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The state of the Muslim world today

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One of the advantages of being a student and an academic is that we can take a somewhat longer and harder look at the realities as we find them. We academics and students neither have an immediate vested interest to protect, nor do we have to be continuously glancing over our shoulders. And, therefore, the university, the Islamic society and being students is a state of free existence. One of the grim realities in the Fourteenth Centenary Year of the *hijrah* is that we, if we were physically placed anywhere in the Muslim world, could not discuss our problems openly and frankly without being reported by somebody to someone who would then put us in prison or worse.

Your chairman has referred to the fact that I once worked for *The Guardian*, formerly *The Manchester Guardian*. This newspaper was founded by C. P. Scott in this city but is now edited by a bunch of people who cannot even use decent language.¹ They get away with such abuse because you and I are not active enough. The Muslim students of this university should have occupied the offices of *The*

1. This refers to the Guardian editorial of November 26, 1979, which used abusive and obscene language for Imam Khomeini.

Guardian and stayed there until they got an apology. I wish this had happened here in Manchester and in London because too many liberties are being taken against us by too many people who seem to think that they can do just what they like. However since *The Guardian* has been mentioned, let me just say that a few days ago this newspaper published a special supplement marking the '1400 years of Islam'. Expressing its ill-informed editorial opinion the newspaper said that Islam was now experiencing the same kind of 'revivalism' that was experienced by Christianity at about the same stage in the Christian era, the implication being that when Islam 'grows up' in the same way as Christianity has 'grown up', when Islam, too, is two thousand years old, Islam will also be as docile as Christianity.

This gives us an insight into the minds of these people, how they look at us and at Islam. It also reflects their view of the history of man, the development of man, their view of his past, their view of his present, and their view of his future. Backing up this editorial opinion were articles written by, or on behalf of, the Shaikh of Abu Dhabi, Colonel Qaddafi of Libya, and the banks and insurance companies of the *Ummah*, mixed with some intellectuals of the Muslim world. These intellectuals are always declaring that Islam is a complete system, without telling us what this system is, and without pointing out exactly how we get rid of the people who are the very blot on our history today. These intellectuals find their way into the media posing as champions of Islam. These are the very people who are the greatest obstacle to the establishment of Islam in its complete and total forms as an operational civilization, solving the problems of mankind, and leading mankind in the way of God.

However, the conditions in which the year 1400 of the Hijri has arrived are, by and large, not of our making. In the last 200 years Muslims have not been in the driving seat of history. We have not made history, we have been victims of history. I need hardly remind you that not long ago we were the chief architects of history. We were the people who brought mankind out of the dark ages. We were the first people who civilized the world. Having lost control over the direction of human history, we were taken over by the alien, hostile, brash, uncouth, civilization of the west. So much so that all the social,

political, and economic systems we have today have been created during the years of our decline; the years of the dominance of the western powers over the Muslim countries. What is it that the west has done? The west has achieved the fragmentation of mankind into small pieces of land known as nation-States. Not very long ago, at the Treaty of Versailles (1919), or even at San Francisco after the Second World War (1945), only a handful of States were represented. It was a world of empires, a world of colonial domination. The world of empires meant that vast territories of the world were controlled by a very small number of States, mainly European, including Russia, which later became the Soviet Union.

This western system turned the course of history not only away from the direction it was taking before; it turned it right round in the opposite direction, in the direction of total *jahiliyyah*, such as had existed before Islam. The reason for it is simple. The European religious experience was a Judeo-Christian experience. Here, political behaviour is influenced by the Reformation and the Renaissance. The Reformation and the Renaissance were really two stages in European history which were directly and distinctly concerned with the religious experience of Europe. They were directly concerned with containing and destroying the influence of religion. The European peoples were allowed to retain Christianity or whatever religion they wanted in their personal life. *The Guardian* says Islam is the most politicized religion. We have to understand that so long as the Muslim people have the will to establish Islam in its political incarnation, everybody outside Islam is our enemy. This is what the *Guardian* means by saying that when we reach our 2000 years we too will have gone through the Reformation and the Renaissance and we too will be reduced to having a Pope, the cardinals and all those irrelevant churches. In order to turn Muslim history in this direction, the colonial powers created among us a group of people who are western-oriented and western-educated. This is the

ruling elite to which the west handed power at the end of the colonial period. This elite is charged with the task of carrying out the good work of secularizing Muslim society. Before leaving, the west also made sure that our societies, particularly our economies, were totally integrated with their economies. In this way they have ensured that their industrial revolution and their high standards of living could be sustained and supported by the raw material, the cheap labour, and the surplus value transferred from us to them. They established a conspiracy of the rich in the poor countries with the rich in the rich countries and then said they were going. They had done their work. They had put the Muslim societies on the same course of history that had been followed by the erstwhile Christian societies. They left us to experience our own Reformation and Renaissance, to 'reform' Islam, to 'modernize' Islam, to bring it 'up to date'. And our political leaders have tried to do just that. Political leaders and regimes have patronized and produced their own *ulama*, giving *fatwas* in their favour. They have their own front organizations trying to project the most reactionary regimes as friends of Islam. They are trying to legitimize their power in terms of Islam. These post-colonial regimes realize that their authority must be legitimate in terms of Islam before it has any chance of survival in Muslim societies. Thus in most Muslim countries, with the sole exception of Iran, a great fraud is being perpetuated on the people in the name of Islam.

In addition to the political and economical integration that I have referred to, the western colonial powers also introduced the intellectual invasion of our societies through the educational systems that they set up. The universities that they set up in our countries are poor replicas of western universities. These universities have introduced into our societies what they call value-free science. This whole notion of value-free science is a deception which is played upon us. Many of us are victims of this notion of value-free science. Having done this, they expected us to behave in the way the masters had taught us, as the good example set by the western model of development of political, economic, intellectual, scientific, and every other type of behaviour. And most governments are succeeding in doing just that.

But the Islamic Revolution in Iran has upset all the calculations of the west and of the nationalist governments about the direction in which

history was proceeding. The Islamic Revolution has stood everything up on its head. Their assumptions made about Muslim political behaviour have been disproved. They were also wrong in their assumptions about our economic and military behaviour. For once we have an Islamic movement totally and completely in control of the destiny of one small part of the *Ummah* known as Iran. While the *Ummah* as a whole was going through this nightmare of historical experience during the last hundred years, a number of Islamic movements have been working to fight against the evils that I have described earlier. These movements and the men who founded them, the men who worked in them, the men who sacrificed their lives, wealth, money, indeed everything for these movements, are some of the most dedicated men that ever lived. Allah, the Compassionate and Merciful, will no doubt reward them for all that they have done to keep the candle of Islam burning through the dark ages of Islam.

Nevertheless, we must admit that these Islamic movements, by and large, did not achieve the major objectives that they set out to achieve. Their achievements have been very considerable and we must not belittle them. There is a great deal that we must learn from them. But there are also a great many lessons we must learn from their experience. And one of the lessons to which I want to refer in particular is that no Islamic revolution is possible in any country anywhere in the world following the democratic method. In fact, in my submission to you, there is no such thing as a democratic method of *change*. Democracy is an instrument of the *status quo*. Democracy does not tolerate change beyond a narrow band of variation within an existing system.

Democracy has a history of development in post-industrial Europe. During this period the tensions created by the industrial revolution in European societies had to be adjusted and mitigated. The landed aristocracy had to be defended and allowed time to transform itself into an industrial aristocracy. The feudal political system was defended against any major social change. Democracy was invented to serve this purpose. The same democratic process has been used by our political masters in Muslim countries to protect the feudal system there.

Because there is a requirement to follow the method of *shura* in Islam, Muslim thinkers have fallen into the trap of thinking that this western democracy, this European democracy, was somehow the model of *shura*, a method of consultation that Allah enjoined upon us. They completely failed to understand the social, economic and political conditions that gave rise to this particular political system which we know by the name of democracy. The true nature of democracy completely deceived the Muslim thinkers who recommended that we or the Islamic movement itself should follow a democratic process. The moment you accept the democratic process you accept the legitimacy of the existing system as one which can be worked according to some of the rules of that very system: you lose your independence and become a prisoner of the existing system. Once that happens, all the doors are closed against the Islamic movement. This we have seen happening in the Sudan and in Pakistan. In Iran, on the other hand, the Islamic movement has achieved an enormous success, a success which could not have been even dreamt of only a few short months ago. The success achieved by the Islamic movement in Iran was due to a very simple expedient—the total and relentless opposition of the system prevailing in Iran. No compromise was made. The finger of accusation was pointed by the Islamic movement at the Shah and his system and this finger remained pointed regardless of what forces were thrown against it. The whole system was challenged and all its corruption was exposed. The masses of Iran erupted, revolted like one man, because despite all the so-called modernization of Iran, the people of Iran are Muslims, their political culture is Islamic, their values are Islamic. By teaching somebody English you do not change his political culture. By putting him in trousers you do not change his political culture. This has been proved in Iran. It has also been proved that no matter how westernized the student body of Iran, of Tehran, of the universities of Iran, once the leadership offered the alternative and the credibility that is essential for a leadership, the people of Iran, the modern sector, the westernized sector, left the existing regime and joined the Islamic movement of Iran. This is one of the greatest events in the whole history of Islam. People who have been divided into these two groups, the traditional sector and the modern sector, came together. Their coming together was never predicted by the political science of the west. This is what

has caused the greatest bewilderment among the western political scientists: they cannot understand how these people, who had been 'civilized' by their education, could follow this 'bearded mullah'. The fact of the matter is that these are not two people. Simply because they wear different clothes, simply because they have been put through two different traditions of education, of knowledge, they have not become two different people. The coming together of the traditional sector and the modern sector produces an unbeatable combination in terms of political, social and economic force in any society. My hope is that the model that Iran today represents of an Islamic movement challenging, defeating an existing system is a model which will be repeated all over the Muslim world within the next few years.

The regimes that surround Iran will be falling like nine-pins in a very short time, *insha'Allah*. But pushing a regime over is only half the story. The other half of the story is of picking up the pieces and rebuilding. In the last two hundred years we have lived through a hurricane of history blowing through our countries. Everything good has been destroyed except the will and the spirit of our people. We now have an enormously important job to do in rebuilding our societies as they go through the revolutionary process one after another. This is where I want to draw your attention to the present situation in Iran. It is imperative for the revolutionary government and leadership in Iran that they should challenge and defeat all the remnants of the old system within Iran and their agents outside Iran. Let no one feel weak-kneed about it being un-Islamic to hold hostages and so on. Please remember that this Revolution is an Islamic Revolution. Once you accept that, your support for this Revolution cannot be conditional. You have to leave it to the leadership of that Revolution to decide what action is necessary to protect and promote that Revolution. You and I do not have the option, the choice, of sitting in judgement on that Revolution and that leadership. We must support that leadership and that Revolution in its totality without any reservation and without any weakness on our part. Weakness on our part is what our enemies are looking for, both inside and outside Iran. From outside Iran we can help this Revolution, we can give this Revolution our full support in every possible way that the Revolution might need and desire. We must not be seen to waver in our support of the Revolution.

We hope, *insha'Allah*, that the Islamic movement in the rest of the Muslim world will soon readjust, draw the obvious lessons, and a new Islamic movement will arise in the image of Iran.

Thus, the state of the Muslim world in the year 1400 is one of grim darkness, broken only by a flash of light in Iran. But this flash of light is strong enough for us to see the future that lies ahead, that can lie ahead, if only we can rise above our petty self-interests and pool our intellectual, spiritual and material resources in the pursuit of the collective goals of the *Ummah*. But the collective goals of the *Ummah* need to be articulated. The present situation is that the generation to which I belong is the worst generation ever to grow up among Muslims. We are people who misled the *Ummah*, in the name of nationalism, in the name of capitalism, in the name of this -ism and that -ism. We tried to mix Islam with capitalism, nationalism, and with socialism. We are the people who have totally failed. We have nothing to show for it. But those of you who are in your twenties, you have a chance to take up this challenge of history and rebuild our society, to forget the bad dream of the colonial and the neo-colonial periods. The so-called leaders of solidarity, the so-called charismatic leaders, the nationalist leaders, the 'fathers' of the nation, the great parties that brought our countries to 'independence', they were all products of a very low period in our history. Having realized what these so-called great people and the great parties were and are, we have the responsibility of producing something better in their place for the future.

Within the *Ummah* today there are Muslims in such countries as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Eritrea and the Philippines who are starving. You have other countries where they do not know what to do with their money except to put it in American banks, eventually to lose it altogether. We have all this and yet there is still plenty of oil where the other oil came from. It is not oil that makes history, it is the human material that makes the difference. We have seen that no amount of fire power that America and its agents could bring to bear could defeat the Islamic movement in Iran. No amount of fire power that France could bring to bear could defeat the Algerians. If you go outside the Muslim world you will see that no amount of fire power that America could bring in Vietnam could defeat the people of Vietnam. So the whole of

the power theory of political dominance, of political organization, has been thrown out of the window. It is for us to grasp the lessons of these events and internalize them in our collective and individual lives. Here I feel that the students have a special duty because western education turns the young into self-seeking opportunists. The young only think of a career, of a job, and of the comforts and other good things in life to follow. And once you have your degree, your car, your job, your status, then you lose your interest in changing the system because you have become part of that system. You have to ponder very deeply whether you really want to get lost in the wilderness in which your parents have been lost. But this is the model of the 'good life' that we are expected to embrace once we have got our degrees and left our universities. If you follow in the footsteps of your parents and grandparents you will be following the path of total decline into oblivion.

During the last two hundred years while we lost empires and political dominance, we also lost our intellectual grasp of the world around us. There has appeared a gap in our experience as makers of history as well as a gap in our knowledge. Had the Muslim civilization remained in its dominant role in history, we would have produced a body of knowledge in the fields of the social sciences, in economics, in political science and so on. After all, Ibn Khaldun and others had done very useful pioneering work. The west has created a body of knowledge, known as economics, in order to justify, rationalize and make profound the economic behaviour of the west. The capitalist system did not follow a theory, it came about through factors that had nothing to do with theory. And yet the west has produced a discipline known as economics. Many of us take degrees in economics. Similarly, in political science, they have produced an intellectual tradition virtually overnight. Did you know that a hundred years ago there was no such thing as political science? That there was no such thing as a department of political science in any university in Europe or America? There was not a single professor of political science! And yet within the last fifty or sixty years these have developed and spread everywhere because the western experience had produced a political model which had to be justified by an intellectual tradition. Therefore, the political system produced the intellectuals, the institutions, and gave them the money to produce a theory to justify the system. It is as simple as that.

And the same goes for every other branch of knowledge that you can care to think of. And yet the Muslims and our westernized elites have tried to use this subjective 'knowledge' of the west to try to solve our problems. Not surprisingly, not a single Muslim government has succeeded in solving any social, economic or political problem. Every problem they have tried to solve, they have made more intractable. These problems have also escaped definition and understanding because the model they were trying to apply is a model developed in an alien civilization, in an alien culture, among an alien people. This failure is something for which we have paid a very heavy price. But if they had succeeded, we would have been in greater trouble. If they had succeeded anywhere we would not be able to point our finger at them to say that this does not apply. They tried it in Turkey, they tried it in Iran, they tried it in Pakistan. They are trying it in Saudi Arabia, they are trying it in Egypt, they are trying it everywhere. But the thing just does not work because it does not belong to us, our people do not know it, it represents an alien value system; it is just not us.

In the years that lie immediately ahead of us we have to make sure that the one Islamic movement that has succeeded, does in fact succeed not only in the short-term but also in the long-term. Our commitment to Iran must be total and complete. We also have to re-orientate our individual life as well as the social, political entities from which we come, in order to achieve the new goals that must be set for our societies in the next hundred years. It is not necessary to set a goal and achieve it. You set a goal, go part of the way towards it, then other people will go ahead and achieve it. This is how the race of history is run. Each generation must pass on its work to the following generation, but please do not accept the work of the generation just gone or going. You have to create a new situation and from then on make a sharp turn. I know that watersheds and sharp turns in history are largely imaginary; they exist in the imagination of the historians and in history books. History goes more or less straight on. Nonetheless, we have to make that effort which is essential in the next hundred years to make sure that when the next turn of the Hijra century comes we, our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren are placed in a much better position *vis-a-vis* the rest of the world. And this is the challenge that faces us and the generations to come. I think the condition in which we

have found ourselves in the year 1400 has been made bearable only by the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Otherwise there was darkness everywhere.

(There followed a period of questions and answers. The following is some of the discussion.)

Question: Thank you for your inspiring exposition. I think we as individuals and the members of the Islamic movement should try to win Allah on our side. Once that happens then no power on earth can defeat us. This is one of the lessons of the Revolution in Iran. Other Islamic movements failed because they set themselves up to gain political power. Would you agree with this?

KS: I am very grateful to you for this comment. In fact I would amplify a little bit of what you have said. A revolution in Islam is not about gaining political power. The Prophet (peace be upon him) was offered political power in Makkah. The Makkans said 'Come and be our king'. If just being the king was the purpose, then there was nothing more to do. But if the Prophet had accepted the kingship of the existing system, he would have become a prisoner of the system in Makkah. His purpose was not to gain political power but to destroy the system and replace it. Therefore, to secure political power is not the objective. In fact there is no one single day in Madinah when the Prophet took up a piece of paper in his hand and repeated after the Chief Justice 'I swear to uphold the Constitution' and became the head of the state. There is no single point in his life when you can say 'on that day he became head of the State'. On the day he arrived in Madinah, he did not become the undisputed leader of Madinah. That took years. This is one point. The other point that emerges from your comment is that Allah comes to your help only when you have stretched yourself to your limit. Allah demands that you stretch yourself to your absolute limit. Then you can expect direct help from Allah and it will come. But so long as you hold back anything you neither deserve, nor are you going to get, direct help from Allah.

These are the two things which we must remember: that political power in Islam is a by-product, is irrelevant as far as the Islamic

movement is concerned. Political power comes as a responsibility, not as a gift as in western political thought. As far as the political role in Islam is concerned, it is the most humble and humbling experience. When you have a political role to play in your society then you are the most humble person. If you are not, then you are a corrupt person. Humility is essential in anyone who is going to exercise authority in any Muslim society. Whereas the reverse is the case in the *kafir* system with which we are so familiar.

Question: How do you see the future of the Islamic movement against the Marxist regime in Kabul?

KS: I happened to be in Kabul two weeks before the *coup* that toppled Da'ud. My complaint against the Islamic movement in Afghanistan is that it was not as active against Da'ud as it is against the present regime. Da'ud's regime was as un-Islamic as the present regime. Simply being capitalist or friendly to the west doesn't make a regime Islamic. Why did they not oppose Da'ud with the same vigour that they are displaying in opposition to the present regime? The fact is that the Islamic movement in Afghanistan is at the moment in an early stage of development. There are a number of Islamic groups working without a co-ordinated plan. The contact that we have had so far with the groups who are operating from the Pakistan side of the border lead us to believe that any immediate collapse of the regime in Afghanistan would not be in the interest of the Islamic movement because the movement is not, as yet, in a position to take advantage of the situation that would then exist. It is in the interest of the Islamic movement of Afghanistan that this struggle lasts some years, so that the movement has time to throw up the leadership, internalize the experience, develop the ideas, the know-how, and the expertise essential for a successful revolution. It is important that the movement develops an organization for the revolution and for the culmination of the revolution. An immediate collapse of the regime in Kabul would be against the Islamic movement and perhaps groups other than the Islamic movement would benefit more. This is our assessment of the situation at present.

Question: You seem to be against the democratic method for social change. I can accept it for Muslim countries. But should we not use the

democratic institutions to change the host society and for the *da'wah* work?

KS: We live in a society which calls itself a democracy. We are bound, as a small minority, to follow the law of the land in which we live. We cannot defy the law except where it runs counter to Islam. For instance, simply because abortion is legal, we cannot start sending our women to have abortions. We don't have to go and take part in their elections, to their electioneering, in their political process, and so on. But as Muslims we have one duty above all and that is the duty to deliver the message of Islam to non-Muslims. That is the duty of *da'wah*. How do we carry out this duty of *da'wah* in the society in which we live? This is a difficult question at this moment because the absence of a living and dynamic model of an Islamic civilization makes *da'wah* very difficult. When you invite someone to your house, you vacuum clean the carpet, you put things right and make your house look attractive. Unless you put your own house in order, how can you invite somebody to it? As they say, 'if you're so clever, why aren't you rich?' If Islam is so good, why haven't we been able to solve our problems? And then you look blank. Some of us manage a few sentences in defence or apology. But the fact of the matter is that the first step in *da'wah* is to establish Islam as a working model of a civilization, of a system, and, therefore, we must use our stay in this country not to convert this country to Islam, but to establish Islam in the house of Islam. And once it is established there, then you will be able to establish Islam anywhere. That is *da'wah*. So, if we mobilize our resources in this country in order to support an Islamic movement overseas, ultimately that is part of *da'wah* in the non-Muslim world. Because the non-Muslim is quite right in saying, 'Well, look, sorry, go and sort your things out, get it working first and then I will consider it.' If the delivery of the message itself had been enough, then Saudi Arabia, Libya and other countries are doing it now. They are printing the Qur'an in millions, distributing the Book of Allah all over the world and having no effect. Allah himself, if He had so wished, could have had the Qur'an printed in millions and distributed all over the world instead of sending it through a Messenger. Why use a Prophet? I am sure it was within the power of the Creator to have these copies made of His Holy Book and distributed simultaneously

throughout the world. One fine morning mankind would have woken up to find a copy of the Qur'an by everyone's bedside.

But the message of Allah came as a method. The method was delivered through the Sunnah of the Prophet. The Sunnah of the Prophet was, and shall always be, to establish a working civilization of Islam which will then emerge from wherever it is established, pressing everything else into retreat. It is the base of Islam that we do not have at this moment. We have to build it and once we have built it then *da'wah* will follow as surely as day follows night.

Question: Could you comment on the present situation in Pakistan?

KS: Well, in Pakistan normal service has been resumed. That sums up the present situation in Pakistan. The Pakistan army is a political party in uniform, armed to the teeth and greedy with a big belly. It is colonialism from within, of a kind unknown before. There has not been a change of government in Pakistan from the day Pakistan came into being. It is the same government, merely having different people sitting in the chair. One Khan followed another Khan, and so on. This is really a farce. The present General, by donning the so-called Islamic clothes, and the Islamic movement of Jama'at-e Islami, by entering the government, has enacted the most tragic events in the history of Pakistan. A military junta obviously hostile to Islam has been able to deceive an Islamic movement. They brought them into their Cabinet for a few short months. Now these former Ministers have no credibility, nobody believes them, there is no more they can do. The Jama'at-e Islami is quite irrelevant in the political equation in Pakistan, now or in the future. A realignment of Islamic forces in Pakistan will have to take place. It is about time it happened. Let us hope that Iran will provide the model of a new Islamic movement in Pakistan. In the meantime, normal service has been resumed.