

The Conquest of the United States by Militant Islam

The Freeman, November 24, 2010

In 1898 William Graham Sumner, a famous libertarian sociology professor at Yale University, gave a speech titled, "The Conquest of the United States by Spain." You read that right. In the same year the U.S. government had attacked Spanish forces in Cuba and the Philippines, a case of conquest by the United States, Sumner claimed that Spain had engaged in conquest of the United States. Was Sumner simply blind to the obvious? No. He was open to the subtle. Sumner saw that by using force to acquire control over property in other parts of the world, the U.S. government was imitating the Spanish conquistadors of old and in doing so had forsaken its own non-imperialist tradition.

Something similar may be happening in the United States, not with foreign conquest but with our domestic freedoms. Two freedoms are at risk: The freedom to practice our religion and the freedom to use our property in any way that's peaceful. This is not new, but what's different are the people who are putting them at risk. Some Americans have attacked these freedoms because other Americans want to build, on property they have legally acquired, a center that includes Muslim prayer space. The Park51 center—prayer space, athletic facility, culinary school, auditorium, and art studio—would be two blocks from "Ground Zero," where murderers flew hijacked airplanes into the World Trade Center on that awful September 11, 2001. If the most extreme protesters succeed, they will have limited the religious freedom of Muslims and the right to use property peacefully.

Therein lie two ironies. The first, the kind highlighted by Sumner, is that if these opponents limit Muslims' rights, they will make the United States a little more like some of the Muslim countries they abhor. A defining characteristic of many Muslim countries is their governments' intolerance of religious freedom. The 2010 annual report of the U.S. government's Commission on International Religious Freedom asserts that Burma, China, North Korea, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam are "countries of particular concern." Governments of these countries, says the report, "have engaged in or tolerated systematic and egregious violations of the

universal right to freedom of religion or belief.” Of these 13, seven—Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—are countries with majority Muslim populations. The commission also put 12 countries on the “Watch List.” These are places where religious freedom is low, but not as low as the other 13. The 12 are Afghanistan, Belarus, Cuba, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Laos, Russia, Somalia, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Venezuela. Of those, six—Afghanistan, Egypt, Indonesia, Somalia, Tajikistan, and Turkey—have majority Muslim populations.

The second irony is that many of the people most involved in attacking the religious freedom and property rights of Muslims had previously fiercely defended—or at least posed as fierce defenders of—religious freedom and property rights. Radio and TV talk-show host Sean Hannity, for example, has passionately defended religious freedom for Christians. Could this all along have been special-interest pleading on his part because he’s a Christian? Possibly.

Or consider Republican politician Newt Gingrich, who last April mounted a ringing defense of religious freedom. In a Washington Post op-ed Gingrich and Jim Garlow argued that students at the University of California’s Hastings College of Law have the right to set up their own Christian club, with belief in Christianity as one of the requirements of membership. Gingrich and Garlow wrote: “[P]eople of faith are being deliberately marginalized and excluded not for any real misdemeanors but for having the temerity to suggest that there’s an authority higher than school administrators, a truth more compelling than the latest government-dictated cultural doctrine.”

Notice the term “people of faith” rather than “Christians.” A careful reader would conclude that Gingrich strongly believes in religious freedom for everyone. With his rejection of “government-dictated cultural doctrines,” Gingrich sounds like someone who would defend all people of faith.

Neither Property Rights Nor Religious Freedom

Yet just three months later, on July 21, Gingrich wrote: “There should be no mosque near Ground Zero in New York so long as there are no churches or synagogues in Saudi Arabia. The time for double standards that allow Islamists

to behave aggressively toward us while they demand our weakness and submission is over.”

Although Gingrich was clever enough to say, “There should be no mosque,” rather than, “The government should not allow a mosque to be built,” his meaning seems clear. By invoking the Saudi government’s intolerance, he seems to be saying that governments in the United States should follow the Saudi model, in this case at least, and not allow the Islamic center to be built. My interpretation is buttressed by how he ends his article:

No mosque.

No self deception.

No surrender.

The time to take a stand is now—at this site on this issue.

On September 10 Gingrich said that President Obama should “tell” Imam Rauf, the Muslim leader who wants to build the Manhattan facility, “don’t do it.”

To add to the irony, who has given a property-rights defense of Muslims’ freedom to build mosques on their own property? None other than President Barack Obama. Obama recently stated: “As a citizen, and as President, I believe that Muslims have the same right to practice their religion as everyone else in this country. And that includes the right to build a place of worship and a community center on private property in Lower Manhattan, in accordance with local laws and ordinances.”

I would have preferred that Obama drop his qualifier—local laws and ordinances—given that zoning laws and other such ordinances are, as legal scholar Richard Epstein has pointed out, a huge assault on property rights. Still, at least Obama defended these rights.

So here’s where we are. A man who would be president, Newt Gingrich, from a party that in recent years has claimed to defend religious freedom and property

rights, the Republican Party, gives up all claim to be a defender of these rights and seems to want to imitate a society whose government is highly intolerant of religious freedom. If Gingrich has his way the Saudis will have won—without firing a shot or even lifting a finger.

Of course, those who oppose the facility do have other options in a free society, including boycotting and picketing. But they do not include using force to prevent it from being built.

The only credible way to defend freedom, the way most likely to lead to its preservation, is to defend everyone's freedom, not just the freedom of those with whom we agree.