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News Week

## The Taliban vs. the Mosque

by Sami Yousafzai and Ron Moreau  
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'A Little Intolerant, But Good Reason To Be' Protesters for and against the building of a Muslim community center near Ground Zero talk about their reasons for supporting or opposing the project.

Taliban officials know it's sacrilegious to hope a mosque will not be built, but that's exactly what they're wishing for: the success of the fiery campaign to block the proposed Islamic cultural center and prayer room near the site of the Twin Towers in lower Manhattan. "By preventing this mosque from being built, America is doing us a big favor," Taliban operative Zabihullah tells NEWSWEEK. (Like many Afghans, he uses a single name.) "It's providing us with more recruits, donations, and popular support."

America's enemies in Afghanistan are delighted by the vehement public opposition to the proposed "Ground Zero mosque." The backlash against the project has drawn the heaviest e-mail response ever on jihadi Web sites, Zabihullah claims—far bigger even than France's ban on burqas earlier this year. (That was big, he recalls: "We received many e-mails asking for advice on how Muslims should react to the hijab ban, and how they can punish France.") This time the target is America itself. "We are getting even

more messages of support and solidarity on the mosque issue and questions about how to fight back against this outrage.”

Zabihullah also claims that the issue is such a propaganda windfall—so tailor-made to show how “anti-Islamic” America is—that it now heads the list of talking points in Taliban meetings with fighters, villagers, and potential recruits. “We talk about how America tortures with waterboarding, about the cruel confinement of Muslims in wire cages in Guantánamo, about the killing of innocent women and children in air attacks—and now America gives us another gift with its street protests to prevent a mosque from being built in New York,” Zabihullah says. “Showing reality always makes the best propaganda.”

Taliban officials say they’re looking forward to a new wave of terrorist trainees from the West like this year’s Times Square car bomber. “I expect we will soon be receiving more American Muslims like Faisal Shahzad who are looking for help in how to express their rage,” says a Taliban official who was a senior minister when the group ruled Afghanistan and who remains active in the insurgency. As an indication of the anger that is growing among some Muslims in the West, this official, who requested anonymity for security reasons, mentions the arrest of three Canadian Muslims in Ontario last week on charges of plotting to build and detonate improvised explosive devices. (A fourth individual was arrested in Ottawa last Friday in connection with the case.) The Ground Zero furor will likely add to that anger. “The more mosques you stop, the more jihadis we will get,” Zabihullah predicts.