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EVALUATING MUSLIM-JEWISH RELATIONS IN BRITAIN

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- British Muslim organizations are becoming far more vocal on foreign policy matters. Two positions would appear to be axiomatic: opposition to the Iraq war and Britain's continued involvement in Iraq, and a resolute anti-Zionism which both delegitimizes the State of Israel and scorns Jewish anxieties when it comes to anti-Semitism.
- Prior to the furor over Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses*, national origin was the principal component of Muslim immigrant identity in Britain. The Rushdie Affair introduced an overarching Muslim identity over these distinct communities. By the end of 1988, a UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs (UKACIA) had been formed to coordinate protests against Rushdie. By January 1989,

Muslims in the northern English city of Bradford were burning copies of the book in public.

- It can be argued that alleviating the social plight of British Muslims does not necessarily require legislation which characterizes the policy focus as a problem of discrimination against a *religious* minority. Moreover, a number of studies have questioned the assumption of an organic link between deprivation and Islamist politics. More sensitive social policies and better employment prospects will not, by themselves, dilute the appeal of the radical Islamist agenda.
- A November 2004 poll conducted by *The Guardian* demonstrates that it is political and religious issues, rather than economic and social ones, which energize Muslim activism in the UK. According to the poll, 88 percent of Muslims want to see schools and workplaces incorporate Muslim prayer times as part of their working day - a demand all but unknown among other religious groups.
- The key issue which divides the British Jewish and Muslim communities is the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. Jews are confronted with a rigid Islamist standpoint which concedes no legitimacy to the State of Israel and which justifies terrorist violence against Jews in the name of Palestine, regardless of whether the victims carry Israeli passports.
- The separation of the secular and religious domains is a prerequisite for both successful Muslim participation in the institutions of Europe and for reform of the Muslim world itself. At the present time, Britain and other EU states are trying to reach

a *modus vivendi* with an Islamic communal infrastructure that does not accept this separation.

Perceptions of British Muslims

Anyone studying the dynamics of the Muslim community in the United Kingdom is confronted with three distinct images. There is the image of the Muslim as fanatic: Islamist clerics indulging in toxic anti-Western and anti-Semitic rhetoric and endorsing the path of violent *jihad* in front of cheering crowds of youthful supporters. There is the image of the Muslim as victim: highly vulnerable, particularly in the aftermath of the 9/11 atrocities, to physical abuse, verbal insults, and the vandalism of mosques and community centers, and disproportionately exposed to poverty and discrimination. Finally, there is the image of Muslim as citizen: advancing communal interests and concerns through the established channels of British political life and forging an identity which harmonizes a devotion to Islamic beliefs with a commitment to the country in which 45 percent of the community was born.

Given these distinct perceptions, it is helpful to be cognizant of the different trends which are at play within the Muslim community. That there are, among non-Muslims, radically different readings of what Muslims in Britain represent testifies to the difficulty of forging a cogent British Muslim identity. In tandem, there is a prevailing view among many politicians and commentators that, in relation to other minorities, attempts to foster a greater sense of belonging to Britain among Muslims have been comparatively less successful.¹

There are a number of reasons for this. British Muslims are, in ethnic terms, far more heterogeneous than other religious minorities. In addition to native-born Muslims, there are large communities originating from South Asia, the Middle East, and Southeastern Europe. This alone complicates the nature of British Muslim identity. Moreover, the combination of social disadvantage along with the penetration of anti-Western beliefs and values into many Muslim communities has served as a brake on greater integration.

Nevertheless, Britain remains confident of its image as a tolerant nation able to integrate different groups. Politicians of all stripes are keen to demonstrate that minorities can advance themselves in what Home Office Minister Fiona McTaggart has described as a "fantastically diverse society." Indeed, Michael Howard, the first Jewish leader of the Conservative Party since Benjamin Disraeli, eulogized Britain's openness during a keynote speech to the party's 2004 conference.² Born in Wales to Romanian Jewish immigrant parents, Howard related that his grandmother had perished in a Nazi concentration camp. If not for Winston Churchill and for Britain, he mused, he too would have shared his grandmother's fate. Howard concluded that he - literally - owed Britain his life; his goal now was to give the country "just a tiny bit back of what Britain has given me."

While some Muslim leaders have made clear their desire to contribute positively to Britain, they are also adamant that a greater sense of belonging cannot be achieved unless certain Muslim demands are met. A notable current demand, which has the support of the government, seeks to outlaw "religious discrimination." This expands existing race relations legislation by making it an offense to target someone because of their religious beliefs. Consequently, there are concerns,

which the government has denied have any basis, that the measures will impact negatively on freedom of speech. Previous legislation covered only Jews and Sikhs, as they are defined as racial as well as religious groups; the new laws seek to close a perceived loophole by offering protection to religious groups, foremost among them Muslims, who are multi-racial in composition. A number of critics, such as the Labour Peer Lord Desai, have repeatedly said that new legislation is unnecessary, since existing laws already provide a robust defense for an individual discriminated against on racial or religious grounds.³

More broadly, Muslim organizations are seeking greater backing for Islamic education in the state sector. They are calling for the introduction of courts, based on *shari'a* law, to deal with divorce, inheritance, child custody and similar status issues.⁴ In addition - and this is of particular relevance to relations with the Jewish community - Muslim organizations are becoming far more vocal on foreign policy matters. Much of the focus is on the Middle East and two positions would appear to be axiomatic: firstly, opposition to the Iraq war and Britain's continued involvement in Iraq; and secondly, a resolute anti-Zionism which both delegitimizes the State of Israel and scorns Jewish anxieties when it comes to anti-Semitism. Underscoring all of this is a determination by Muslim communal organizations to group legitimate political criticism with illegitimate racial and religious slurs: all amount to expressions of Islamophobia.

A serious examination of the state of Muslim-Jewish relations in Britain needs to recognize that the emergence of a Muslim political consciousness is a critical element of the narrative; for those Muslims under the age of 25 especially (a massive 70 percent of the

total population), an Islamic political and cultural identity exercises a powerful attraction. Therefore, we will first examine the development of Muslim consciousness in Britain and its current manifestations before considering the implications for relations with British Jews.

The Emergence of Muslim Political Consciousness in Britain

While there has been a discernible Muslim presence in the United Kingdom since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the mass immigration of Muslims to the UK coincided with the dismantling of the British Empire. Muslims, as well as Hindus and Sikhs, arrived in large numbers from India and Pakistan from the late 1940s onwards. Like immigrants from the West Indies, they mainly found work in the public sector, in factories, in transport and similar fields. A large number also started small businesses, such as shops and restaurants. Racism and discrimination were an ugly fact of life from the beginning. The 1970s was a particularly unpleasant period, due to an upsurge in agitation by the neo-Nazi National Front following an influx of Asian refugees expelled by Idi Amin's regime in Uganda.

Among those immigrants to the UK of the Muslim faith, there was a gradual process of institution-building. During the 1960s and 1970s, student societies, educational trusts, and welfare bodies were formed, and a Muslim journal, *Impact*, began publication. But it was not until the late 1980s that a definably Muslim political consciousness emerged in Britain. The catalyst for this was what became known as the "Rushdie Affair."

Prior to the furor over Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses*, national origin was the principal component of Muslim immigrant identity. Of course, to uninformed or prejudiced outsiders, there was not much difference between a Pakistani and a Bangladeshi with British citizenship. However, a host of factors - linguistic, cultural, historical, and religious - demarcated the identity of a British Muslim whose roots were traceable to Karachi in Pakistan from the identity of a British Muslim who originated from Sylhet in Bangladesh. That Bangladesh had fought a bitter struggle for independence from Pakistan in 1971, during which up to one million Bengali civilians were murdered by rampaging Pakistani troops, only shored up this particular divide. It should also be noted that these divisions are still intact. Commenting on the internal splits among British Muslims, Humayun Ansari observes that "tensions persist between belief in the unity of the Muslim *umma*" - the global Muslim community - "and the conflicting ties that distinguish these communities."⁵

The Rushdie Affair effectively introduced - some might say imposed - an overarching Muslim identity over these distinct communities. Rushdie's novel challenged the very foundations of Islam by questioning the divine origins of the Qu'ran and the authority of the Prophet Mohammed. What was regarded by many Muslims as a work of blasphemy galvanized the Muslim communal bodies, which had been developing over the previous three decades, into action. By the end of 1988, a UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs (UKACIA) had been formed to coordinate protests against Rushdie. Three main demands were directed at Rushdie's publishers, Penguin Books: first, that all copies of the book be pulped; second, that an unqualified public apology be offered to the "world Muslim community"; and third, that

damages be paid equal to the returns on copies of the book which had already been sold.

By January 1989, Muslims in the northern English city of Bradford were burning copies of the book in public. The following month, Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini issued a *fatwa* from Tehran exhorting Muslims to kill Rushdie. With the fatwa now in play, the British government observed developments in the Muslim community with growing alarm. In a letter to UKACIA's Iqbal Sacranie, now the Secretary-General of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), the then Home Affairs Minister, John Patten, pointed out that the same liberty which permitted Muslims to protest guaranteed Rushdie's right to freedom of expression. UKACIA's reply anticipated the current religious discrimination legislation by asserting that there was no "right to commit sacrilege and insult and abuse the deeply held sanctities of other people."⁶

Still, UKACIA committed itself to working within the law, through lobbying and forging political alliances, though this approach was not universally adopted. Some prominent Muslim radicals, such as the late Kalim Siddiqui of the Muslim Institute in London, openly endorsed Khomeini's *fatwa*, with the result that Rushdie was forced to live with a 24-hour guard. Buoyed by the campaign against Rushdie, Siddiqui then launched the so-called "Muslim Parliament of Great Britain." The basic concept behind the Parliament was what Siddiqui called a "non-territorial Islamic state"; effectively, the provision of Islamic education and community services to enable Muslims to survive within what Siddiqui and his supporters regarded as an inherently hostile environment which would eventually give way to an Islamic state.⁷

UKACIA and the Muslim Parliament represented two different schools of thought with regard to Muslim

political activity in Britain. UKACIA argued that Muslim interests were best served by working within, rather than against, the system - an approach continued by the umbrella group which it spawned, the MCB. The Muslim Parliament, on the other hand, was far more oriented towards the Islamist political currents in the Middle East and Pakistan. Even though the Parliament dissolved shortly after Siddiqui's death in 1996, its political legacy survives through the radical Muslim organizations which are present on the current British scene. Importantly, these two approaches do not face off as adversaries; while there are differences and disagreements, the Muslim mainstream in Britain cooperates with the radical tendencies on both an institutional and political level, as will be demonstrated.

British Muslims: Ethnic Composition, Social Position, and Political Orientation

The most recent UK national census, conducted in 2001, determined that there are 1.6 million Muslims in Britain.⁸ According to the census, 43 percent are of Pakistani origin, 17 percent are Bangladeshi, and another 9 percent originate from India. Additionally, 4 percent are British converts, while 6 percent are from African or Caribbean backgrounds. The remaining 21 percent include Arabs, Iranians, Turks, and Kurds from the Middle East and North Africa; East Africans; Balkan Muslims from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania, and Kosovo; and Muslims from other Asian countries. As well as exhibiting a strong degree of ethnic diversity, British Muslims are also comparatively young. Indeed, out of all the country's religious groups, British Muslims have the youngest age profile: one-third are under sixteen,

compared to one-fifth for the population as a whole.

A recent report by the Open Society Institute examines "the deprivation, disadvantage and discrimination that many UK Muslims experience in their daily lives."⁹ While the report does not conceive of British Muslims as anything other than social victims, and while it uncritically endorses many of the proposals of British Muslim leaders (for example, the religious discrimination legislation), the raw data gathered by the OSI in itself suggests why the British government is now anxious to seize the policy initiative, particularly as it observes worsening relations with Muslims in other EU countries like France and The Netherlands. For example, unemployment is proportionately much higher among British Muslims, standing at 38 percent. Substandard housing is another problem, with 42 percent living in overcrowded accommodations, compared with 12 percent for the population as a whole. The report also cites a survey conducted by Muslim community groups in which 80 percent of respondents said they had been subjected to "Islamophobia," which encompasses the full range of verbal and practical discrimination.¹⁰

Yet it can be argued that alleviating the social plight of British Muslims does not necessarily require legislation which characterizes the policy focus as a problem of discrimination against a *religious* minority. Moreover, a number of studies have questioned the assumption of an organic link between deprivation and Islamist politics.¹¹ More sensitive social policies and better employment prospects will not, by themselves, dilute the appeal of the radical Islamist agenda.

In that sense, it is worth examining how British Muslims perceive their own position and their attitudes towards the wider British society. A November 2004 poll

conducted by *The Guardian* newspaper demonstrates that it is political and religious issues, rather than economic and social ones, which energize Muslim activism in the UK.¹² According to the poll, 88 percent of Muslims want to see schools and workplaces incorporate Muslim prayer times as part of their working day - a demand all but unknown among other religious groups. In a related area, 61 percent of Muslims want the introduction of *shari'a* courts to decide civil issues within their own communities. Notwithstanding the caveat that such courts should not contradict British law, such a measure would certainly strengthen the conservative, theocratic elements among British Muslims.

While 40 percent of British Muslims feel they need to do more to "integrate" into British society, how this is to be achieved is not specified. In terms of political affiliations, the poll reinforces the impression that judgments of Muslim voters are principally made on the basis of perceived anti-Muslim bias in British government policy; considerations unrelated to direct Muslim concerns do not seem to register. This has impacted strongly on the ruling Labour Party. In 2001, 75 percent of Muslims voted for Labour as it won a second term in office. By the reckoning of *The Guardian* poll, this support has collapsed to 32 percent as a result of the conflict in Iraq and Prime Minister Tony Blair's continued backing for the war on terror.

Support for the Conservatives has also slipped among Muslims, from 25 percent to 16 percent. This has occurred despite Michael Howard's attempts to distance himself from the Iraq war - on the grounds that Blair allegedly manipulated intelligence regarding the threat posed by Saddam Hussein - as well as his support for conservative moral values and his denunciation of

Islamophobia. A full 41 percent of Muslim voters now identify with the Liberal Democrats, who are now situated as the left-wing opposition in Britain. In September 2003, the party's candidate won the election for the Brent East parliamentary constituency in North-West London, overturning a Labour majority of 13,000, due largely to Muslim voters who make up 12 percent of the electorate. In a triumphant post-election declaration, the Muslim Public Affairs Committee (MPAC) - a body which Jewish community officials view with great concern because of its incendiary attacks upon "Zionists"¹³ - urged Muslim activists to leave the Labour Party and join with the Liberal Democrats, which had "actively been encouraging Muslims as parliamentary candidates."

Smaller parties also make a showing. The Respect Party, so far the foremost political expression of the burgeoning alliance between the British far left and the Muslim Association of Britain (the British branch of the Muslim Brotherhood), commands the support of 4 percent of Muslims. Formed by Scottish MP George Galloway after he was expelled from the Labour Party because of his association with Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, Respect has made every effort to conform to the Islamist agenda - even denying that it is a secular organization after a delegate to its 2004 conference claimed that such a designation would be "Islamophobic."¹⁴ The notoriously anti-Zionist Galloway - boosted by his victory in a libel case against the *Daily Telegraph*, which had accused him of receiving funds from Saddam Hussein - will contest Bethnal Green and Bow in East London in the 2005 general election, a constituency with more Muslim voters than any other in the country. Galloway is building his campaign by pointing out that the sitting Labour MP, Oona King, supported the war in Iraq. For her part, King has

attempted to mollify Muslim anger by comparing the situation of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip to Jews facing the Nazi onslaught in the Warsaw Ghetto.¹⁵

Humayun Ansari writes that there is a growing awareness among British Muslims of their electoral clout, "especially in constituencies where they have the potential to alter the balance of power."¹⁶ In both the 1997 and 2001 elections, communal leaders exhorted Muslims to vote and disseminated information on candidates in the forty or so constituencies with a significant Muslim vote. The 2005 election is certain to see this trend repeated. Thus, despite their concerns about Islamophobia, Muslim leaders are well aware that their community now enjoys unprecedented political influence.

Muslim Organizations in Britain: A Profile

During the 1980s and 1990s, a number of domestic and international issues - including the Rushdie Affair, the Gulf War of 1991, the Bosnian war of 1992-95, the ongoing calls for state support for Muslim education, and growing concern about Islamophobia - underscored the need, as far as Muslim leaders were concerned, for a Muslim representative body in Britain. Accordingly, the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) was created in 1996. A cursory examination of the MCB's structure reveals that it is quite similar to the main Jewish representative organization in Britain, the Board of Deputies of British Jews. A member of the Board has confirmed that the Jewish body provided some guidance to the MCB, mainly on constitutional matters, during the initial stages of its formation.

The MCB's Aims and Objectives stress that the body seeks to promote Muslim unity in Britain and a "more enlightened" appreciation of Islam. In the wake of major reports on Islamophobia in 1997, 2001, and 2004, all of which endorsed calls for legal sanctions against religious discrimination, the campaign against Islamophobia remains central.¹⁷ Currently, the MCB has around 380 affiliates, comprising mosques, community and professional organizations, and cultural associations. However, the emphasis placed on cordial relations with the British government has meant that the MCB is viewed with suspicion by some Islamist groups. Other groups, such as the Saudi-backed World Association of Muslim Youth (WAMY), do not place overt political involvement at the center of their activities, focusing instead upon the religious dimension. Still, many of MCB's affiliates, such as the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS), echo the core belief that Muslim interests are best served through political participation.

One organization affiliated with MCB which has achieved a major public profile is the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB). Although it is an Islamist organization linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, MAB has played a major role in both the movement against the Iraq war and the Respect party. This participation reflects a tendency in Islamic political thought which regards Europe as part of the *Dar al Sulh* (the domain of truce) rather than, as the *jihadists* would have it, the *Dar al Harb* (the domain of war).¹⁸ Hence, MAB, like the MCB, believes that British Muslims have a duty to engage politically; however, MAB does not regard existing British political institutions as having any inherent legitimacy. Political participation is simply one means of carrying out the fundamental duty of *dawa*, or proselytizing the Muslim faith. Yet it would be a

mistake to regard dawa as mere outreach; underlying it as a concept, as Alyssa Lappen points out, is the view that other faiths are inferior to Islam.¹⁹ For its part, MAB has said that those who abandon the Islamic faith are deserving of the death penalty.²⁰

One of MAB's leading figures is Azzam Tamimi, a Palestinian who heads the Institute of Islamic Political Thought in London. A Hamas sympathizer, Tamimi served as an advisor to Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the Hamas leader successfully targeted in Gaza in 2004 by Israeli forces in an anti-terrorist operation. In an interview with the BBC, Tamimi declared that, given the opportunity, he would become a homicide bomber.²¹ Such sentiments are fervently endorsed by MAB, which actively praises Islamists like Yassin and the late Sayid Qutb of the Muslim Brotherhood, who expressed his sympathy for Hitler's efforts to exterminate the Jews of Europe. The MCB, which is always quick to dissociate itself from terrorism, and which unambiguously condemned the 9/11 atrocities, has neither remarked on MAB's enthusiasm for radical Islamists nor condemned Tamimi's announcement on the BBC, despite the fact that MAB is an affiliate.

Therefore, it is no exaggeration to conclude that Islamist politics have pierced the heart of the Muslim communal infrastructure in Britain. In many ways, this is hardly suprising. As Gilles Kepel points out, London - or "Londonistan," as some Islamists have called it - has been "a sanctuary for global Islamist extremism beginning in the 1980s."²²

Muslim-Jewish Relations in Britain

Since the onset of the second intifada in September 2000, relations between the Jewish and Muslim communities in Britain have been disfigured by tension and mistrust, much to the chagrin of Jewish leaders.²³ As a member of the Board of Deputies explained, "our position was that the problems of the Middle East should remain in the Middle East." This perspective was not shared by the Muslim communal organizations. By allowing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to cloud their relations with British Jews, Muslim leaders were kowtowing to the Islamist notion that the Palestinian cause is the principal rallying point for the *umma*. Thus, while British Jewish leaders recognize that there are different theological and political viewpoints running through the Muslim community, on the key issue which divides them - the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians - Jews are confronted with a rigid Islamist standpoint which concedes no legitimacy to the State of Israel and which justifies terrorist violence against Jews in the name of Palestine, regardless of whether the victims carry Israeli passports.

Indeed, the issue of Palestine is at the core of the confusion regarding British Muslim organizations and terrorism. The mainstream organizations, notably the MCB, have all been vocal in their condemnation of terrorist outrages, whether perpetrated in Iraq or elsewhere. When British engineer Kenneth Bigley was kidnapped by terrorists in Iraq in September 2004, an MCB delegation went to Baghdad to try and secure his release. Although Bigley was eventually decapitated, the MCB was able to portray its initiative as an exercise in responsible citizenship. Moreover, they were boosted by frequent media interviews with Paul Bigley, Kenneth's brother, who insisted that President Bush, Prime Minister Blair, and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and

Gaza Strip were the real culprits behind Kenneth's grim fate.

Such condemnation does not, however, extend to those acts of terrorism committed against Jews and Israelis. For example, no British Muslim organization condemned the November 2003 attacks on Jewish targets in Istanbul; by contrast, two bombings against British targets in the city a few days later, one of which claimed the life of the British consul-general, were denounced. Attacks against Jewish civilians in Israel, meanwhile, generally tend to be justified as acts of resistance. The logic is transparent: since Palestine has been usurped by Zionists, civilian Israelis can never be victims of terrorism in the manner of citizens of other states. Moreover, Israel alone is responsible for the bloodshed in the region. As an MCB press release stated: "Israel's unlawful occupation of Palestine has for decades spread seeds of hatred in the Middle East, hatred which has extended into the world far beyond."²⁴ This last phrase - "world far beyond" - is particularly ominous, implying that the hatred which would lead to an attack on a Jew outside Israel is the responsibility not of the perpetrator but of the Jewish state.

Such attacks have already manifested in Britain. Data gathered by the Community Security Trust (CST), the Jewish community's security organization, shows a definitive correlation between the number of anti-Jewish incidents in the UK and the renewed conflict in the Middle East. In 2003, 609 incidents were reported, including physical assault, abusive behavior, and desecration of holy places.²⁵ According to the CST, there is a recognition among police specialists at Scotland Yard who are researching anti-Semitic crimes that, while not all incidents are confined to Muslim or Arab perpetrators, tension in the Middle East directly

influences the troughs and peaks of violence against Jewish targets.

In terms of anti-Semitic or Judeophobic statements and outbursts, the incitement against Jews which prevails in the Arab and Muslim world, especially in the media, has impacted upon Muslim-Jewish relations in Britain. The MCB, as well as groups like MPAC and the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC), have accused Israel of committing genocide and have spoken darkly about the "Zionist lobby." Criticism of "neoconservatives" - meaning those Jews working in foreign policy for the Bush Administration - is routine. Jewish complaints that such language and imagery are redolent of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories fall upon deaf ears, both among British Muslims and, to a great extent, in the liberal media.

A favored tactic among Muslim activists is to call for a boycott of Israeli goods and institutions. The boycott has a long pedigree in the Muslim world, having first been introduced by the Arab League in 1945 against "Jewish products and manufactured goods." Thus, despite frequent protests from contemporary advocates of the boycott that their target is the State of Israel, and not the Jewish people, the historical origins of the boycott reveal it to be an unambiguously anti-Jewish measure introduced three years before Israel's creation.

Of special note is the ongoing campaign for an academic boycott of Israel. As in other countries, the drive to boycott Israeli universities and academics has been enthusiastically seized upon by leftist academics in Britain, among them biologists Steven and Hilary Rose, philosopher Ted Honderich, and others. The MCB was an early and enthusiastic supporter of the boycott. In July 2002, Iqbal Sacranie was quoted by the Iranian news

agency, IRNA, as saying that the academic boycott "is a clear message to Israel that it is committing moral outrage."²⁶ Israel is singled out by British Muslim leaders as a target for a boycott because they subscribe to the Islamist dogma that, since Jews have no right to a state of their own, the State of Israel lacks legitimacy.

Two episodes in 2004 reveal the extent to which Jewish-Muslim relations have deteriorated as the result of the adoption of Islamist positions on Palestine by the British Muslim leadership. In June, an Interfaith Prize awarded to Iqbal Sacranie by Sir Sigmund Sternberg, a noted Jewish advocate of interreligious dialogue, was abruptly withdrawn following Sacranie's accusation that Israel was engaged in "ethnic cleansing" and "creeping genocide" against the Palestinians. Statements issued by both the MCB and MAB supporting Sacranie's decision not to retract his original remarks maintained that it was unreasonable for Jewish concerns over anti-Zionism to influence interfaith dialogue - a clear example of how Muslim organizations delegitimize not just Israel, but Jewish identification with Israel.

The July visit to the UK by the Qatar-based Islamist Sheikh Yusuf al Qaradawi further poisoned Muslim relations with Jews and other groups, including Hindus, Sikhs, and lesbian and gay activists. Protests from all these communities regarding Qaradawi's xenophobic and anti-Semitic views - he has declared, for example, that there can be no dialogue with Jews "except by the sword and the rifle" - were greeted with uniform anger by Muslim organizations. The MCB declared that "the smear campaign against Dr. al Qaradawi is being orchestrated by the Zionist lobby who are evidently angered by Dr. al Qaradawi's staunch opposition to Israeli state brutality against the Palestinian people." This position was backed by Ken Livingstone, the left-wing Mayor of

London, who publicly embraced Qaradawi and denounced a coalition of groups opposing the visit as "Islamophobic."²⁷

As Reuven Paz has demonstrated, Qaradawi has emerged as a leading Islamic authority for Muslim Brotherhood groups.²⁸ In 2003, he founded the World Council of Muslim Clerics, headquartered in Dublin. At a meeting in November 2004 in Beirut, the Council adopted a 14-point declaration which backed the insurgency in Iraq and underlined the centrality of Palestine by claiming that it is "the duty of all Muslims to support the Palestinians by all means of Jihad, by finance, propaganda and self-sacrifice." Such radicalism, Paz observes, should be taken as a "warning sign by the West." A first step towards such recognition might be to question the "moderation" of those Muslim communal organizations which endorse Qaradawi's views and denounce his critics in the most fearsome terms.

In such an environment, are there any reasonable prospects for a meaningful dialogue between Muslims and Jews in Britain? Jewish leaders note that there is continued dialogue about issues of mutual religious concern, such as circumcision and *kashrut/halal*, the latter issue having been targeted by Britain's vocal animal rights lobby. For example, in 2003, Muslims and Jews jointly worked against demands for the pre-stunning of animals, which would violate the requirements of both *kashrut* and *halal* slaughter. There are also exercises in mutual understanding undertaken by such bodies as the Maimonides Foundation, Three Faiths Forum, and Alif/Aleph. According to one of the leaders of Alif/Aleph, there is plenty of informal contact and discussion, particularly on university campuses, places better known as key centers of anti-Zionist

activism led by Muslim and leftist students.

Conclusion: Separation or Integration?

Among both Jewish leaders and analysts of Muslim politics, there is an understanding that the British Muslim community cannot be reduced to its *jihadist* elements, in the form of clerics such as Omar Bakri Mohammed and Abu Hamza al Masri, or groups such as Hizb ut Tahrir and the (currently dormant) Al Muhajiroun. There is also a recognition that British Muslim identity is complex and malleable. Yet the political orientation of the British Muslim mainstream remains a source of strong concern.

In Britain and much of Western Europe, it is increasingly acknowledged that the multiculturalist model has failed. What is needed - as the Commission for Racial Equality, for one, has pointed out - is a model which encourages integration rather than communal separation under the rubric of shared values, such as democracy and "the common currency of the English language."²⁹ Yet Britain appears to be heading in the other direction; one of the potential problems of the religious discrimination legislation is that, while providing extra protection from crude Islamophobic actions, it may end up as a gateway for further demands which actually encourage greater separation and the strengthening of Islamist positions. The call for *shari'a* courts, for example, is a key demand of Qaradawi and his acolytes. For any British government to concede on this and other points would be a grave mistake, leading to further social fragmentation.

Initial indications are that the British government, mindful of the collapse in its status among Muslims, is doing its

utmost to accommodate the political agenda of the Muslim leadership. In an article for the *Muslim Weekly*,³⁰ Mike O'Brien, the Energy Minister, launched an attack on Michael Howard and Dr. Evan Harris MP, a Jewish Liberal Democrat who has opposed the religious discrimination legislation, for not standing up for the rights of Muslims. "Ask yourself," O'Brien wrote, "what will Michael Howard do for British Muslims? Will his foreign policy aim to help Palestine?" That O'Brien, by placing it at the top of the list, acknowledges that Palestine is the main priority for Muslim political activists, is telling indeed. What is also telling is that the two politicians criticized by O'Brien are both Jews. Harris himself wondered aloud whether O'Brien had named him specifically because he is the only Jewish Liberal Democrat MP, resulting in an indignant denial of anti-Semitism from O'Brien.³¹

In the same article, O'Brien handed the credit for the religious discrimination legislation to the successful lobbying of the MCB. "The Muslim Council of Britain has been at the forefront of lobbying the Government on issues to help Muslims," he said. "Recently Iqbal Sacranie, the General Secretary of the Council, asked Tony Blair to declare that the Government would introduce a new law banning religious discrimination. Two weeks later, in the middle of his speech to the Labour Party Conference, Tony Blair promised that the next Labour Government would ban religious discrimination. It was a major victory for the Muslim community in Britain." It would not be fanciful to assume that similar "victories" lie on the horizon. Responding to O'Brien's article, MPAC stated that the minister would continue to be regarded "as a friend of the Muslims so long as he refuses to break under the Zionist (sic) pressure for an apology."³²

As Gilles Kepel has argued, the separation of the secular and religious domains is a prerequisite for both successful Muslim participation in the institutions of Europe and for reform of the Muslim world itself.³³ At the present time, Britain and other EU states are trying to reach a *modus vivendi* with an Islamic communal infrastructure that does not accept this separation. As long as that remains the case, rigid Islamist thinking will continue to be a powerful current within the Muslim community, with the result that Jews will be regarded as *dhimmis*,³⁴ and not as fellow citizens.

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Notes

1. See, for example, David Pryce-Jones, "The Islamization of Europe," *Commentary*, December 2004.
2. Philippe Naughton, "Howard goes right with crime, EU and immigration pledges," *The Times*, 5 October 2004.
3. In an interview with *The Times*, Lord Desai said: "Religion is not a defined thing. How can you decide what counts as a religion? Should we extend protection to scientology? If one Muslim insults another from a different sect, we would have a lot of problems. And how do you protect freedom of speech? How do you decide when criticism is reasonable and when it becomes incitement to hatred?" See Jack Shamash, "Start of Ramadan signals move for tolerance," *The Times*, 16 October 2004.
4. See "UK Muslims Want Civil Cases Resolved by Sharia: Poll," *FAIR Daily News Digest*, 1 December 2004; <http://www.fairuk.org/dnd/2004/12/DND20041201Wed.htm#1>
5. Humayun Ansari, *The Infidel Within: Muslims in Britain since 1800* (London: Hurst and Co., 2004), p. 4.
6. The exchange is available at http://www.salaam.co.uk/themeofthemonth/september03_index.php?l=1
7. See <http://www.islamicthought.org/mp-is1.html>. See also Ansari, *op. cit.*, p. 205.
8. Detailed breakdowns are available at <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/>
9. See "Muslims in the UK: Policies for Engaged Citizens," Open Society Institute, Budapest and New York, 2004.
10. A report issued in January 2005 by the Crown Prosecution Service determined that, out of 44 religiously-motivated hate crimes prosecuted in the year to April 2004, 22 involved Muslims and 5 Jews. Given the relative proportion of these communities to the overall population, one can conclude that Jews are just as vulnerable to such crimes as Muslims. Yet the entire

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- focus of the report has been on Muslim fears. See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4184931.stm>
11. See, for example, Daniel Pipes, "God and Mammon: Does Poverty Cause Militant Islam?" *National Interest*, Winter 2002.
 12. Alan Travis and Madeleine Bunting, "British Muslims want Islamic law and prayers at work," *The Guardian*, 30 November 2004.
 13. MPAC publishes a list of prominent Jews in the media at <http://www.mpacuk.org/content/view/176/34/>
 14. See "Anti-war Catholic MP to court Muslim voters," *FAIR Daily News Digest*, 6 December 2004; <http://www.fairuk.org/dnd/2004/12/DND20041206Mon.htm#4>
 15. King made the comparison in her article, "Israel can halt this now," *The Guardian*, 12 June 2003, which ended with a call to boycott Israeli products.
 16. Ansari, *op. cit.*, p. 244.
 17. See "Islamophobia: A Challenge for us all," published by The Runnymede Trust in 1997 and launched by then Home Secretary Jack Straw, and the two reports on Islamophobia issued by the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia in 2001 and 2004.
 18. Gilles Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and The West* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 255.
 19. Alyssa A. Lappen, "The Dawning of Dawa," *FrontPageMagazine.com*, 15 July 2003.
 20. See Nick Cohen, "Muslim is not a dirty word: Why do we define so many minorities by one faith?" *New Statesman*, 4 October 2004.
 21. A partial transcript of the interview is available on Professor Martin Kramer's weblog, "Sandstorm." See http://www.geocities.com/martinkramerorg/2004_11_04.htm
 22. Kepel, *op. cit.*, p. 242.
 23. See Ben Cohen, "British Jews Keep Wary Eye on Future," *Jewish Week*, 7 January 2005.
 24. The press release is available at http://www.mcb.org.uk/mcbdirect/searchresult.php?ann_id=324
 25. See "Annual Review: Antisemitism and Jewish Communal Security in Britain in 2003," The Community Security Trust.
 26. "UK Muslims Call For Widening of Academic Boycott Against Israel," *Tehran Times*, 13 July 2002.
 27. Twelve prominent individuals, including representatives of the Hindu and Jewish communities, signed the initial letter of protest to Livingstone. See <http://www.londoncommunitycoalition.org/>
 28. Reuven Paz, "Qaradawi and the World Association of Muslim Clerics: The New Platform of the Muslim Brotherhood," *Project for the Research of Islamist Movements (PRISM), Occasional Papers*, Vol. 2, No. 4, November 2004.
 29. Kepel, *op. cit.*, p. 245.
 30. Mike O'Brien, "Labour and British Muslims: can we dream the same dream?" *Muslim Weekly*, No. 61, 7-13 January 2005.
 31. See Melissa Kite and Tony Freinberg, "Minister denies anti-Semitism after attack on Howard," *Daily Telegraph*, 9 January 2005.
 32. See <http://www.mpacuk.org/content/view/256/26/>
 33. Kepel, *op. cit.*, p. 295.
 34. The term "*dhimmi*" derives from Islamic law and enshrines the subordinate

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but tolerated status of Jews and Christians living under Muslim rule. See Bat Ye'or, *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians under Islam* (London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1985). I use the term here more loosely, to describe the haughty, dismissive, and scornful attitude towards Jewish aspirations and concerns which is prevalent among many Muslim leaders.

* * *

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