

Wojciech Grabowski

Hizb ut Tahrir – between violence and politics

Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami (the Islamic Liberation Party) is an international Islamic movement which aims trend to restore the Islamic caliphate destroyed in 1924 (the Ottoman Empire). The Islamic Liberation Party was founded in 1952 by a Palestinian, Taqiuddin al-Nabhani (1909-1979). Nabhani aimed was heading to remove barriers between Muslim states to create one international empire. Nabhani called on Muslims to work towards turning *Dar al-Kufr* (lands where Islam is not implemented) into *Dar al-Islam*. The Liberation Party used to say that work in order to establish the caliphate is one of the duties of every Muslim. This created the essential Party ideology which in the last fifty years has not much changed. *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* strategy is based on Nabhani's Islamic Revolution which is a fight for hearts and minds. This strategy is based on three stages. In the first stage the Islamic Liberation Party educates society through an information campaign in which people get together with *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* members, learning about the movement's history, ideology and activities. This stage should create common ties between the Party and society. The second stage is dedicated to cooperation with legislative and executive powers of the state. During the third stage the Party calls on society and the infiltrated power structures to take control over the government peacefully. The third stage can be reached only after society is ready to establish a caliphate. If resistance is met, force will be used.

The party is an internally divided organization which represents on the one hand radical Muslims, who want to fight with Western domination and secularization using violence; and on the other hand more liberal members of the Party who aspire to represent the whole Muslim community (*umma*) and fight with religious intolerance and the identification of Islam with terrorism through building social networks (*da'wa*), organizing mass demonstrations etc. There are armed cells of *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* in the Middle East and Asia and political cells in Europe. This implies that we should judge the Liberation Party on two fronts: peaceful and armed.

Radical ideology

The ideology of *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* has an influence on its behavior and aims, both in the political and armed spheres. This ideology is based on radical Islam, sometimes

described as Islamic fundamentalism. The movement leans towards puritanical interpretations of Islam, which in the view of the Party allow violence as a means to reach the final destination. As fundamentalists they forbid everything that is inconsistent with their interpretation of Islamic law. David Zeidan noticed that Nabhani consider western policy towards Islam as a constant since the Crusades, which implies that the Party is burning with revenge for the colonization, exploitation, and humiliation of Islam¹. *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* supports those who fight with Western domination in the Islamic world (e.g. they oppose the U.S in Iraq).

Other radical elements of Islamic Liberation Party dogma include:

1. opposition to democracy – as a tool of the West in opposition to the caliphate and inconsistent with Islamic rules. Muslims are forbidden to adopt democracy because this means accepting laws other than the law of Allah and that is unacceptable according to the Koran. The Party calls people who adopt democracy “kaafirs”, which means non-believers. In practice this rejection of democracy means boycotting elections but we can find exceptions e.g. in the last UK elections the Party called on Muslims to vote for Islamic movements.
2. opposition to capitalism – capitalism is incompatible with Islam which means not recognizing organizations like the United Nations or ideas like human rights. In practice we can find exceptions, such as the posting on the Party’s website of articles showing the opposition of human rights institutions to the ban on *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* in the UK.
3. opposition to Zionism – all dialog with other religions is forbidden. Jews are described as a people of slander, unjust and treacherous, an enemy who killed the Prophet and who should be killed. In Denmark the Party was accused of creating a list of Danish leaders of the Jewish community who should be killed. *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* deny considering that in their vision of the caliphate the Party will allow Jews practice their religion.
4. opposition to the West – especially to the United States of America and its presence in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Party questioned American explanations of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre on 11th September 2001. *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* called on Muslims to support their brothers and sisters in Iraq and Afghanistan in the West’s war against Islam. However the Party

¹ David Zeidan, “The Islamic Fundamentalist View of Islam as a Perennial Battle”, Middle East Review of International Affairs, 5, no. 4, 2001, p.26-53.

doesn't call for jihad, explaining that holy war can only be declared by the caliph.

5. opposition to violence – the Islamic Liberation Party claims that any member who commits an act of violence does so of his own accord and is not a member of the Party. Indeed, the American State Department admits that there is no evidence of involvement of *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* in terrorist acts. In fact, Amnesty International claims that there were unfair arrests, trials and imprisonment of Party members. However, in the past we can find some exceptions e.g. members of the Islamic Liberation Party took part in 1968 in the coup against king Hussein II of Jordan, in the assassination of president Anwar Sadat of Egypt in 1981, and in bomb attacks in Tashkent and Uzbekistan in 1999².

There is one point which should be stressed. Every element of the Party's ideology has two sides: radical and liberal, peaceful and armed. For Party members in Asia, where regimes fight with extremists by putting them in prison, where opposition is suppressed and the activity of *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* is banned, there is no way to resolve this problem through the ballot box. In consequence the violence used by the authorities gives rise to the violence of the opposition.

Hizb ut Tahrir al-Islami in Asia

The Islamic Liberation Party is very active in Central Asia. The economic, social and political conditions of states in Central Asia help the Party to increase its popularity and strengthen its position. *Hizb it-Tahrir al-Islami* underlines that a return to Islamic values is the only solution to social ills. The Party demands justice and calls for the reinstatement of *sharia* law, especially in regions where law is weak and corruption defaces the political system. The backdrop of ethnic violence between Kyrgyz and Uzbek, and Uzbek and Turk makes the Islamic Liberation Party popular (because of its rejection of violence), especially in regions where tensions are still active.

² S.Swick, „From London to Andijan: the rising global influence of Hizb-ut-Tahrir among Muslim Youth”, Minaret of Freedom Institute, Bethesda 2005.

The Party operates in Central Asia in small cells of between five and seven people, called *doiras* or *halkas*. The leader of each cell is called *mushrif*. Members of *doiras* know each other only within the confines of the group³.

The Islamic Liberation Party spreads its propaganda in Central Asia through leaflets, books and the internet. This propaganda is produced in Arabic and other Central Asian languages.

Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami in Central Asia bases its activity on promoting itself, becoming closer to the people and gaining their support. The Islamic Liberation Party distributes leaflets and gives interviews. In 2005 it tried to establish a television and radio station in Osh in South Kyrgyzstan, but was forced to close the studio after the intervention of the authorities. The Party also operates on a charitable footing, especially in socially vulnerable regions. *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* aids families of jailed Party members, supports poor families while alerting the authorities to bad social conditions, and distributes free food during religious holidays. The Islamic Liberation Party has the support of Christians to whom it offers food, clothes, and money. This social network aims to prove that the Party really cares about simple people who have been forgotten by the state⁴.

The imprisonment members of *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami*, particularly in Central Asia, has brought unexpected consequences. In prison Party members recruit new followers and spread their propaganda. Harsh government policies are used by the Party against the authorities. Members of the Islamic Liberation Party when caught by the police admit their membership. With open criticism of the government these activities are going to generate publicity⁵. Despite government policy in Central Asia of banning membership of *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami*, the popularity of the Party is still growing because the Party offers a way to express opinions other than official government opinion.

In Indonesia *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* is able to gather thousands of demonstrators for mass marches in support of *sharia*, against U.S. politics towards Muslim countries, or in defense of jailed members. Pamphlets, conferences, seminars and religious lectures are the main channels of communication for the Islamic Liberation Party in Pakistan. The major

³ A. Khamidov, Countering the call: The U.S., Hizb ut-Tahrir and religious extremism in Central Asia, The Saban Centre for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institutions, Washington 2003.

⁴ S. Mukhametrakhimova, „Perception and treatment of the extremist Islamic group Hizb ut-Tahrir by central Asian governments” in “China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly”, Central Asian-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, vol. 4, no. 2, Washington 2006, p. 49-54,
http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/CEF/Quarterly/May_2006/Mukhametrakhimova.pdf

⁵ „The IMU and the Hizb ut-Tahrir: implications of the afghanistan campaign”, International Crisis Group, Central Asia briefing, Osh/Brussels, 30 January 2002,
http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/report_archive/A400538_30012002.pdf

recipients include middle class “opinion-makers”: journalists, teachers, lawyers, trade unionists and religious scholars. After demonstrations some members of the Islamic Liberation Party are arrested and often released. However, the Party is not banned in Pakistan.

There is no evidence that *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* is involved in violence or terrorist acts. The authorities have claimed that the Party are preparing for potential armed action but the Party denies this. It is hard to find people in the security services who believe that the Islamic Liberation Party is a military organization. Indeed, some members of *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* are not satisfied with the non-violent character of the Party. As a result some of them have left the party or gone to fight in Afghanistan.

In Central Asia the Party opposes government policy which leads to difficult social conditions. In Uzbekistan the Islamic Liberation Party attacked president Karimov’s policy against bazaar traders. The Party state that Karimov’s tyranny demands the removal of all Jews from Uzbekistan. When the president is overthrown the state will be free – members of the Party proclaim. In Kyrgyzstan the Islamic Liberation Party emphasizes the repressive tactics of the security services. In Tajikistan *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* highlights government corruption, insufficient gas and electricity supplies and migration problems⁶.

In recent years the Liberation Party has been strengthening its position in Indonesia and Pakistan. In 2003 *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* organized a mass demonstration in Jakarta against the U.S. invasion of Iraq. The Party’s publications describe the mass repression and torture to which Party members are subjected in Central Asia⁷. In 2007 the Party organized an international caliphate conference which attracted about 100 000 participants.

In Pakistan the Liberation Party was proscribed in 2004 by president Musharraf although the ban on it has since been lifted. Naveed Butt, spokesman for the Pakistani *Hiz ut-Tahrir al-Islami*, stresses that the reason for the Party’s popularity and effectiveness is its non-violent character. The Liberation Party is an intellectual and political movement – states Butt. In Naveed’s opinion the West feel menaced because the Party is gaining the support of the upper elites and liberal classes.

It has to be clearly stated that the Liberation Party has achieved success in Central Asia (Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan). The Party is gaining support from teachers, politicians, military officers and other representatives of the middle

⁶ „Radical islam in central asia: responding to Hizb ut-Tahrir. Executive summary and recommendations”, International Crisis Group report no. 58, Osh/Brussels 2003, http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/report_archive/A401032_30062003.pdf

⁷ M. Łabenda, *Hizb ut-Tahrir czyli Partia Wyzwolenia*, in: A. Parzymies (red.), *Islam a terroryzm*, Dialog, Warszawa 2002, p. 170.

and higher classes . Poor socio-economic conditions allow *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* to direct their activity and propaganda against corruption, repression and so on. The worse the conditions are, the more support the Party can gain. According to the Party the only solution to contemporary problems is to terminate *kufir* (non-believer) rules and form a united caliphate. In order to gain more support, the Liberation Party has created an image of itself as a peaceful organization which is opposed to the use of torture by the authorities in Uzbekistan .. The Party often seems to be the only platform from which to express dissent against state policy.

Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami in Europe⁸

In the Party's opinion the West is full of corruption, and the propagation of democracy is a kind of invasion against Islam. However in many Western countries *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* is allowed to act legally, unlike in Asia or the Middle East.

The Party started its activities in Britain in 1986, when the Syrian Omar Bakri Muhammed founded its first cell. After 10 years Bakri left the Liberation Party and formed a more radical group – a splinter cell – known as *al-Muhajiroun (emigrants)*. In the 1990s *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* was spreading its propaganda of hatred on university campuses, organizing debates and societies. As a result restrictions were imposed on the Party and it had to moderate its propaganda. The Party started to act under different names such as the Ideological Society.

Great Britain is the headquarters of the Liberation Party. From Great Britain many supporters of the Party are sent across the globe to spread Islamic propaganda and ideology. In the United Kingdom the Party organizes conferences and demonstrations and actively recruits in British schools. In 2003 the Liberation Party organized a demonstration in front of the Uzbekistan embassy. Demonstrators carried banners announcing “Uzbekistan – a prison for Muslims”, “Karimov and Bush - murder brothers in the war against terrorism”. This is possible in country where there is freedom of speech, thought and religion. In the United Kingdom the Party operates on two fronts. The first is connected with explaining *ummah*, the importance of building a caliphate and creating an Islamic identity in a country where the

⁸ Z. Baran, “Hizb ut-Tahrir. Islam political insurgency”, The Nixon Centre, Washington 2004.

image of Islam is not always positive. The second front engages with the rest of society and attempts to educate them on the political and intellectual role of Islam⁹. The main target group are students which is why *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* is so active in universities. Some British students who were asked what made the Liberation Party attractive answered: they are politically aware and not gullible¹⁰. In Great Britain there is an ongoing debate about banning the Party. The prime minister Gordon Brown maintains that there must be evidence which shows a real threat to the public safety of Britain. Dr Magnus Ranstrop, director of the Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland says “that banning Hizb ut-Tahrir is probably just going to push the problem into the underground, less visible for the intelligence services to be able to identify individuals with radical views. So I am not sure it’s the right thing to do”¹¹. *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* has begun a campaign that still continues. The Party reiterates its attitude to violence and terrorism in conferences and petitions. One of them refers to the terrorist attack of 11 September 2001. In a leaflet from 18 September 2001 the Party concludes: “The rules of this Message forbid any aggression against civilian non-combatants. They forbid the killing of children, the elderly and non-combatant women even in the battlefield. They forbid the hijacking of civilian aeroplanes carrying innocent civilians and forbid the destruction of homes and offices which contain innocent civilians. All of these actions are types of aggression which Islam forbids and Muslims should not undertake such actions”¹². Another example is a special report prepared for Tony Blair which concluded that “young people attracted to terrorism may shy away from HT because they do not espouse violence”¹³.

In Germany the Liberation Party was active in universities where it spread its propaganda of hatred against Jews and called for the destruction of Israel. Germany’s answer to the violent and anti-Semitic propaganda of *Hizb ut Tahrir al-Islami* was a ban on the Party in 2003. Germany’s government also suspected the Party of meeting with far right groups (neo-Nazis). Such government action was possible in a system which prohibits activity which is held to be in opposition to the democratic foundation of the state. The Liberation Party has ceased to operate publicly and its periodical *Explizit* has been banned. However, the Party is

⁹ M. Abedin, “Inside Hizb ut-Tahrir: an interview with Jalaluddin Patel, leader of the Hizb ut-Tahrir in the UK”, in *Terrorism Monitor*, vol. II, Issue 8, The JamesTown Foundation, London 2004, p. 1-2.

¹⁰ S. Swick, op. cit., p. 8.

¹¹ J. Jun, „U.K.: Hizb Ut-Tahrir Challenges Government’s Proposed Ban With Offer Of Dialogue”, Radio Free Europe, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/09/3f0461f4-1022-4b61-94a7-ff2e72e6c6bc.html>

¹² “Banning non-violent Hizb ut-Tahrir, is the real threat to the british way of life?”, <http://www.petitiononline.com/HTban/petition.html>

¹³ *ibidem*

still recruiting and raising funds in secret. A representative of the German cell, Shaker Assem, said that *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* does not call for the killing of Jews but calls on Muslims in Palestine to defend themselves from the Zionist violence in Palestine¹⁴.

In Denmark in 2002 the Party created a hit list of leaders of the Jewish community. *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* recruits those who have lost faith in Western values and emphasizes that the number of these people still rising. In 2006 the Party was banned. Fadi Abdelatif – spokesman of the Party - was sentenced to three months in prison for threats against Anders Rasmussen, the Danish Prime Minister. In 2007 in Copenhagen *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* opened its own kindergarten based on its radical ideology. In 2007 the Islamic Liberation Party invited to its headquarters in Norrebro four well known imams from the Islamic Association, the Islamic Society, the Islamic Culture Center and Taiba mosque. The aim of the meeting was to foster cooperation towards improving the situation of Muslims in Denmark through the solving of social problems such as criminality or social marginalization among Muslims¹⁵.

Conclusions

There are two opposite opinions in judging the Islamic Liberation Party. One group of observers, researchers and politicians maintains that as long the Party's activities don't break national law it should be allowed to act legally. They point out that *Hizb ut Tahrir al-Islami* doesn't have a military wing in contrast to the Palestinian Authority governed by Hamas. Jamal Harwood, a spokesman for the Party in Britain, claims that in the Islamic Liberation Party there are many Muslims who left jihadist groups and joined *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* because they lost faith that violence can resolve any problem¹⁶. More skeptical voices argue that the Islamic Liberation Party is a conveyor belt of extremism and terrorism. This camp highlights the Party's militant rhetoric full of anti-western and anti-Semitic slogans. In this camp we find Germany, Holland, Russia and some Asian states who treat the Party as a terrorist organization and/or have established a ban on its activities. From the perspective of these states the Party is remembered for violent acts which it committed in the past, not taking into account the Party's present activity.

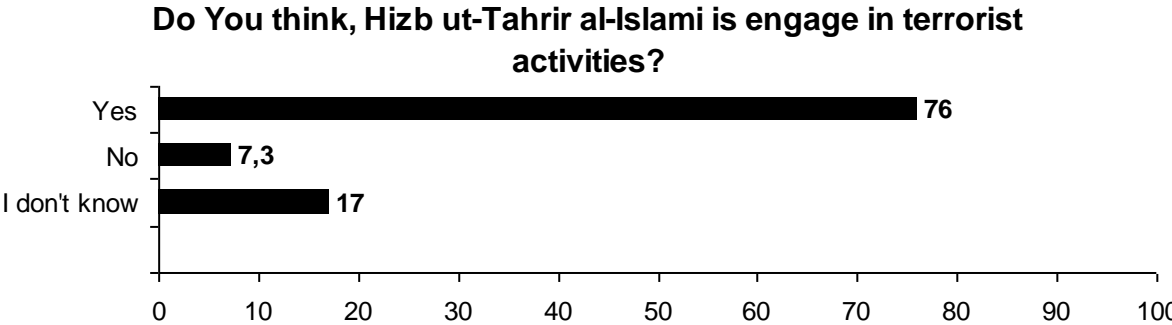
¹⁴ S. Lambroshini, Germany: Court appeal by Hizb ut-Tahrir highlights balancing act between actions, intentions, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2004/10/a9e085a9-a771-4e5c-b41d-16b3d7d1258f.html>

¹⁵ „Copenhagen: Imams cooperating with Hizb ut-Tahrir”, <http://islamineurope.blogspot.com/2007/06/copenhagen-imams-cooperating-with-hizb.html>

¹⁶ D. Strieff, „Inside Islam's political insurgency in Europe”, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/11989895/>

Certainly the Party constitutes a challenge to existing regimes because of its aim to destroy the existing order and create a caliphate. This aim is the same for cells both in Europe and Asia. *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* uses western tolerance, freedom of speech and civil rights to sow its anti-western propaganda. The Party seems to tone down its rhetoric to prevent a ban, especially in the United Kingdom. The Islamic Liberation Party is similar in its activity to the Lebanese *Hizballah* and the Palestinian *Hamas*, which in recent years have radically modified their strategies in order to bring them important support. These parties have transformed themselves or rather are still transforming themselves from terrorist organizations by limiting their military activity to political movements. The Palestinian Authority is the best example showing that the victory of a radical Islamic group is possible.

Officially the Islamic Liberation Party is opposed to terrorism because killing innocent people is not allowed by *sharia* law. The government in the USA is convinced that the Party has never participated in acts of terrorism. However *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* is associated with political violence. In April 2006 MSNBC asked on its website “Do You think is *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* is engaged in terrorist activities? 76% of 8108 respondents answered: Yes. This may be a result of the past activities of the Party connected with state coups and murders in the previous century, or insufficient knowledge of respondents about the Party.



source: www.msnbc.com

War with HT is an ideological war which means a battle for ideas. U.S should emphasize the importance of internal reform in the context of national security. People with the opportunity to participate in political, social or economical life will be less susceptible to HT ideology. Thanks to benefits of capitalism and democracy people will see that HT is not right. Prisons shouldn't be a ground for breeding HT ideology. This struggle has an existential and ideological nature. HT is not a local but a global threat and should be combated not at national but at international level.

