

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ
UK ISLAMIC MISSION
البعثة الاسلاميه فى بريطانيا



Mr. Andrew Smith

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8th January 2007

By post, fax and email

Dear Mr. Smith,

I wish to refer to your five-page letter dated 28th December 2006 sent during the Hajj and Eid al-Adha holiday week, informing us that you are investigating the spread of 'religious teachings by Saudi Arabia and the Saudi Arabian religious establishments through British mosques and Islamic organisations'.

We, however, find it rather blatantly odd and uninviting that instead of following the normal course of doing some fair and objective research, you have already carried out your so-called 'investigation', ex parte and that through guile and stealth. Clearly you had a preconceived agenda and now after having reached 'the final stages of editing', you have sent a 'charge sheet' for us to answer.

Please tell us what is the point of anyone entering their plea, 'guilty' or 'not guilty', at this last stage except to let you pick and choose a couple of phrases from here and there and tell viewers that you gave the 'accused' the opportunity to respond and this is what they said.

This open season of Muslim-bashing and Islamophobia has been with us for so long that one is little surprised about yet another Channel 4 'investigation'. You take it with a pinch of humour, yet one is constrained to say that the phobia of some of our friends in the media is getting absurd by the day. Sadly, phobia is a condition of mind and one can only pray that God may cure them of all their phobias.

Islam was not discovered yesterday. It has been there in the universe of ideas and civilizations for almost a millennium and half dealing with, during these odd years, all kind of doubts, fears, slander and criticism, and winning ever more understanding even from its bitter opponents. Britain and Muslims, in particular, have been together since ages; not always so, yet, on balance, it has been a relationship of more mutuality than hostility. The largely civilised British de-colonisation of Muslim lands - Palestine and Kashmir being the two sad exceptions, however helped to cement this relationship in the shape of that unique multi-national, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-faith intercontinental institution, the Commonwealth. So, while we welcome any critical debate or serious discussion about Islam or British Muslims, we strongly rebuff any attempt to put Islam and British Muslims on trial and hand down a pre-judged verdict. No, thank you.

We, therefore, want you to record that we firmly and unequivocally reject all the distortions, insinuations, imputations, accusations and allegations that seem to underscore your letter and were presumably going to colour your programme.

I shall, however, deal with some specific apprehensions and objections you seem to ventilate in your letter.

Firstly, Jihad, the greatest Red herring in our post-modern Islamophobic discourse! Had your researchers referred to any primer on Islam, they would have known that Jihad is one of the basic tenets of Islam and no Muslim, Sunni or Shi'ah, 'extremist' or 'moderate', 'sufi' or 'salafi' would deny its obligatory nature. The duty to bid goodness and forbid evil is a common human obligation.

Jihad is holistic in its concept. It means striving one's utmost in order to do good, beginning from one's own personal life to the overall good of the community and humanity. The undoing of evil was a necessary corollary of doing good. Thus when everything else fails and oppression and sedition become insufferable, it may become obligatory to take recourse to military Jihad, which is called *Qital*, in Islamic terminology. Yet *Qital* is rated as 'Minor Jihad' (*Jihad-e-Asghar*); that is to say one doesn't rush into 'war' without exhausting all other civil and non-violent means to bring about peace and normalcy. *Qital* is like surgery in medicine; you call in the surgeon only after the physician has given up.

Contra to *Qital* and *Jihad-e-Asghar*, civil and non-military Jihad is called 'Greater Jihad' - *Jihad-e-Akbar*. 'Minor Jihad' is situation-specific and short-term. 'Greater Jihad' is long-term and life-long. *Qital* or military Jihad can be only waged in a just and noble cause and besides the justness of the cause, the means too have to be strictly ethical. The rules are clearly laid down and any fighting otherwise may not qualify as Jihad in the sight of God.

Again, it is not for anyone, individual or civil organisation, to declare Jihad and engage in *Qital*. To declare jihad is the sole prerogative of a legitimate Islamic authority.

In our own British context, British Muslims are under no Islamic obligation to take part in any conflict or struggle overseas on the assumption that it was Jihad (*Qital*). It would not be Jihad should someone tried to commit violence or indulge in any unlawful, let alone a subversive activity on the British soil.

I hope this helps to clarify your and your team's understanding of Jihad in Islam. By the way, the foregoing précis about Jihad is extracted from Sayyid Mawdudi's (d.1979) very work on Jihad that seemed to have alarmed you. It was first published in 1927 during the prime of the Empire. It was a scholarly treatise. It did not threaten the Raaj then, it doesn't threaten anyone now.

Jama'at-e-Islami seemed to be another cause of your fright, especially The UK Islamic Mission's alleged 'links' with the Jama'at. Peace!

The UK Islamic Mission is an independent British Muslim institution. It was established by British Muslims in 1962. It has its own constitution, own membership and elected leadership. It functions openly and transparently and that is how your covert journalists could walk in through the front door.

The UK Islamic Mission has no organic links with Jama'at-e-Islami in Pakistan or for that matter with any other Islamic party or society overseas, neither does it defer to or take its policies or programmes from any foreign body or individual. However, you would know that while the Jama'at was a national political party in Pakistan, it's late founder Maulana Mawdudi was a great 20th-century Islamic scholar and although 'little known in the West,' according to Martin Bright, an 'expert' you might know, he says 'hugely significant as a thinker across the Muslim world'. (*The Observer*, Sunday, 14 August 2005). It was, therefore, little out of the ordinary that any British Muslim, whether within or without The UK Islamic Mission, who has read his works, may have an educated regard for his contribution to modern Islamic thought. Mawdudi was not, as in some traditions, an 'imam' or shaiikh or a sufi order, a 'holy man', who has to be followed almost to the

dot. But if he looked significant even today, to his admirers and critics alike, it was perhaps because his scholarship was not beyond argument and the debate went on.

It seems that some over enthusiastic Webmaster has described the UKIM as one of the Jama'at-e-Islami's 'outreaches' has in fact come as news to us. We didn't know until you told us. Yet whatever the term might mean, it is similar kind of relationship that, for example, the British political parties have with their socialist, social democratic, Christian democratic or other like-minded parties in our part of the world.

Your 'experts' also tell you that Jama'at-e-Islami is 'a fundamentalist political party in Pakistan' which is, among others, 'inherently opposed to the principles of genuine plurality, multiculturalism, universal human rights and peaceful co-existence.' You should have better asked the Jama'at-e-Islami itself whether all that was really true. But knowing them to be an Islamic party, how could we expect them to call for a non-Islamic policy. However, the part about the Jama'at, and by insinuation the UKIM too, being opposed to 'genuine plurality, multiculturalism, universal human rights and peaceful co-existence' was false and mischievous. In Islam, the idea of human rights, cultural diversity and plurality of the human family, long predated anything similar in modern political thought.

You seemed to be worked up too about the use of the term *Kafir* (pl. *Kuffar*) in Islamic discourse. It is in fact a Qur'anic term, and it simply means 'The coverer'; that is, one who hides or covers. It is an objective statement of fact and NOT a word of abuse or insult. According to the *Dictionary of Islam*, (Thomas Patrick Hughes, 1885, reprinted 1996), 'The word [kafir] is generally used by Muhammadans to define one who is an unbeliever in the ministry of Muhammad and his Qur'an, and in this sense it seems to have been used by Muhammad himself.' Thus instead of covertly recording the Friday prayer at Sparkbrook, your reporter could have easily referred to The Qur'an itself. Your translation is poor, but the words come from The Qur'an, *Al-Baqarah* 2: 286). Marmaduke Pickthall translated it as follows:

'Allah tasketh not a soul beyond its scope. For it (is only) that which it hath earned, and against it (only) that which it hath deserved. Our Lord! Condemn us not if we forget, or miss the mark! Our Lord! Lay not on us such a burden as Thou didst lay on those before us! Our Lord! Impose not on us that which we have not the strength to bear! Pardon us, absolve us and have mercy on us. Thou, our Protector, and give us victory over the disbelieving folk.'

The Qur'an uses a different term though for Jews and Christians - *Ahl al-Kitab*, or the People of the Book. That is to underscore the proximity and affinity between the People of the Qur'an and the People of the Book; the Book was in its origin, One Book - Torah, the Gospels and The Qur'an.

Now a few words about a couple of things, out of a year-round regime of events, lectures and discussions at the Sparkbrook community hall said to have been picked up by your covert reporters. The hall is available for hiring by other community organizations and almost all the alleged 'angry outburst' you cite seems to have happened during its use by some non-UKIM organization.

We know that the TV camera is often made to lie and we do not know the veracity or context of those seemingly rash and rhetorical utterances. But assuming that they were really made the way you say, I have no hesitation in saying that they did not reflect our policy or culture. Although I am not sure that they violated any British law, they did violate the Islamic ethic of discourse, especially with the People of the Book. The Qur'an (*Al-Ankabut* 29:46) asks Muslims:

'Argue not with People of the Book except in the nicest manner.'

But given our predilection for gratuitous Islamophobia and sacrilege of the highest Islamic - and Christian - sanctities, under the holy doctrine of absolute freedom of speech, it seems a little rich for anyone making so much fuss about some intemperate words blurted here and there by

someone feeling hurt and angry. Islam teaches that anger is 'haram', it is not permissible. It is not right and we would not defend it. However, no matter all the fuss about 'extremists', are we ourselves not involved in a self-fulfilling prophecy when we add insult to injury and stoke 'extremism'? Or maybe the idea is to provoke extremism and then use them to bash the 'moderates'. Heads they win and tails we lose! Actually, there is no win for anyone in this and better we quit this farce. ASAP!

And finally, a few words about the main thrust of your inquiry: the alleged spread of 'religious teachings by Saudi Arabia and the Saudi Arabian religious establishment through British mosques and Islamic organisations'.

Saudi Arabia does have the singular distinction of being the Holy Land of Islam, but we don't have a pope in Saudi Arabia, nor is there anything like 'religious teachings by Saudi Arabia and the Saudi Arabian religious establishment', which Muslims may be obliged to follow.

Islam is sourced from two authentic and meticulously preserved Texts, The Qur'an and the Sunnah (as explained, taught, explained and exemplified by the Prophet, peace be upon him). Then there are four Sunni juristic schools, Maliki, Shafi'i, Hanafi, and Hanbali and a fifth, the Ja'afari or Shi'i school. Almost every Muslim in the world, including Britain, follow one of these major schools, which have of course evolved and developed over the centuries by scholars in their respective schools. The division between the schools is scholastic and not theologically exclusive and, therefore, between them they all can - and they do - exchange and adopt each other's understanding of Islam.

Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab (1703–1792) was an 18th century Arabian scholar, who was born into the Hanbali tradition in the central Arabian region of Najd. The main thrust of his teachings was on Tawhid or Oneness of God, as he felt the Arabian society was getting mixed up with some non-Islamic practices. He won an important ally in the person of the regional emir of Ad-Dar'iyah, Muhammad ibn Saud (d.1765), who went on to lay down the foundation of the Saudi kingdom. Although he went on to acquire a stature of his own, Shaikh Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab did not found nor is regarded a founder of any new juristic school in Islam. However, while their opponents term them as 'Wahhabi', all be it in a deprecatory sense, his followers prefer to define themselves as *Salafi*, that is those who try to follow in the path of the *Salaf as-Salihin*, the 'pious predecessors'.

The great majority of British Muslims follow the Hanafi school and while they may listen to talks and lectures given by visiting scholars from Saudi Arabia, as they do to many more scholars from South Asia, contrary to the blinkered lens of some covert cameras, they are a discerning community and they can think for themselves. It is all outlandish, but where all the Hanafis to 'convert' to the 'religious teachings by Saudi Arabia and the Saudi Arabian religious establishment' or vice versa, it should not worry anyone else. That if any of this involved any violation of British law, we have plenty of laws to deal with all kind illegality.

Saudi institutions and philanthropist have no doubt been generous in supporting a new and nascent community in putting up it basic religious institutions, mosques and schools and this should be appreciated. However, their philanthropy has not been Muslim-exclusive, their assistance has gone to many other British causes and institutions as well. Probably in a greater proportion, but rightly so.

It is, however, extremely demeaning to both the donors and recipients to insinuate that all this generosity could buy the religious and political loyalty of British Muslims. The Saudis did not need to buy British Muslim support. It was worth little and yet had this been possible, considering the trillions they contribute to the British economy, the Saudis were very well placed to buy up the British establishment itself.

British Muslims are being constantly lectured about integration, about community cohesion and about respect for British values and they have no problem about any of these. They are working hard to integrate, seriously to cohere with all other communities and they do have the fullest

respect for the values of the British nation. Unfortunately, the boot seems to lie on the other leg. They need as much respect as they are supposed to give to others. They are human too and do not claim any infallibility. Anything and everything can be raised and discussed but by not hauling an entire community into the dock and acting as judge, jury and executioner. Not once but almost every now and then.

I am very sure that nothing of what we say here is going to correct the basic thrust of your programme. I am not sure whether you were going to read. Nevertheless, since you raised a number important question, we spent a little time to clarify critical issues for the benefit of all fair-minded media persons. We do believe that left to themselves most media person can be fair and objective, but we will see.

To conclude, I would like to ask you to email the few words of quote from us that you may be inserting in your programme. If you tell us the sequence where you want to insert them and the number of words you can afford, 50 to 500, we can provide you exactly that many words.

With kind regards

Yours sincerely,

Shafiq ur-Rahman
President

PS. We believe this letter also disposes of the separate letters you have sent to the Sparkbrook Islamic Centre and Alum Rock Islamic Centre, Birmingham