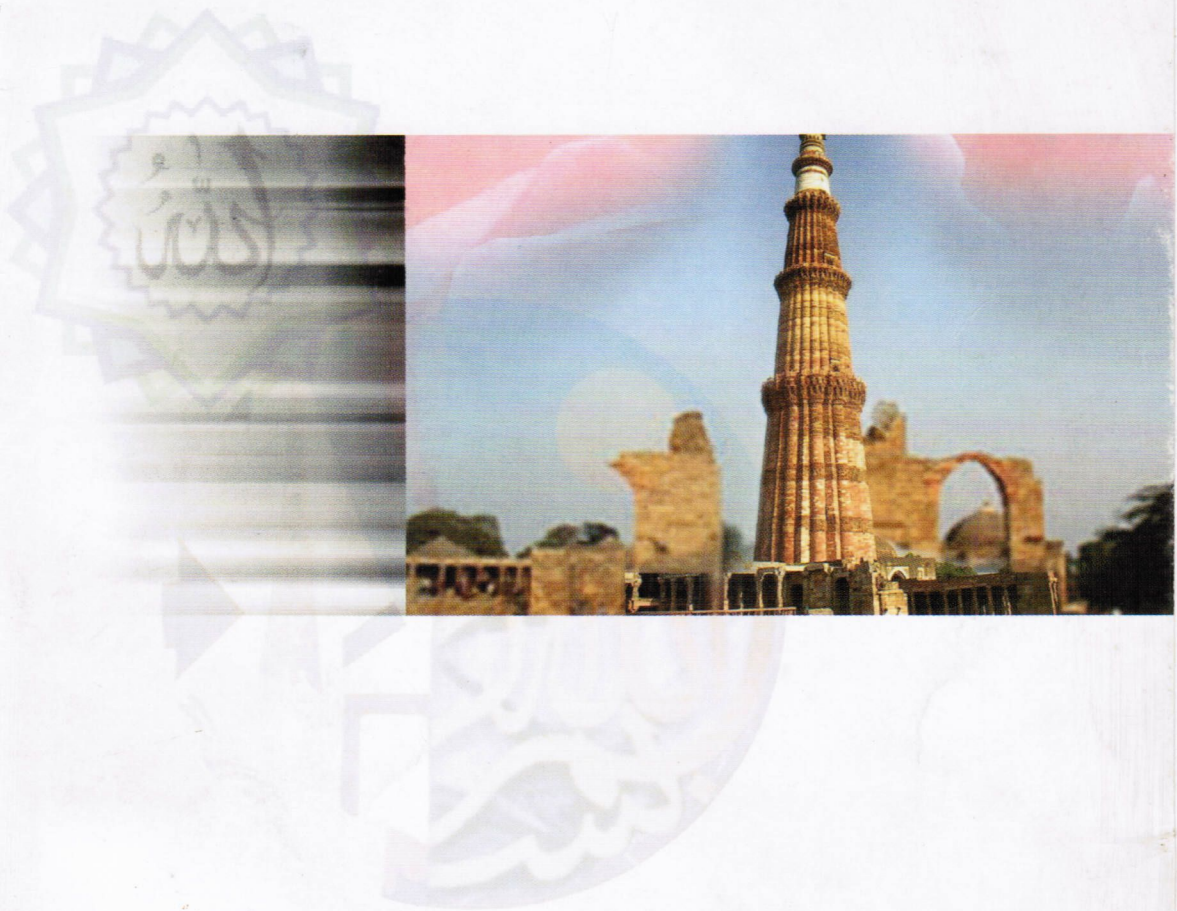


INVITATION

Delhi Platform 2006

International Council on Islam



Email: conference@futureislam.com

Website: www.futureislam.com

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Dear brother/ sister,
Assalamo Alaikum,

The world we live in has not come up overnight. The last fourteen centuries have witnessed a gradual shift of the world capital; from the Prophet's Medina to Damascus, then to Baghdad, Istanbul, Amsterdam, London and eventually in our time it is the Washington DC that calls the shots. True, there are other seemingly powerful members of the Security Council that sometimes make some noises. The emergence of a Euro-land, the empowerment of the EU and the growth of Asian economies sometime give us the feeling that there are other equally powerful players on the horizon. Then, there is another equally important fact that the major resources of energy so vital to keep the modern world going lie in the world of Islam. And as fifty per cent of the energy resources lie in just five countries, any planning for a future world would simply be inconceivable without them. Yet despite all the given odds it remains a fact that it is the Washington DC that controls the world today. In the post 9/11 world the American intervention, rather aggression, around the world and the bowing down of the world community to American dictates have further convinced us that any plan to change the world without proper recognition of the American might will simply be unrealistic.

A realistic view of the situation however does not mean that the present world order is irredeemable. History testifies to the fact that no power on earth has ever been invincible. What is required is to take a realistic account of the situation and formulate a counter

strategy accordingly. Wishful thinking or romantic longings can add further woes to our predicament. More than four years have elapsed since the 9/11 incident that jolted the Muslim world more than the United States but unfortunately the Ummah has not been able to put forward a well-thought out work-plan for the future. True, the last four years have not been a cake-walk for the Americans too; the unexpected delay of American mission in Iraq, the ceremonial rather non-functional presidency of Karzai in Afghanistan, the rise of Islamist groups to power in Pakistan and Palestine and above all the growing public unrest against the Bush Administration inside the country have created some real obstacles. We even hear now of the future of the dollar at stake and there are public murmurings and televised programmes calling for the impeachment of Bush. Such furores are natural reactions to imperialist onslaughts. But all this should not enhance our delusion that the US is on a retreat and that the fall of Washington DC is now a matter of time.

Had there been no inbuilt mechanism of repair the American Empire might have collapsed under the heavy burden of her sins. But the growing criticism of the administration that it is guilty of misguiding the American public on the Iraq issue and the way many thinking people from the media, academia, politics and human rights groups have come in the open to protect their liberty and freedom have provided enough room to right the wrongs of the system. It is in fact this strength of American democracy that holds promise of giving it a fresh lease of life and thus enabling Washington DC to function as a world capital in the foreseeable future.

The fall of the Soviet Union had prompted some state-intellectuals in the US to single out Islam as a new threat to the future. This view that Islam was essentially and inherently anti-western was further enhanced by loud proclamations of some *jihadi* groups and Muslim organizations who after the defeat of the Red Army were swayed by romantic visions. They mistakenly believed that it were they who had

inflicted not only a defeat on the Soviets but also engineered the dismantlement of the USSR. And if they could force the Soviets to leave Afghanistan, they argued, why they could not pull down the other super power, the US? In their enthusiasm, they conveniently ignored the fact that apart from the human resource that the Muslim nation had provided to the Afghan jihad there were other equally important factors responsible for the demise of the Soviet Union. Mention should also be made of the mythical stories that were making rounds during the Afghan war. It was related that miracles were happening in the battlefield; people even saw angles descending from the sky and the dead bodies of the martyrs were reported to have filled the air with fragrance. Such stories were helpful though in boosting the morale of the fighters, nonetheless, they inculcated in our youth a romantic outlook. Then, there were seemingly Islamic myths that had long made their way into the mainstream Muslim thinking. The *Mahdi* myth which originated in the second century Hijra gradually became part of our popular belief system. Despite its foreign origin the *Mahdi*/ Messiah/ *Mujaddid* myth kept intervening in the emergence of a rational outlook among Muslims. On the very first morning of the 15th century Hijra when Juhaiman Al-Otaiba along with his followers seized the holy Harem in Mecca, he was a victim of this messianic thinking. The oft quoted tradition, which relates that in the beginning of each century God will send a *mujaddid* to set things right, has engineered many a catastrophic situation in our history.

At a time when the Red Army was on the retreat and in the neighbouring Iran the Shiite world was witnessing an unprecedented revival under Khomeini who as a *wilayat-al-faqeeh* had claimed to paving the way for the hidden imam, a romantic view of the future was probably not much out of place. The jihad in Afghanistan had gathered Islamists from all corners of the world in the bordering districts of Pakistan. After the defeat of the Soviets the Islamists

looked at themselves as conquerors, and instead of a rational analysis of the Afghan war, took refuge in the myth of their own making. Although there were enough indications that as believers they were still a fragmented lot least deserving of God's unconditional support. Yet they looked at themselves as a favoured nation. After the Taliban took hold of Kabul, the romantic thinking attained a high pitch by the use of pompous terminologies such as *amirul-momenin*. It appeared to many that under the leadership of Mullah Omer the modern world was witnessing a replica of the Prophet's Medina where *Ansar* and *Muhajirun* from around the world had gathered for a decisive battle against the global *kufir*. Neither the Muslim intellectuals seriously enquired where the post-Afghan Muslim mind was heading to nor the new *Muhajirun* and *Ansar* who now comprised the cream of Islamists from around the world were fully aware that they not only lacked the required planning to topple the global *kufir* they even lacked the essential insight into the nature of the *kufir* itself. The modern day *amirul momeneen* and the people gathered around him were cultic in their thinking inspired by unfounded myths. Such people due to their mythical outlook no doubt had the potential to act out great disasters but could not produce a new dawn.

Four and a half years have elapsed since the 9/11 but the Ummah has yet to recover from the Bar Kokhba syndrome. The story has it that the Jewish community, confronted with the tyranny of the Roman Empire found in Bar Kokhba an ambitious man, a promising messiah, despite the fact he was not a man of vision nor was he capable of leading a successful revolt against the mighty Romans. Yet it was the romantic longings of the Jews that gathered the entire Jewish community around him. Even a man like Rabbi Akiva known for his political acumen and religiosity endorsed him as a messiah. And as the messiah had arrived the Jewish world experienced an unprecedented amount of hope and optimism. It appeared as if the kingdom of Solomon and David was about to return. But soon the

optimism vanished. The Bar Kokhba rebellion was crushed and a general atmosphere of gloom engulfed the Jewish nation for centuries to come. It was not very lately when we witnessed a similar situation in the Muslim world. From Palestine to Peshawar and from Indonesia to Morocco it was a sea of people passionately demonstrating in support of bin Laden. At times it appeared that the world of Islam had awakened and the unity in its ranks could now achieve the impossible. Mythical minds and romantic longings with no inkling of realism can only produce a Bar Kokhba, a Sabbetai Zevi, a Juhaiman al-Otaiba and a bin Laden.

There would be a Tomorrow

The shifting of the world capital from the Prophet's Medina to the modern day Washington DC took almost fourteen centuries. However, for a reversal of the process we need not necessarily wait for an equal amount of time if we can pin-pointedly locate what made the 7th century Arabia a world capital. Locating those factors or envisioning the pristine worldview of Islam is crucial for our future. In our search for the pristine Islamic world view however if we rely too much on historical account we may be guilty of making the revelation subservient to history. In the past many of our thinkers have committed this mistake. The revelation, in my opinion, has to be understood anew in the temporal and spatial atmosphere of the Prophet's time as it emerges from the contents of the Qur'an. Last but not the least; we need to find out what keeps the Washington DC as the 21st century world capital despite her so blatant violations of justice. In short, without a proper understanding of the modern world we cannot reinstate ourselves yet again to the seat of authority and guidance

To begin with, we need to create **a new Muslim mind**. In the later centuries of Islam our approach to the divine revelation has been dogmatic rather than inquisitive. We have taken our faith as a set of rituals and many of the revelatory truths have become mere cliché

due to their oft and unthoughtful repetition. Reshaping the Muslim mind, I believe, will give a new life to many of our lifeless dogmatic clichés. Let me briefly elaborate:

1. The Qur'an is a complete book and a definitive text. It is a book for all time. The Qur'an demands from us that we do not give up the habit of thinking and reflection. And it is the bare revelation that should be the focus of our attention. No historical or exegetic material should take hold of our imagination.
2. The followers of the last Prophet are upholders of an international mission. Islam as it has come down to us is the converging point of the entire prophetic tradition. Looking at Islam as exclusively the Mohammedan religion (*deen Muhammadi*) undermines the universality of the prophetic mission. It is the religion of Abraham (*millate ibraheem*) as the Qur'an puts it and Muhammed is the benefactor of humanity and a Warner to all.
3. The Qur'an is in plain Arabic, *Arabie mubeen*. Despite the fact that it was revealed to an Arabian prophet in an Arabian setting, Arabism is not its essential component. Its application in the international arena will transcend all cultural, linguistic and regional barriers. The future Islamic society has to be built on piety and not on those fabricated traditions that institute the prophet's descendents at the centre stage of Muslim polity. No specific culture, colour or lineage should be taken as the natural colour of Islam.
4. As deputies of the last prophet Muslims are entrusted with global leadership till end-time. They must reorient themselves to work for the betterment of humanity in general and should not limit themselves to mere communitarian projects. For too long they have been living under the delusion that they are

like any other nation. This attitude is in direct contravention to their Qur'anic status and has deprived the modern world of God-fearing Muslim leadership.

5. As upholders of the last revelation Muslims have a key role to play in future history. However, a global project of justice cannot be carried out in isolation nor Muslims are enjoined to do so. We need to gather around us all believing nations who can lend their support for a common programme, the *kalimatun siva*. Opening up the doors for other faith communities will make it easier for us to achieve our objectives.
6. No single nation can claim a monopoly on salvation. It is a thorny issue on which we are asked to keep our mouths shut. The traditional *fiqhi* rulings that deny salvation outside the present day Muslim community and believe that the verses in the Qur'an contrary to this view are abrogated cannot be taken as the final word. Such exclusivist opinions have been the real stumbling blocks in activating the other faith communities for Islamic ideals of justice.
7. Owing to some worn out cultural norms, today woman today stands marginalised in the Muslim society. The code of decent dressing for women as enshrined in the Qur'an needs to be understood beyond any cultural straitjacket. Denying a social role to women is not only against the Qur'an and our own early history, it has virtually kept half of our human potential frozen for a long time. Given the enormity of its global agenda, if the Qur'an enjoins us to seek the cooperation of other faith communities how can we afford to keep the potential of our own women folk underutilised?
8. The Qur'an is a book in detail, *kitabam mufassila*, leaving no room for exegetical manoeuvring. Any reading of the text in a

historical context, *asbab-an-naẓool*, is not only akin to making the revelation subservient to history, it also obstructs in a fresh reading of the text for our own specific setting. God has fully conveyed what He wanted to. Does He need the human assistance of the exegetes to make His intent clear and comprehensible? An admonition to all – *bayanullinnas* – as the Qur’an is, it demands from us that we read it as an every day manual. This attitude alone has the potential of generating a revelation-based mass movement.

9. Islamic ideals of justice, equality and liberty can only materialise when each human being is realised to his/her fullest and virtually there is none else between God and man. Scholars of Islam should cease functioning as the clergy and the church-like situation that has stealthily crept into the polity of Islam must be weeded out. The Qur’an projects prophet Muhammed as the liberator of human mind from the shackles of *ahbar*, the priesthood, and hence Muslims must shun all kinds of *salf* worship. The new Muslim mind operating within the Qur’anic paradigm, however, has all the possibilities of committing mistakes. But the extraordinary emphasis that the Qur’an places on the use of one’s brain leaves no other option for us.

These are some of the essential components of the new Muslim mind which I believe is crucial for a fresh start. I should also confess at the outset that not much is available in the traditional heritage literature that could be put to ready use. Hence there is no alternative to a re-reading of the text. In the past some Muslim thinkers and *ulema* had made concerted efforts to change the traditional mythical mind-set but they ended up in losing their own popularity and acceptability. Their works are now confined to library shelves as *tajarrudat* of great scholars. The new age reformers have to be cautious lest they, instead of initiating a creative reading of the

Qur'an, should end up with producing yet another variety of *tafarrudat*. In short, the new movement despite its highly acclaimed intellectual pitch has to come out of the ivory towers of academia.

A full-fledged revelation based intellectual revolution requires engaging some best minds of our time who not only believe in the efficacy of the book of God and the *uswah* of the beloved prophet but at the same time posses a remarkable insight into the prevailing world order. During the last few years, our writings on the issue have attracted a large number of people from across the globe and some three to four hundred thinkers and writers who equally share our concern have pledged their support to our cause.

Some well-meaning friends have suggested that establishing a university-like institution can be a groundbreaking initiative yet some other well-wishers have pointed out that establishing a full-fledged academic institution solely for this project may absorb all our energy in administrative logistics. Before we finally decide for a revelation based modern university, we should also enquire as why any such efforts in the past did not bear fruits.

Lately, during the American bombing of Afghanistan when the Taliban's extraordinary courage proved no match for B-52 bombers, it became clear to many of us that unless our *madaris* and seminaries are able to invent something more effective than the B-52 we will be vulnerable to western onslaughts. Living in a world which has largely been shaped by the west and where the West has a marked technological edge over us there can be two possible ways to respond to this challenge: first, we compete with them on technological front or at least acquire readily available nuclear capabilities, second, we put up our ideological weapons where the military arsenals have failed us. The latter move, though it may appear far-fetched, is closer to the prophetic strategy and has proved its efficacy many a time in the past. Islam, a salvafic possibility for all as it happens to be, if presented in the universal Qur'anic metaphor, will certainly find

many takers in the top echelons of the western society. The sack of Baghdad in 1258 had cast such a gloom that it appeared as if the phenomenon called Islam was over once and for all. But soon Islam conquered the same enemies who held the banner of Islam high for many centuries to come. No wonder then, if today too, unveiling the universal message of Islam yields a similar result.

Given the enormity of the challenge a world-class revelation based university can only be a minuscule of our thinking. We need to think hard and act with courage and confidence. Soon we will invite you for a brainstorming session in New Delhi. Logistics are being worked out. But before we get together I think it would be wise to hear from you how we can make this initiative more effective. Your inputs are crucial for us.

Your brother,

Rashid Shaz