The controversy over a Florida pastor's threat to burn copies of the Koran heats up as the U.S. military, the State Department, and the White House condemned the plan, saying it will endanger the troops abroad.

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General, David Petraeus, Koran, Quran, Burning, Florida, Images, Gainesville, Pastor, Muslim, Religion, Anti, American, Anger, War in Afghanistan, Military, September 11th, 9/11, Effigy, Threat, Church, Islam, Slogans, Terry Jones, Extremism, Radical, Safety, Soldiers, Mission, Intolerance, Condemn, Ramadan, State Department
Transcript

General Petraeus - Koran Burning Would Endanger Troops

BRIAN WILLIAMS, anchor:
Now we turn to the recent upswing in anti-Muslim activity in this country. Now we're seeing it sparking anti-American anger in some places. And with the 9/11 anniversary approaching, the best-known active duty four-star general, David Petraeus, the top US commander in Afghanistan, is issuing a strong warning to a pastor who says he's planning a Quran burning this weekend. The Obama administration is calling his threat un-American. We get more on all of it tonight from our chief foreign correspondent Richard Engel.

RICHARD ENGEL reporting:
Demonstrators in Kabul angrily denouncing the United States. They burned flags and effigies and pelted stones at a passing US military convoy. Kabul, once one of the most isolated cities, is no longer cut off. The demonstrators were reacting to a tiny church in Gainesville, Florida. With just a few dozen members, the church has made headlines and Internet chatter with its anti-Muslim slogans and its plans to burn copies of the Quran on 9/11.

Mr. TERRY JONES: We are going to have a international Burn a Quran Day.

ENGEL: Church leader Terry Jones says the goal is to stand up to Islamic extremism.

Mr. JONES: We believe our president plays it down. We believe that people are afraid of radical Islam. They're afraid to confront it.

ENGEL: But the American commander in Afghanistan doesn't agree. General David Petraeus said the image of Americans burning a Quran could harm US troops and the war effort. In a statement today, Petraeus said, "The safety of our soldiers and civilians would be put in jeopardy, and accomplishment of the mission would be made more difficult." Americans burning a Quran, the general said, could be used as a propaganda tool and goes against the US military's mission to win over the Afghan people.

Today the White House said it agrees with General Petraeus.
Mr. ROBERT GIBBS (White House Press Secretary): Any type of activity like that would be--that puts our troops in harm's way would be a concern to this administration.

ENGEL: And the State Department called the proposed Quran burnings un-American.

Mr. P.J. CROWLEY (United States State Department Spokesman): We think that these are provocative acts, they are disrespectful, they're intolerant, they're divisive.

ENGEL: But so far the church, already denied a permit, isn't backing down.

Mr JONES: If people should lose their life, that would be tragic. Still, I must say that we feel that we must sooner or later stand up to Islam.

ENGEL: Today religious leaders spoke out against the event.

Rabbi NANCY FUCHS-KREIMER (Reconstructionist Rabbinical College): The threatened burning of copies of the holy Quran this Saturday is a particularly egregious offense that demands the strongest possible condemnation.

ENGEL: And polls suggest few Americans support anti-Muslim activities.

The timing of this, Brian, is especially sensitive. The anniversary of 9/11 is just a few days away. It also coincidentally falls at the end of Ramadan, which is a Muslim holiday. So you could have a small group of Americans burning Qurans on a Muslim holiday on the 9/11 anniversary.