

ISLAMIC RENEWAL IN BRITAIN – A PRACTICAL DIRECTION

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Tareq Ali

I would like to set the scene for you of Britain today and the renewal an Islamic future will bring to Britain and the peoples of that land. In doing this it is necessary to consider the political, social and economic milieu in which the people of Britain find themselves.

From this starting point what emerges is an understanding that Allah's decree is as Shaykh Abdalqadir has so sublimely clarified for us "the inescapable web of events".

The fact is that there is an inescapable web of events which leads Britain to one equally inescapable conclusion that Islam in its political, social and economic reality is the only option to bring justice and sanity to a country where the political and legal institutions have been dismantled, the political class are discredited, the social fabric is smashed and the economic system is in collapse.

The seeds for the future of Britain and its peoples – and Islam in Britain – were planted centuries ago and since that first encounter the pace has quickened with the collapse of a Christian society and the emergence of a Muslim populace primed to take its place in contributing to British society in all its facets.

King Offa, the eighth-century King of Mercia (one of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms existing at that time) had gold coins minted with the declaration in Arabic that "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah". These gold coins were copies of coins issued by the near-contemporary Muslim ruler Al-Mansur.

This gold coinage itself although a seemingly novel encounter between an eighth century King of the Anglo Saxons and Islam is the way forward for Britain and in the declaration "Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, Who sent him (Muhammad) with the true faith to prevail over every other religion" (which was engraved around the margin of the coin) we find the destiny of Britain.

Turning now to the current landscape and the legal political social and economic terrain of Britain I would now like to make an assessment which sets the context for the role that, Muslims can play in British society.

A picture of the landscape in Britain is essential to understand the future for Britain and its ongoing encounter with Islam.

Dealing briefly first of all with the legal situation in Britain we find that civil liberties in the UK have been considerably eroded under both Conservative and Labour administrations. From the 1980s onwards legislation has been brought into force which increased state power over the individual and communities and which attacked the right to silence, the right to a fair trial, freedom of association, freedom of movement, freedom of speech, the right to protest and the presumption of innocence.

To push the legislation through, which undermined these liberties, the government had to suspend Britain's obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights, which guarantees the right to liberty.

The jingoistic phrase of a War on Terror, legally unsustainable, resulted in the war with Afghanistan and Iraq, both in reality wars of occupation.

Britain's most senior military commander Brigadier Mark Carleton-Smith has publically stated that the war in Afghanistan cannot be won. He added that a deal might have to be struck with the Taliban to bring peace and that "That should not make people uncomfortable".

He further stated that there would be no "decisive military victory".

A Ministry of Defence spokesman commented "We have always said that there is no military solution".

As British Muslims we should be asking the government why the lives of our troops are needlessly being lost and why our resources are being squandered in order to participate in a war with no victory.

The infringement of civil liberties however continues under the present Prime Minister. The government is to spend £12 billion on creating a vast data project to monitor the e-mails and telephone records of every single person in Britain. This follows the Governments £20 billion programme which will require every citizen to carry an identity card linked to a National Identity Register, the largest information bank of its kind in the world.

The Daily Express newspaper editorial rightly commented that both of these expensive steps sounded like something out of an East European communist regime of the seventies than the policy of a modern liberal democracy. Perhaps they need to see that

modern liberal capitalist democracy is in its totalitarian nature no different from the communist regimes of the seventies.

To sum up this brief consideration of the legal situation in Britain we can comment that the legal framework and heritage of Britain has disintegrated.

The present Government has shown that the Magna Carta and the right to habeas corpus can be dispensed with when it suits the interests of legally unsustainable wars to serve the interest of the banking and commodity barons.

Second the political situation:

The political class is finished. Discredited disgraced.

Let us consider one aspect of the quality of the men and women in charge of the Labour government.

The expenses scandal:

Prime Minister Gordon Brown agreed this week to repay more than twelve thousand pounds in expenses after an enquiry found he made excessive claims for cleaning, gardening and decoration at his second home.

Former Home Secretary Jacqui Smith was forced to apologise to the House of Commons after a separate inquiry found that she had wrongly claimed second home allowances on her family house.

Hazel Blears Communities Secretary resigns 3rd June 2009 under investigation by the parliamentary commissioner for standards over inappropriate expenses claims of up to thirteen thousand pounds.

Tony McNulty the Department for Work and Pensions anti-fraud minister resigns 5th June 2009 after admitting claiming sixty thousand pounds of expenses on a second home occupied by his parents eight miles away from his primary residence. Three months earlier in his role as minister after a man is convicted of a thirty thousand pounds benefit fraud he is quoted as saying: "Lying to the DWP to get money you are not entitled to is a crime. Expecting to get away with it is criminally stupid".

Geoffrey Hoon minister and Secretary of State for Transport resigns 5th June 2009 for making inappropriate expense claims.

Kitty Usher resigns 17th June 2009 as Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury following details of avoiding capital gains taxes being published.

This list is only of ministers and senior cabinet members and does not include backbenchers or politicians of other political parties.

The expenses scandal takes on a new dimension when even government ministers and the Prime Minister are found guilty of what is essentially a form of theft by abuse of a system of claiming expenses.

As the Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams stated: “the continuing systematic humiliation of politicians itself threatens to carry a heavy price in terms of our ability to salvage some confidence in our democracy”.

On the same day writing in the Times newspaper the columnist and former MP Matthew Parris reflected that: “extravagance, genuine mistake, sly acquisitiveness and outright criminal fraud are now jumbled together in the national mind as though there were no moral differences”.

Power historically has moved from monarch to Parliament and is now moving from Parliament to Prime Minister. The transfer is almost complete. This month saw the creation of an American style Supreme Court and the removal of the final appellate from the House of Lords. The judiciary is slowly moving into the hands of government and the Prime Minister. Are we heading towards a dictatorship?

Britain will in the next few years emerge from the disaster and abject failure of a Labour administration that is disgraced and that destroyed its legal heritage and its economic base.

The present Prime Minister when Chancellor of the Exchequer sold Britain’s gold reserves when the price of gold was at its lowest – and then proudly announced he had done so to the public.

Now let us look at the reality of the economic situation in England.

We are all aware of the talk of \$700 billion dollar bail outs in the economy of the United States. As a result of the credit crisis the present Government has, as one newspaper described it, taken the biggest economic gamble of Britain’s history by making the biggest intervention in Britain’s banking industry putting forward a £500 billion rescue package to save the banking system. To put this sum of money into perspective the \$700 billion injection into the American banking system is £100 billion less than the sum the British Government is injecting into its banking system. It will cost each British taxpayer the equivalent of £16000.00.

It appears that there are more bail outs to come next year.

The Treasury Chief Secretary Liam Byrne confirmed this week that the Chancellor’s programme of asset sales is to proceed in order to support the Government’s priorities of paying down debt. The portfolio of sales is to include the sale of the Dartford crossing, the student loan book and the Channel Tunnel rail link. These sales are expected to deliver sixteen billion pounds.

The Shadow chief secretary stated that “selling the family silver” would do nothing to address the United Kingdom’s deficit. What comes to mind is a government and financial system in deep deep crisis.

A recent study found that up to fifteen million workers fear that they could lose their jobs because of the credit crisis in Britain. The current figures show that there are 2.47 million unemployed in the United Kingdom an increase in three quarters of a million since the credit crisis began.

One year after the crisis began despite the Prime Minister’s assurance that Britain was in as good shape as it could be to weather the storm it turned out rather differently than he expected. The anniversary of the credit crunch was marked by house prices falling at their fastest rate on record, consumer confidence at rock bottom and what was in August of this year called a looming recession.

And this is what we have - talk of bailouts, quantitative easing. Talk of heading into recession followed by confirmation that we are officially in recession. The deputy governor of the Bank of England stated “This is a once in a lifetime crisis, and possibly the largest financial crisis of its kind in human history”.

The national debt has spiraled. Our dependence upon a usurious based debt economy is out of control. Private business interest has become indistinguishable from government as the so-called Public Private Partnerships trend has now gripped the British state. The fact that these partnerships are driven by Private Finance Initiatives reveals where the true power lies. In effect our dependence on usurious credit as a nation has driven us to give portions of our State to private business and financial interests in return for more credit effectively increasing the national debt and mortgaging the British people for generations for generations to come. These initiatives are usury by stealth.

Globally the usury fuelled economic system is in crisis. Britain under the present government relied upon being a financial centre and is now reaping the seeds of allying itself to an economic system based upon the illusion of usury.

So now we have a picture of the landscape in Britain and from this the tremendous opportunities for Islam to become a political reality.

What we have before us is a vacuum in the failure of the political class, a dismantled legal system and a collapsing economic infrastructure.

Now the question arises not what will fill the vacuum but how there can be an Islamic renewal in this era for Britain and how practically speaking we can achieve that.

To assess this let us consider what we the great Muslim population of Britain have at our disposal.

Beyond a land crying out for social and economic justice we have to acknowledge in the first instance that this matter can only succeed by obedience to Allah and His commands. We do not have a political programme we have people and their obedience to Allah and that is where the renewal must occur. The personal acts of ibada - prayer fasting and haj are performed. What is now required is the restoration of zakat, just trading and leadership based on the Islamic pattern.

Before we consider what we have to do in detail let us look at the position of the Muslims in Britain.

Other estimates indicate that the number of Muslims is anywhere up to 3 million, with over half of them having been born in Britain. 71% of this population are under the age of 35 and 50% under the age of 25.

Immigration of Muslims into UK was primarily from Muslims who emigrated to Britain from the Indian sub-continent. They had legal status due to their entitlement to hold British passports – and therefore to become British citizens - as members of the British Commonwealth.

What has been recognized as further significant development of Islam in Britain is the coming to Islam of Shaykh Abdalqadir as Sufi. I say this not only because of the awareness we have of the importance of his work. One contemporary writer has acknowledged Shaykh Abdalqadir as the father of traditional Islam In Britain.

From Shaykh Abdalqadir's dawa and teachings there has emerged a significant body of British Muslims from amongst who have translated many key works and who have been at the forefront of presenting the amal of Madinah as the way forward for Islam in this age. In addition to this is the work of Sidi Umar Vadillo in regard to understanding and presenting a critique of usury based capitalism.

Now onto some facts and figures:

Muslim businessmen own one in ten of London's 250,000 businesses.

There are 5,400 Muslim millionaires - measured by cash and stocks but not property and so the number could be considerably higher.

Their community contributes over fifty one billion pounds to Britain's GDP and forms the backbone of Britain's retail and healthcare sectors.

Approximately 800 mosques have been established in the UK and the number is growing.

30,000-40,000 British Muslims travel to Mecca for Hajj annually

The influence of the Muslim population in other spheres of British life cannot be underestimated.

There are Muslim members of Parliament both in the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

It is a well-known phenomenon that the diet of the country has changed. The cuisine of the sub-continent now providing one of the, if not the, most popular dishes of Britons today.

Inter-marriage between Muslims, descended from emigrant Muslims, to indigenous Britons is a common phenomenon.

A conservative estimate indicates that there are 60 recognized Muslim schools in England. There are madrassas operating in the main mosques of all the major towns and cities – and much more informal teaching that takes place in houses by community members.

The position, especially politically, of the Muslims in Britain differs from Muslims in other parts of Europe in that they are recognized citizens and have formed a significant body of businessmen and academics within British society. Their position also differs in that, by in large, what one would once have termed the indigenous Britons (Muslims now also being indigenous Britons), accepted the influxes of immigration and accommodated their new neighbours.

The Muslims of Britain have tremendous strengths.

Now let us consider the practical direction which we must follow in order to have an Islamic Renewal for Britain. We are turning now to the specifics of what we see as the way forward.

LEADERSHIP

We are aware that the way forward is governance through Amirate. The difficulty that we face is that the predominantly Hanafi Muslim population have not yet accepted this as their way forward. This is however despite the fact that in their fiqh the issue of leadership is very strong - so much so that they hold to the position that even their juma is not valid without a caliph being in place.

Our success will be dependent upon our recognition that it is not the imams who are our leaders. That Islam is not dependent on a priest-hood for governance but upon leaders. And the leaders are those who are in authority.

We have an infrastructure of mosques and madrassas throughout the country. We are however seen as being disorganized. Politically there is no representation, no viable accepted authority for the Muslim populace. How do we achieve this?

It has not come from the Muslim Parliament or the multitude of umbrella organizations such as the Muslim Council of Britain or the scores of mosque committees.

The Islamic renewal here must come from the issue of Amirate being taken to the Muslim population of Britain - a revival of leadership - the leadership which gave the great Muslim peoples of the Indian sub-continent Mogul rule.

In Britain as central government devolves its power to local areas the Muslims must organize themselves initially at a local level. We are already implementing this by organising local mosques so that they have one body which represents the whole community for a region. The remit of this body is to represent the Muslims to the media and to deal with issues affecting Muslims on a day to day level – issues which impact on the daily lives of the Muslim communities such as welfare and social issues affecting the young people. The significant factor here is that the representation comes from the

grass roots up.

What must follow from these bodies is the taking on of Amirate and it is the duty of our community and our fuqaha to revive and renew the understanding of what constitutes leadership for the Muslims to the Muslims.

Next,

THE RESTORATION OF ZAKAT AND JUST ECONOMIC TRANSACTIONS.

The Muslims of Britain have commercial awareness and an internal demographic which is youthful, growing and become increasingly dedicated to and searching for the din as a reality

Opportunities have been made available to us through the financial meltdown and the failure of democracy.

Our work is now to activate the business class, to activate inter communal networks, to prime communities with coherent strategies in the face of what the collapse of the capitalist system will entail and to make allies with other activists and take the message of Islam to them.

It is also imperative that we move vigorously towards a presentation and putting into place of an active reality of the Islamic practices of zakat, trade and commerce and governance.

The dinar, dirham and fulus, wakilas, contracts correctly presented, markets and guilds must all be understood and adopted. This is beginning to happen in a way that we could not have orchestrated ourselves given the current world financial situation. The necessity and importance of establishing this model will become even more relevant as the economic system slides into chaos with increasing numbers of unemployed, bankruptcies and social deprivation.

This process has begun with the establishing of a market on the Islamic model in Edinburgh. As one non-Muslim writer wrote after he attended such a market:

“When you buy from a real market you know that you are supporting someone’s independent business. When you buy from a supermarket you know you are contributing to a hideous web of exploitation” and he continued “the other wonderful thing about (the market)...is that there was a stall where you could change your pounds sterling into real silver, and use that silver to buy goods. This is because the Quran says that trade is permitted but usury is forbidden and therefore silver and gold – real money rather than usurious paper money – are approved. To take trade away from the supermarkets and to take money away from the banks – now that really is an exciting prospect”.

This message must also go out to the Muslims of Britain. An international conference to raise awareness of these issues is being arranged in Britain by our community as well as the production of a number of publications to communicate the way forward.

In order to further this process of education we are setting up a centre of learning to deal with these matters specifically and in detail, which will be open to the young Muslims seeking knowledge of Islamic renewal in Britain. A renewal which is based on re-connecting the Muslim population to an active din with a social reality in the matters of leadership and zakat and halal trade.

The matter is clear as Shaykh Abdalqadir has stated : “The relentless progress, so-called of corporation and currency capital expansion, has not only destroyed the eco-sphere in war and pollution – but also the disappearance of the animal species has been accompanied, inevitably, by the deliberate alteration and deconstruction of the human personality and the societal order of family and community”.

Nowhere is this more relevant than the British Isles and it is a message being heard by thinking people who are now engaging in actively seeking solutions to these issues. These people are standing at the door of Islam - what remains for us in Britain - is to show these people the way through the door into Islam.

Our community has to act with the knowledge that they must serve the Muslims in this matter and be bold in their call to the din.

The restoration of zakat and just trade will be the remedy to the social and economic disintegration that is accelerating in Britain.

In order to facilitate these matters we must:

Network Muslim communities throughout Britain through the creation of Muslim businessmen and trader groupings;

Write and speak out publicly highlighting the solutions to the problems besetting Britain and garnering a voice that identifies with all the peoples of Britain;

Support and organize free markets;

Actively involve ourselves in community issues in a manner which ensures we put in place solutions to the problems being faced as the liberal capitalist so-called democracy implodes;

Encourage and engender a culture of self sufficiency which moves away from a dependency upon usurious institutions such as the banking system and supermarkets;

Restore the teaching of the din by taking the message of Islam in its social reality to Muslims and non-Muslims;

Begin a well publicized distribution of zakat among the eight categories of those entitled to receive it including those whose hearts are to be won over.

These are indicators of the tremendous task and challenge which awaits us and in which we must remember that the Muslim population of Britain are a part of the fabric of Britain.

We heard from Shaykh Ali this morning of the importance of leadership and holding to the sunnah.

Now we are at the crossroads. The theme of this conference is Islam at the End of Capitalism. Capitalism is in its final death throes. Islam we know is the only way that will save the human project. Simply put obedience to Allah.

Islam will be renewal for Britain and its peoples.

For the muslims of Britain there is also a necessary renewal of the social modalities of leadership and zakat and just trade in the practice of their din.

A renewal because following the eras of colonialism, the suspension of the caliphate, the disasters of a modernist Islam and then of criminals perpetrating acts of terror supposedly – but most definitely not – in the name of Islam – the muslims have lost the knowledge, let alone the practice of these social modalities.

So as Shaykh Ali explained we must hold to the sunnah of our Rasul – may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him – and of the first four Caliphs.

The imperative here in this age for renewal is not only holding to the sunnah – but it is beyond and far greater than that – it is restoring one of the five pillars of the din – an obligatory act – that of zakat.

The declaration for the Muslims of Britain from this conference is simple and clear:

As you have established salat in the land, that is now your home,

You must now establish zakat!