

Lying About Islam By: Stephen Schwartz
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AMERICANS have a lot to learn about Islam – even in the aftermath of the horrors of 9/11. While the atrocities of that day provided a wake-up call about terrorism, our political and media elites continue to show us that they haven't done their homework on the religious background of al Qaeda – and are likely not to.

An exceptionally irritating example of this came to light when a USA Today “Q&A on Islam and Arab Americans” appeared as a mass mailing around the country. Although the flier bore the USA Today logo, a call to the newspaper elicited the claim that the logo was used without its permission, even though the content of the flyer appeared on the paper's Web site.

USA Today staffers doubtless thought they were doing Muslims and non-Muslims in America a favor by presenting a warm and fuzzy picture of the situation inside world Islam.

But the leaflet was sent out by the “International Institute of Islamic Thought” (IIIT) in Herndon, Va., one of a group of Muslim organizations raided by federal authorities in an antiterrorism investigation last year.

IIIT advocates for the Wahhabi sect of Islam, the most extreme, separatist and violent trend in the faith of Mohammed. Wahhabism is the official religion in Saudi Arabia. Saudi oil royalties are spent to spread Wahhabism throughout the world – including right here in America.

We shouldn't be surprised, then, at how the newspaper, and the leaflet, answered the question, What is jihad? “Jihad does not mean ‘holy war.’ Literally, jihad in Arabic means to strive, struggle and exert effort. It is a central and broad Islamic concept that includes struggle against evil inclinations within oneself, struggle to improve the quality of life in society, struggle in the battlefield for self-defense or fighting against tyranny or oppression.”

Here we have the money quote: “Jihad does not mean ‘holy war.’ ” A few lines later, however, jihad does include “struggle in the battlefield.”

The truth is, military jihad cannot be written out of Islam. The prophet Mohammed himself led armies. This answer would be more honest if it said, “Jihad cannot be reduced to the idea of ‘holy war.’ ” But IIIT seeks only to escape responsibility for the Wahhabi ‘jihad,’ which has been terroristic since the founding of the Wahhabi cult in central Arabia 250 years ago.

Wahhabism is murderous in its attacks on non-Wahhabi Muslims, especially the Shi'as who comprise a majority in Iraq and the oil-rich Saudi eastern province, as well as in Iran. Just last week, nine Shi'a Muslims were murdered in Pakistan. The finger of blame has been pointed at Lashkar i Janghvi, the same Wahhabi terror gang that killed American reporter Daniel Pearl. (Indeed, Pearl was among the few victims of Lashkar i Janghvi who was not a Muslim.)

The “Q&A” that first appeared in USA Today and has been recycled by IIIT is part of a not-so-sophisticated campaign to convince Americans that there is only one Islam, represented by Saudi-Wahhabism, that it has nothing to do with terror, and, above all, that other forms of Islam, such as Shi'ism or Sufism, the spiritual form of Islam, do not exist or are unworthy of notice in the West.

This is especially pernicious as the United States solicits allies among Shi'a Muslims in Iraq, who yearn for liberation from the bloody hands of Saddam Hussein. Over the weekend, Deputy Secretary of

Defense Paul D. Wolfowitz met with Shi'a Muslims in Michigan who stressed their hatred of Saddam and their desire to see the United States take firm action. One said, "It is not a very good idea to wait much longer."

In New York, Shi'a Muslims will hold their annual religious procession on March 9. They will proclaim their loyalty to America and their hatred of Saddam, of Wahhabism and of terrorism.

In addition, I and others who work closely with dissident Saudi subjects increasingly hear that restive young people in the kingdom, rather than supporting Osama bin Laden as the Saudi rulers claim, are turning to the peaceful and meditative way of Sufism as a form of opposition to the extremist form of Islam that has a grip on their country.

But Shi'ism and Sufism are absent from the USA Today Q&A. It's bad enough that Saudi money has enabled Wahhabis to take over 70-80 percent of American mosques. But when major American media like USA Today cover for this, it's a disgrace – and a threat.

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