this activity. (h/t [Nate Silver at fivethirtyeight](#)) If anyone were to show evidence that the parties building the center were in any way linked to the 9/11 terrorists, or funded by or funding these same terrorists, then the issues at stake would change. But they haven't done so, and are unlikely to do so. In the meantime, those GOP leaders who oppose the mosque betray a basic inability to discern public attitudes, even as they propel this country on a ruinous course, headlong into a **civilizational war which pits all Americans against all Muslims.***

[...]

George W. Bush himself set the tone in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 atrocities, counseling against retaliation against innocent Muslims who had nothing to do with the attacks, and noting that a number of Muslims were killed on 9/11. Other conservative organizations and institutions took notice of Bush's leadership, and wisely sacked the few voices who preached violence against all Muslims because nineteen of their coreligionists had perpetrated the attacks.

Not quite nine years later, we've come full-circle. With Bush enjoying retirement in Texas, who within the GOP will affirm the party's position that declaring a war on Islam does not advance our nation's security?

George W. Bush's comments on Islam in the wake of 9/11 desperately need to be repeated as we continue to discuss this issue. Unfortunately, not many Republicans are taking former House Speaker Newt Gingrich to task over his divisive comments.

And finally, Josh Barro, writing over at the *National Review*, [notes that there is much more here than just preventing a mosque two blocks from Ground Zero](#):

While some protesters raised the usual pretextual concerns about parking and traffic, others were not so politic. "We just want to leave our neighborhood the way it is—Christian, Catholic," declared one protester. Another alleged that "mosques breed terrorism" and a third that "the city has had enough terrorism and everything else." The protest wrapped up with chants of "USA! USA!" The protesters were successful in convincing the Catholic Church to cancel the sale.

The expansion of a mosque in Murfreesboro, Tennessee became an animating issue in primary elections in that state. The Lieutenant Governor of Tennessee [declared that he was unsure](#) whether the First Amendment applies to Islam, which might be a cult or a nationality rather than a religion. Lower-profile mosque controversies have also been seen in California and Wisconsin.

If it were generally the case that Muslims are being welcomed into our communities, and allowed to build their houses of worship without public hostility, then it would be possible to condemn the Cordoba House's site without worrying about alienating and excluding Muslims generally. But unfortunately the complaints about Cordoba House are just the highest-profile example of a wish that Muslims would stay out of our neighborhoods—the trouble being that everywhere is somebody's neighborhood.

The construction of the Cordoba House touches nerves, and understandably so. The death and destruction that occurred on September 11, 2001 is something that has been burned into collective psyche. There are some people (whether they represent a majority, I can't tell) that believe that the city or state should take the property via eminent domain, which is owned by ConEd, to prevent construction of the complex.

Property rights and religious freedom are among the principles of a free society, basic liberties that are supposed to be protected from the mob. Whether you or I agree with the construction of this complex simply doesn't matter. Our founding principles are what matters. If we are willing to give up our basic liberties because of our fears, then we've already lost this conflict.