



**CROSSING THE LINE**

**NY Post Attempts to Label Prominent Muslim Advocate as 'Terror Imam'**

**Imam Siraj Wahhaj led "Why Islam" campaign (coming to 4.9 million New York City subway commuters this Ramadan), hopes to help clarify misperceptions about Islam and being Muslim.**

*By Ibrahim Abdil-Mu'id Ramey, MAS Freedom Civil and Human Rights Director*

**WASHINGTON, D.C. (MASNET) July 28, 2008** - Rupert Murdoch's New York Post has, once again, re-established itself as having the journalistic integrity and ethics rivaling the worst of tabloid publications found in the check-out aisle at most convenience stores. The in-your-face sensationalism and hyperbole of Post news articles is not designed to elevate intelligent debate or present objective news information. Rather, it is published to sell tabloid-style news - trading on the emotional responses, and often prejudices - of those who might not otherwise be inclined to read publications such as the New York Times or the Economist.

So it wasn't any surprise to me when, on Monday, July 21, I was alerted to a Post "Exclusive" cover story titled, "Train-ing Day for Jihadists - Muslim Subway Ads Have Terror Tie-In" referring to Imam Siraj Wahhaj, of Brooklyn, as the 'inflammatory imam', who has organized a campaign to post advertisements on 1,000 New York City subway cars, this September (during Ramadan), guiding commuters to a source for information explaining the true nature of Islam to non-Muslims curious about the religion, or who, based on inaccurate information (largely provided through media sources), believe the religion is bent on acts of violence.



This, of course, in the eyes of the Post editorial team and its journalists, would make Imam Wahhaj guilty of being a purveyor of terrorism and a supporter of radical Islam and its proponents, who launched an attack on the World Trade Center (WTC) in 1993.

Despite the fact that Imam Wahhaj was never formally charged with having any connection to the 1993 WTC tragedy, cited as 'evidence' for the inappropriately titled Post article, was U.S. Attorney Mary Jo White's statement alleging him to be 'one of 170 unindicted co-conspirators' in the WTC bombing; the fact that he testified as a character witness for Sheikh Oman Abdul Rahman - convicted of playing a role in the same incident; and past statements wherein Wahhaj is said to have referred to the FBI and CIA as the 'real terrorists'.

While it can be said that Imam Wahhaj is, indeed, a highly vocal and prolific critic of U.S. foreign policy and the blanket indictment of Muslim activists by the Justice Department, it is clear that the intent of the Post's article is to suggest that the "Why Islam" campaign, very simply designed in an attempt to aid in clarifying long-held misperceptions about Islam and being Muslim for the 4.9 million people riding the New York City subway, is nothing less than a blatant attempt to recruit people into criminal or terrorists acts.

What the Post failed to include in their report is the fact that the "Why Islam" initiative has been a part of the east coast billboard landscape for the past several years, has been

advertised in community newspapers, promoted at booths in local malls, and has never once been associated with promoting violence or condoning crime.

Now to address the matter of the nebulous and dangerous 'smear' otherwise known as the 'unindicted co-conspirator' (UCC) phenomenon, a tool used by government prosecutors empowering them with the ability to cast a wide net of implied conspiracy in criminal cases - with or without evidence of guilt. More than 150 UCC's were named in the WTC case - a number that rose to 300 or more as the government prosecuted the Holy Land Trust (a Muslim charitable organization).

Despite the fact that Imam Wahhaj is a well-established, prominent, national Muslim leader and highly regarded advocate and fund-raiser for Muslim institutions throughout the United States, the tag, "UCC" has, in effect, according to the Post, morphed into his being labeled as the 'terror imam'.

Numerous national legislators, including Rep. Keith Ellison (D-MN) have called the Justice Department to task for their use of the UCC label as a substitute for real evidence in legal actions against Muslim individuals and institutions - an act that has subsequently produced 'trial by trash' journalism - just one of numerous strategies designed to malign, and even destroy, the credibility and work of Muslim individuals and organizations who have had nothing to do with criminal activities. Perhaps that was the intent of the Post's article as it relates to the "Why Islam" initiative.

For the record, I believe that all people are free to accept or reject the call of the Holy Qur'an, and equally, they are free to reject the ideology and vision presented to them by any Muslim individual or organization propagating the message of Islam. We are all free to form our own opinions about the credibility and authenticity of - or lack thereof - Muslims in the public sphere. After all, there is no compulsion in religion, and there should never be.

But to label Imam Wahhaj as the 'terror imam' based merely on guilt-by-association, or by a desire to propagate his religion, is simply a flimsy and crude attempt at character assassination and fear-mongering.

Imam Wahhaj is not underground, by the way. It's fairly easy to find his mosque, Masjid Al-Taqwa, in the Bedford-Stuyvesant community of Brooklyn. I would suggest that, New York Post reporters, and anyone else with a legitimate interest in the truth about who he is and what he believes, meet him and visit his community before launching future attempts to label or smear him, Islam, or the Muslim community at-large.

If the Post has hard evidence of the involvement of Imam Siraj Wahhaj, or anyone else, in conspiracy to commit violent crimes, they should present the evidence to the proper law enforcement authorities. If the publication and/or its publishers have contempt for Islam, that is its/their right. And for those objecting to the public display/advertisement of educational material on the subject of Islam, I would suggest a good read-through of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution.

And finally, the Post, and the general public, should also be aware that labeling someone as a terrorist, or implying that a person has connections with terrorists, is a very, very, serious charge that cannot be used as a cover for bigotry, religious hostility, or a sensationalist pretext to sell newspapers.

**URL: [http://www.muslimlinkpaper.com/mybo2/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1604&Itemid=1](http://www.muslimlinkpaper.com/mybo2/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1604&Itemid=1)**

*"Why Islam" is a public information campaign to bring information about the religion of Islam, the Holy Qur'an, and Prophet Muhammad (Peace be Upon Him) to the American public. The centerpiece of the campaign is a toll-free number (1-877-WHY ISLAM) and a website (whyislam.org) that gives people access to further information about the fastest growing religious affiliation in the United States.*