

**RADICAL ISLAM IN CENTRAL ASIA:
RESPONDING TO HIZB UT-TAHRIR**

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RADICAL ISLAM IN CENTRAL ASIA: RESPONDING TO HIZB UT-TAHRIR

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami (The Party of Islamic Liberation) stands apart from better known radical Islamist movements by its apparent opposition to the use of violence. But its views are highly radical, advocating the overthrow of governments throughout the Muslim world and their replacement by an Islamic state in the form of a recreated Caliphate. It has grown quickly in Central Asia and been met with a heavy-handed repression that threatens to radicalise members still further and sow the seeds of greater Islamist extremism in the region.

Hizb ut-Tahrir first emerged among Palestinians in Jordan in the early 1950s. It has achieved a small, but highly committed following in a number of Middle Eastern states and has also gained in popularity among Muslims in Western Europe and Indonesia. It began working in Central Asia in the mid-1990s and has developed a committed following inside Uzbekistan, and to a lesser extent in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. Estimates of its strength vary widely, but a rough figure is probably 15-20,000 throughout Central Asia. Its influence should not be exaggerated – it has little public support in a region where there is limited appetite for political Islam – but it has become by far the largest radical Islamist movement in the area.

Hizb ut-Tahrir is not a religious organisation, but rather a political party whose ideology is based on Islam. It aims to re-establish the historical Caliphate in order to bring together all Muslim lands under Islamic rule and establish a state capable of counterbalancing the West. It rejects contemporary efforts to establish Islamic states, asserting that Saudi Arabia and Iran do not meet the

necessary criteria. According to Hizb ut-Tahrir, the Islamic state is one in which Islamic law – *Sharia* – is applied to all walks of life, and there is no compromise with other forms of legislation.

Hizb ut-Tahrir claims to reject violence as a form of political struggle, and most of its activities are peaceful. In theory, the group rejects terrorism, considering the killing of innocents to be against Islamic law. However, behind this rhetoric, there is some ideological justification for violence in its literature, and it admits participation in a number of failed coup attempts in the Middle East. It also has contacts with some groups much less scrupulous about violence. But despite the allegations of governments, there is no proof of its involvement in terrorist activities in Central Asia or elsewhere.

Government responses have been contradictory and often ineffective. In much of the Middle East, the organisation is banned from acting openly, and many of its members have been imprisoned. Central Asian governments have taken particularly harsh stances, with Uzbekistan leading the way by arresting and sentencing thousands of members to long prison terms. In some other Muslim countries, such as Indonesia, Hizb ut-Tahrir acts more or less openly, as it does in much of Western Europe.

Wider policies of governments in Central Asia have probably contributed to the growth of Hizb ut-Tahrir, particularly in Uzbekistan. Repression by the Uzbek government has given it a certain mystique among some of the population, and the lack of alternative forms of political opposition or expression of discontent has ensured that it has attracted members from the mass of those opposed to the regime for political reasons. Poor economic

policies have further undermined support for the government, and induced discontent among traders – a key Hizb ut-Tahrir constituency. Uzbekistan's restrictive border regime has also increased support for a group that advocates a universal Muslim state, with no national distinctions.

For a small but significant group of predominantly young men, Hizb ut-Tahrir gives an easy explanation for their own failure to achieve change in their personal lives, in society or in the state system. It provides young men with some meaning and structured belief in an era of otherwise confusing and difficult social change. It also offers occasional material benefit and social support in states characterised by extreme poverty and social breakdown.

Repression of its members, and often of those merely associated with them, has radicalised the movement, and had an impact on wider societies. Given the radical ideas of the group and the conspiratorial nature of its political struggle, it is understandable that governments are concerned about its impact on stability. But too often governments in the region, particularly in Uzbekistan, use Hizb ut-Tahrir as an excuse for their own failure to carry out political and economic reform and for continuing suppression of religious activity outside narrow official structures. Too often the international community has turned a blind eye to this repression. The West, and the U.S. in particular, is in danger of damaging its reputation in the region by close association with Central Asian dictatorships.

The international community has a key role to play. It should resist temptation (and requests from Central Asian governments) to ban Hizb ut-Tahrir since driving it underground would only make it more secretive and conspiratorial and probably more radical. Rather, it is in Western interests to press states such as Uzbekistan to take urgent measures to change the environment in which Hizb ut-Tahrir thrives. Closed political systems, lack of freedom of speech, lack of economic progress, and unreformed and brutal security services all contribute to the growth of radical opposition groups. It is in the security interests of the international community to ensure that political opposition to unpopular regimes does not by default coalesce into a more militant group, with a more violent and dangerous agenda than the present-day Hizb ut-Tahrir.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

To the Government of Uzbekistan:

1. Undertake with the participation of specialists on Islam and independent experts a major review of policy towards religious groups and the political opposition.
2. Legalise secular opposition groups such as Birlik and permit other political groups, particularly those working with youth, who recognise the existing constitutional order to operate freely.
3. Allow legal channels for expression of discontent by opening the media to discussion of religious and political issues and permitting criticism of the government and security forces.
4. Repeal restrictive decrees on cross-border trade and small business, which have provoked wide popular discontent and further support for radical opposition to the state.
5. Allow the muftiate and imams greater freedom to teach Islamic theology and permit authoritative figures to emerge who are capable of challenging Hizb ut-Tahrir's ideas from the stance of orthodox Islam.
6. Take serious measures to reform the security sector, limiting the powers of the police and the procuracy and enhancing the independence of the courts.
7. Implement the recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture to end the systematic torture and killing of prisoners, which increases sympathy for Hizb ut-Tahrir and radicalises prisoners.

To the government of Tajikistan:

8. Open up the political system by permitting opposition parties to operate more freely, allowing more freedom of expression in the media, and ending harassment of the Islamic Renaissance Party that is likely to drive supporters of political Islam to seek more radical alternatives.
9. Avoid excessive reliance on the security forces to deal with Hizb ut-Tahrir, develop more understanding of the issue among religious leaders, NGOs and community groups, and actively encourage them to work with vulnerable young people.

To the government of Kyrgyzstan:

10. Reject calls for more severe measures against Hizb ut-Tahrir members, which will merely increase their radicalism and gain them sympathy.
11. Reverse the slide into authoritarianism of the past two years and end policies designed to limit the influence of secular opposition parties.
12. Take active measures to reform law enforcement structures, including more ethnic balance in recruitment and increased education in religious matters for police officers and officials;

To the U.S. and other members of the international community:

13. Avoid close identification with the repressive policies of Central Asian regimes against Muslims and take a firmer line against abuses of human rights, torture and unfair judicial processes with regard to Hizb ut-Tahrir members;

14. Prioritise in public diplomacy human rights, religious freedoms and disagreement with those Central Asian government policies that undermine long-term stability and living standards.
15. Press governments of the region to take active measures to open the political system, further economic reform, liberalise cross-border trade and fight corruption within elites.
16. Improve information-gathering and sharing on Hizb ut-Tahrir.
17. Resist calls to ban Hizb ut-Tahrir in Western countries, which would reinforce repressive policies in Central Asia and push the party underground and into more radical positions.

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RADICAL ISLAM IN CENTRAL ASIA: RESPONDING TO HIZB UT-TAHRIR

I. INTRODUCTION

The nature and role of the Hizb ut-Tahrir al Islami (The Party of Islamic Liberation) is one of the least understood phenomena in the political, social, and religious situation in Central Asia. The party's emergence over the past five years has been a significant political development, widely used by governments in the region to explain their failure to achieve political and economic liberalisation and considered by local elites as a major threat.

At least since the 1980s scholars and policymakers have debated the role of Islam in Soviet and post-Soviet politics. Some argued that the Soviet system had at least suppressed if not completely nullified the potential for Islam to become a credible religious and political force. Others anticipated that a Muslim rebellion would bring about the Soviet demise in Central Asia, or that an Islamist movement would quickly fill the ideological and power vacuum left by the communist party's collapse.

In fact, Islamic movements played almost no role in the Soviet collapse and in the unexpected independence of the Central Asian states in 1991. Only in Tajikistan did an Islamic party become active in the limited social mobilisation of the late Soviet period. Even there the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) had a relatively limited social following and was but one of multiple opposition groups. Although the IRP became the lead player in the United Opposition, popular support for political Islam as such seems to have been limited and to have declined rapidly in the aftermath of the civil war.

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) had even less success in generating support for its "Islamic Jihad" and political-military agenda, although it did put fear of "Islamic terrorism" and "religious extremism" at the top of domestic and international agendas in the region. Still, the failure of the IRP, the IMU, and other Islamist activists to generate a widespread following suggested that Islam had little serious political potential in the region after all.

The rise and apparent growth and staying power of Hizb ut-Tahrir has, therefore, come as a surprise. Whereas this movement was almost unheard of in the region five years ago, it now claims thousands of adherents, and it has become a leitmotif in government justifications for authoritative actions and repressive policies.

As a clandestine organisation, Hizb ut-Tahrir is challenging to understand and to assess. There have been few adequate attempts to research its ideology and political potential.¹ Lack of solid information

¹ The best detailed overview of the growth and ideology of the transnational party is Suah Taji-Farouki, *A Fundamental Quest: Hizb al-Tahrir and the Search of the Islamic Caliphate* (London, 1996). Extremely useful work has been done in Central Asia by the Uzbek scholar Bakhtiyar Babadjanov. See inter alia his, 'O deyatelnosti 'Hizb ut-Tahrir al-islami' v Uzbekistane' [On the activities of Hizb ut-Tahrir al-islami in Uzbekistan], in Aleksei Malashenko and Martha Brill Olcott (Eds.), *Islam na postsovetskoy prostranstve: vzglyad iznutri* (Moscow, 2001), pp. 153-169. Ahmed Rashid has provided a colourful assessment in *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (London, 2002). For a fairly balanced critique of his work, see Hizb ut-Tahrir (Britain), "The Inaccuracies of the Book 'Jihad – the rise of militant Islam in Central Asia' by Ahmed Rashid". ICG has also covered aspects of Hizb ut-Tahrir in previous publications; see especially ICG

has hampered government responses to the organisation, both in Central Asia and elsewhere. Nonetheless, understanding Hizb ut-Tahrir in Central Asia, its goals, methods, and social following, is important in developing state policies for dealing with this opposition force.

A better understanding is also central to forming appropriate international strategies, especially when U.S. involvement in the “war on terrorism” has dramatically escalated the international presence in the region. Both the Central Asian states and the international community must carefully choose strategies and policies for dealing with political-religious groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, if they are to avoid creating a threat to state and regional stability.

II. HIZB UT-TAHRIR’S GLOBAL AGENDA

A. ORIGINS

Hizb ut-Tahrir was founded in 1952, in what was then the Jordanian controlled part of Jerusalem, by the Palestinian Islamic legal scholar and political activist Taqiuddin an-Nabhani (1909-1977). He was educated at Al Azhar University in Cairo and later worked in Palestine in the Islamic courts, eventually becoming a judge. After 1948 an-Nabhani was a leading member of East Jerusalem discussion circles among politically active Palestinians, many of whom later became involved in the Ba’athist movement of Arab socialism. An-Nabhani was also attracted by the ideals of Arab nationalism, but in contrast to many contemporaries, he based his political views on the centrality of Islam in politics.

Like many Arab political parties that emerged after the 1930s, Hizb ut-Tahrir took on characteristics of a modern political party, with a program and structures. Many of these parties found inspiration in early Leninist ideas, echoing the concept of the party as a revolutionary vanguard. Most took on an ideology of nationalism or socialism, or both. Taqiuddin an-Nabhani ‘was...one of the first Arab intellectuals to argue the case for a modern political party using the constructs of Islamic discourse.’² Nevertheless, Hizb ut-Tahrir had much more in common in terms of political structure with secular parties such as the Ba’athists, later to become a ruling party in Iraq and Syria, than it did with the major Islamic political movement, the Muslim Brotherhood.³

Almost from the beginning Hizb ut-Tahrir acted as a non-constitutional party, the Jordanian authorities having rejected its application for legal registration, but it still functioned fairly openly and as part of the wider political opposition. It gathered popular support in the 1950s in Jordan and the West Bank, and some in Beirut, where an-Nabhani was forced to live in exile, but overall its influence on the wider political scene of the Middle East was limited.

² Taji-Farouki, *A Fundamental Quest*, op. cit., p. xi.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 7. It is not clear if An-Nabhani was ever a member of the Muslim Brotherhood but it clearly had a significant influence on his thinking, and the new group attracted many members from the Brotherhood.

It picked up more support in the 1960s, and by 1968 the leadership considered that this was sufficient to seize power, not just in Jordan, but in Iraq and Syria also, led by pockets of backing in the armed forces in each country. The coup failed, as did further attempts in Jordan in 1969 and 1971 and in southern Iraq in 1972.⁴

These failures and the subsequent arrest of many members seem to have led to a sharp decline in enthusiasm and activity. The original premise of the party was that as in the seventh century, it would take thirteen years to follow the Prophet Mohammed's path in creating an Islamic state. The inability of the party to achieve its stated aims led to a loss of members and some ideological confusion. An-Nabhani died in 1977, having seen no results, and the party continued to decline into the 1980s. He was replaced by Yusuf Sheikh Abdul Qadeem Zaloom, a founding member and also a Palestinian. But wider reactivation of the party only really began in the early 1990s, as a wave of interest in political Islam swept through the Muslim world, and events such as the Gulf War, radicalised parts of Islamic society.

The popularity of the party had already spread beyond Jordan and Syria to North Africa, Turkey and South-East Asia. The repression of Hizb-ut-Tahrir in the Middle East led some of its members to set up new chapters in Western Europe. It quickly gained ground among second-generation immigrants and now has important branches in the UK, Germany, Sweden and Denmark. With the Soviet collapse, it also started working in Central Asia, where it began growing rapidly in the second half of the 1990s.

Although much organisational work may have shifted to Muslim communities in the West, the leadership still revolves around Palestinians in exile, mainly in Jordan. Abdul Qadeem Zaloom, who was probably resident in Amman, died in April 2003. He was succeeded by another Palestinian, Ata Abu-l-Rushta, a civil engineer who studied in Cairo and previously headed the Jordan section. He has spent time in prison in Jordan and has been linked to the party since 1955.⁵ Given his background, it seems unlikely that there will be

significant change in the party's ideology under his leadership, although it is not known how much real influence the Amir has, compared with other active leaders.

B. IDEOLOGY

The stated aims of Hizb ut-Tahrir are straightforward and grandly ambitious – to recreate an Islamic state, a utopian interpretation of the Caliphate that once ruled the Muslim world,⁶ in which Islamic law would be introduced immediately and in full. There is no gradualism or compromise in the program for change: Hizb ut-Tahrir views all other political, social or religious programs as at best irrelevant, since it argues that other Islamic groups can do little until they concentrate on establishing an Islamic state in the full sense.

The ideology has changed little from that outlined in an-Nabhani's writings in the 1950s and 1960s though there have been continuous efforts to build on his interest in developing Islamic rules for all aspects of life and provide an alternative Islamic view on modern problems.⁷ Indeed, his writings have remained the basis for Hizb ut-Tahrir's ideology to the extent that they form an essential canon of belief which is difficult to challenge without undermining the essence of the party.

His approach to Islam and politics distinguished Hizb ut-Tahrir from two major trends in Islamism in the modern era. On the one hand, the more traditional Islamic parties, such as the original Muslim Brotherhood, sought to implement aspects

⁶ Hizb ut-Tahrir's understanding of the Caliphate is decidedly ahistorical. The Caliphate as a single entity under the command of a caliph who receives obedience from all and has religious authority has not existed at least since 850 AD. Later offices of the caliphate, and particularly that claimed by the Ottomans, were largely symbolic posts used for foreign policy purposes. The final formal office of the Caliphate was disbanded by Turkish leader Kemal Ataturk in 1924.

⁷ An-Nabhani was convinced that the Koran and the *hadiths* contained sufficient basis for legal decision in all aspects of life, as interpreted by authoritative scholars. The list of issues on which Hizb ut-Tahrir has issued rules and opinions is endless: from buying and selling shares to test-tube babies and cloning. Sometimes these verge on the esoteric: in 1982 there was even a discussion of whether a Muslim astronaut should be required to pray. See Taji-Farouki, *A Fundamental Quest*, op. cit., p. 57.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 27-28.

⁵ ICG interview, Dr Imran Waheed, spokesperson, Hizb ut-Tahrir (UK), 5 June 2003, London; Taji-Farouki, *A Fundamental Quest*, op. cit., p. 34

of Islam within existing constitutional frameworks, a type of Islamic reformism, which concentrated on gradual change through education, and legal reform. An-Nabhani rejected this gradualism completely, arguing that only a radical transformation of society would produce a change in the lives of Muslims.

On the other hand, there were the various followers of Sayyid Qutb, who took up Islamic radicalism. Unlike early Islamic reformers, an-Nabhani rejected all attempts to compromise Islam with Western ideas of constitutionalism or nationalism. Hatred of the West, and particularly of the British,⁸ informed all his ideological writings. But he did not follow Qutb in rejecting modernity; indeed Hizb ut-Tahrir more than most Islamic groups has embraced modern technology and idioms, even its political methodology. While it claims to be based on early Islamic history, the party owes much to modern revolutionary movements such as Leninism.

In religious matters, an-Nabhani developed an independent viewpoint from the four major legal schools of Islam. Observers who would like to push him into the 'Wahhabi' camp for political reasons will have trouble doing so on the basis of his religious ideology: his beliefs are clearly not in line in many cases with the Hanbali school of legal interpretation that many 'Wahhabi' groups follow.⁹ His independent approach means that much of Hizb ut-Tahrir's teaching on Islamic matters is considered heterodox by leading scholars in the major schools of Islam.

1. The Islamic state

Hizb ut-Tahrir rejects existing attempts to establish Islamic states as not sufficiently radical. Its vision of an Islamic state is absolute:

⁸ He particularly disliked the British, whom he termed 'the summit of unbelief' for their role in the destruction of the Caliphate in 1924. Britain plays an important role in Hizb ut-Tahrir's view of international relations, with frequent writings claiming that its role in the Middle East is part of an ongoing struggle for influence with the U.S.

⁹ Along with many Hanbali adherents, An-Nabhani rejected tradition and custom, 'urf and 'ada, as the basis for law. Taji-Farouki, *A Fundamental Quest*, op. cit., p. 61. This is important in Central Asia, since it means both Wahhabi groups and Hizb ut-Tahrir campaign against what they view as pre-Islamic rituals, including pilgrimages to sacred places, and some aspects of funeral rites.

For a land to be considered an Islamic state, every single article of the country's constitution, every rule and law, must emanate from the Islamic *Sharia*.¹⁰

The party accepts no compromises with other forms of political structure or legal provision. *Sharia* must be applied completely and immediately for any state to call itself Islamic. Existing states that consider themselves Islamic are rejected as falling far short of the ideal. Iran is considered far too gradualist, with large elements of its political structures derived from European political systems (elections, a parliament, and so forth) and many policies, according to Hizb ut-Tahrir, not fully based on Islamic principles: its foreign policy, for example, is criticised as infected by Iranian nationalism and state interests. Similarly, Saudi Arabia, as a monarchy, does not meet Hizb ut-Tahrir's exacting standards.¹¹

The details of what an Islamic state would look like are outlined in a range of literature produced by the party. Some is quite detailed but little is said on actual mechanisms of power. Nevertheless, the party has produced a draft constitution, which sketches the major provisions of such a state. It is a strange mixture of anachronistic elements from the medieval Caliphate, placed alongside elements of the modern state. According to one scholar, "an-Nabhani attempted to resurrect models reflecting the socio-economic life of societies much less complex than today's, making little allowance for the needs and circumstances of the contemporary age".¹²

The basic elements of the state would be the ruler, a Caliph, elected by a *Majlis al-Ummah*, or assembly, in turn elected by the people. Political parties would be permitted, provided they were based on Islamic ideology, and they would be called upon to hold the Caliph to account, within the set framework of the *Sharia*.

An Amir would control military affairs and external relations. There would be no diplomatic relations with 'imperialist' states, such as Britain and America, and there would be a state of war with Israel. The Islamic state would refuse to join

¹⁰ Hizb ut-Tahrir (UK), "Media Pack".

¹¹ ICG interview, Dr Imran Waheed, Hizb ut-Tahrir (UK) spokesperson, 5 June 2002, London.

¹² Taji-Farouki, *A Fundamental Quest*, op. cit., p. 67.

international organisations such as the UN and in general would be in a state of *jihad* (struggle) with unbelievers.

The main planks of Hizb ut-Tahrir's economic policy are a return to the gold standard and distaste for capitalism but what exactly would replace it is very vague, though parts of the constitution look like a somewhat Islamicised socialism. It is not clear how the state would finance its wide-ranging responsibilities to provide health, education and so forth.¹³

Women would be 'basically segregated from men', although permitted to take posts in government, engage in trade, and other activities.¹⁴ Non-Muslims would be permitted to follow their own beliefs and customs.¹⁵

The Islamic state proposed by Hizb ut-Tahrir is a utopian Islamic ideal that few Muslims would recognise as either attainable or desirable. Members do not show much interest in the detail of Islamic statehood – there is nothing to discuss in this area, since all is considered to have been decided. In many ways, it is based less on the desirability of developing a state, than on the psychological need to believe that a great Islamic polity could once more emerge to dominate world affairs and stand up to Western nations, much as the USSR used to counterbalance U.S. power. Indeed, there are many parallels between the Soviet state and the Islamic state proposed by

Hizb ut-Tahrir, including the presumption of constant revolution/*jihad* with other powers.

The absolute nature of their goal and the lack of realism in their vision make Hizb ut-Tahrir unlikely to emerge as a major political force with mass appeal in any country, but the nature of its political structures has ensured longevity as similar fringe movements have faded away or merged with other groups.

2. Political methodology

Insistence that the method of political struggle is a critical part of its ideology distinguishes Hizb ut-Tahrir from other Islamist groups.¹⁶

The party's writings elaborate three stages of political struggle, based on its interpretation of the historical mission of the Prophet Mohammed in establishing the first Islamic state:

The First: The stage of culturing; this involves finding and cultivating individuals who are convinced by the thought and method of the party. This is necessary in order to formulate and establish a group capable of carrying the party's ideas.

The Second: The stage of interaction with the *Ummah* (wider Muslim community) in order to encourage the *Ummah* to work for Islam and to carry the *Da'wah* (message) as if it was its own, and so that it works to establish Islam in life, state and society.

The Third: The stage of taking the government and implementing Islam completely and totally, and carrying its message to the world.¹⁷

The first stage is the most important in present party activity and one of the keys to its longevity. It is based on finding appropriate members and moulding them to its thinking. An-Nabahani writes: 'Taking them through this culturing process

¹³ 'The only thing that will save the world from the corruption of this Capitalist economic system, the public company system, the usurious banking system and the inconvertible paper money is the abolishment of this corrupt Capitalist economic system ... To save the world from this malaise, the usurious banking system and the inconvertible paper money standards must be abolished and a return to the gold and silver standards initiated'. Hizb ut-Tahrir, *The turbulence of the stock markets: their causes and the Shari'ah rule pertaining to these causes*. Al-Khilafah Publications (London, 1998), p. 18.

¹⁴ Most of an-Nabahani's *The Social System in Islam*, Al-Khilafah Publications (London, 1999), translated from Arabic, is devoted to the role of women in society. This is also a burning obsession for many members. Compared with some other fundamentalist Islamic groups, Hizb ut-Tahrir is considered relatively moderate in this area. Women are allowed to work and men to shake women's hands. Women must wear headcoverings, but the face and hands may be left uncovered.

¹⁵ The 'draft constitution' is included in Taqiaddin an-Nabahani, *The System of Islam*, Al-Khilafah Publications (London, 2002), translated from Arabic, pp. 115-164.

¹⁶ The resemblance of Hizb ut-Tahrir to early Leninist political groups is frequently noted by researchers, notably its emphasis on maintaining political purity of membership rather than a mass following, its attraction to conspiratorial methods of organisation, and its rejection of all other movements' tactics as inadequate for bringing about change.

¹⁷ Hizb-ut-Tahrir, *The Methodology of Hizb ut-Tahrir for Change*. Al-Khilafah Publications (London, 1999), p. 24.

requires that each one of them assumes the role of a beginner (student), whose mind has to be reshaped anew'.¹⁸ This 'reshaping of minds' is the most effective part of the strategy, enabling Hizb ut-Tahrir to establish small but very strong groups of individuals fiercely committed to the cause.

The second stage involves: 'Collective culturing of the masses...through organising lessons in the mosques, conferences, lectures, places of public gathering, newspapers, books and leaflets...' ¹⁹ Hizb ut-Tahrir is very effective at spreading its views through wide publication of books and leaflets in multiple languages and a network of well-run websites²⁰ that provide access to most of the party's literature.

Through these two stages of political work, Hizb ut-Tahrir claims that it can develop mass understanding of its ideas (although not necessarily mass membership), and most importantly that it can persuade influential figures in politics, the military and elsewhere to act in accordance with its program and aims. The party actively attempts to recruit well-educated members of society, particularly those in positions that allow them to influence popular opinion.

Getting from this position – wide acceptance of ideas, and some influence on those who are capable of influencing policy – to establishment of an Islamic state is the essence of the third stage of political struggle. It is this stage, the actual seizure of power, and the establishment of the Islamic state, that is most murky in the literature.

In most of its writings Hizb ut-Tahrir rejects participation in parliamentary democracy, or any alliances with other political parties to gain power. Nevertheless, it has compromised its stance on elections in some countries – it even had a member of parliament for a short period in Jordan – but this seems to be a controversial point inside the movement. Hizb ut-Tahrir candidates were

permitted by the party to contest parliamentary elections in Yemen in 2003, but only under strict conditions, primarily that they publicly proclaimed their 'rejection of the Western capitalist system', announced they were 'working to change the *kufir* systems and establish Islam in their place', and used the Qu'ran as their sole election program.²¹

There is little doubt about Hizb ut-Tahrir's disregard for democracy. It rejects the concept as a Western, anti-Islamic invention and is not interested in acting as a party within an open political system. A recent publication claims: 'Democracy ...is considered a *kufir* system, it is in clear contradiction with the Qu'ran and Sunnah'.²²

Such views are accepted by members in Central Asia. One activist told ICG: "Democracy means freedom of opinions and freedom of business activity – all this is in contradiction to Islam".²³ A Hizb ut-Tahrir leaflet issued in Tajikistan says: "Democracy has drowned Muslims in a swamp of humiliation, and led to their alienation from each other..."²⁴

This rejection of democratic means has prompted discussion of how the party expects to achieve power. An important distinction is between what it considers its task – explaining to people that a Caliphate is vital – and actually bringing it into being, which is the responsibility of the wider *ummah*. One member in Central Asia explained: 'We conduct a political struggle; our task is not to build the state ourselves, but explain to people how to build the state'.²⁵

What then is Hizb ut-Tahrir's advice to the wider Muslim community on how to construct the Islamic state? One option is clearly to persuade existing leaders that they need to adopt its proposals. Members seem to have attempted to do this on a number of occasions. They claim to have met with the Libyan leader, Colonel Gaddafi, to advise him on how to build an Islamic state, but ended up in prison. They

¹⁸ Taquiuddin an-Nabhani, *Structuring of a Party*, Al-Khilafah Publications (London, 2001), translated from Arabic, p. 11.

¹⁹ *Methodology*, op. cit., p. 35.

²⁰ Among them are www.Hizb-ut-tahrir.org and www.khilafah.org; there are also individual national sites, and sites run by Hizb ut-Tahrir but without explicit acknowledgement, such as www.muslimstudents.org, and www.1924.org.

²¹ Hizb ut-Tahrir (Yemen), "The ruling on participating in parliamentary elections", 25 April 2004, p. 2.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ ICG interview, Hizb ut-Tahrir member Aravan, Osh region, January 2003.

²⁴ Hizb ut-Tahrir (Tajikistan), "Muborizai hukumati Tojikiston bar ziddi ahli da'vat," ['The struggle of the Government of Tajikistan against the chosen people'], 3 March 2003.

²⁵ ICG interview, Osh province, April 2003.

also apparently met with Ayatollah Khomeini in the early days of his rule in Iran.²⁶ But they have had no success in their attempts at persuasion, and so the question has arisen of whether they are prepared to resort to violent action.

3. Attitude to violence

It is widely reported that Hizb ut-Tahrir, both in Central Asia and beyond, eschews violence to achieve its ends. Some human rights activists have argued that it is essentially a peaceful group that operates only in the realm of ideas and propaganda. It has never been proven to have been involved in any violence in Central Asia, and in its other global activities it has generally pursued its aims through peaceful propaganda. It is strongly opposed to U.S. policy in the Middle East, but does not call for terrorist actions against America. Indeed, it claims to be opposed to terrorist activity and asserts that the killing of innocent civilians is against Islamic law.²⁷ Its literature is straightforward, claiming that ‘...military struggle is not the method of re-establishing the Khilafah’.²⁸ As one member puts it: “To help Iraq is the duty of every Muslim. But to help with a gun in your hand is stupid – what is needed is to build the Caliphate”.²⁹

Yet the view that Hizb ut-Tahrir is opposed to political violence *per se* is mistaken. The situation is much more nuanced than most researchers allow. To understand its position, it is important to stress that the theoretical basis of its political activity is the historical example of the Prophet Muhammed. The basis of non-violence is that Muhammed did not initially use force during his early life in Mecca; instead he voiced his objections to the misdeeds of rulers and gathered followers around him.³⁰

Yet Hizb ut-Tahrir is clear in its call for existing regimes in Islamic countries to be overthrown and replaced by an Islamic state. How then does it expect to come to power and establish an Islamic state if it refuses to take violent action? The first point is that Hizb ut-Tahrir expects to have

achieved a mass following for its ideas before assuming power. It opposes the idea of seizing the state and then forcing society to accept an Islamic order, in contrast to persuading society to accept the ideas, which would lead, seemingly inexorably, to a change in regime.³¹

But even in these circumstances, there is likely to be a need to use some kind of force to remove recalcitrant regimes. One scholar explains:

...in practical terms an-Nabhani argued that a regime could be brought down through acts of civil disobedience such as strikes, non-cooperation with the authorities or demonstrations, or through a procession to the palace or presidential residence, provided that the movement enjoys exclusive control and leadership... Alternatively, it could be toppled through a military coup executed by forces that have agreed to hand over power to the movement.³²

However, Hizb ut-Tahrir argues that as a political party it does not undertake any physical or violent actions. So how can it justify involvement in a military coup?

Hizb ut-Tahrir itself eschews the use of force [but]... ..internal sources argue that groups pledging the party their back-up can use arms...if society stands against the regime its removal even by military force does not constitute an act of violence: this would be the case only if the party were to kill its opponents to arrive in power, for example.³³

Here an important concept in party thinking emerges that explains some of its apparent contradictions. Hizb ut-Tahrir has developed the concept of seeking outside assistance (*nusrah*), by

²⁶ ICG interview, Dr Imran Waheed, Hizb ut-Tahrir (UK) spokesperson, 5 June 2003, London.

²⁷ ICG interview, Sajjad Khan, active member, Hizb ut-Tahrir (UK), London, 5 June 2003.

²⁸ Hizb ut-Tahrir, *The Method to Re-establish the Khilafah*. Al-Khilafah Publications, London. 2000. pp. 68-69.

²⁹ ICG interview, Karasu, Osh province, April 2003.

³⁰ *Methodology*, op. cit., p. 36.

³¹ ‘Our aim is not to assume power first and they try to induce the *ummah* to embrace our ideas. Our intention is rather to induce the *ummah* to convey the call as we do, so that the entire *ummah* becomes the party’. Hizb ut-Tahrir leaflet, 1962, cited in Taji-Farouki, *A Fundamental Quest*, op. cit., p. 76; *Sunday Telegraph*, 7 August 1994.

³² Taji-Farouki, *A Fundamental Quest*, op. cit., p. 102.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

studying the assistance Muhammed received from Arab tribes in his conquest of Medina.³⁴

The objectives of seeking *nusrah* are twofold: first to protect the party and enable it to continue propagating its ideology; secondly, 'to reach the government, so as to establish the Khalifah and bring back the rule of Allah in life, the state, and society'.³⁵ What this means in practice is not certain, but it could clearly be interpreted as seeking military assistance from other groups, should members be experiencing considerable harm, or in the broadest sense to establish the Caliphate. In this way, the party remains committed to its intellectual and political struggle but does not rule out seeking assistance from other groups, including some that will take military action on its behalf.

4. Jihad

The party's interpretation of *jihad* is also somewhat confused at first glance. An-Nabhani's interpretation seems to be limited to *jihad* as the responsibility of the Caliphate, and Hizb ut-Tahrir argues that *jihad* is not part of the method by which the Caliphate can be rebuilt.³⁶ A member in Kazakhstan explained: "There are two types of *jihad*: the physical and the spiritual. The physical *jihad* will come after the establishment of the Caliphate. The spiritual is for now".³⁷

Certainly the HT view of *jihad* is not primarily that of an inner struggle against desires in order to purify oneself. One party writer comments: "...when the Western nations seek to change the whole concept of *jihad*, to mean nothing but

struggling against one's own inner desires, this will invariably give them a distinct advantage as it will render the Muslims defenceless".³⁸ He claims that 'It is a consensus from the scholars of Islam that *jihad* is "fighting the *kuffar* to remove the obstacles in the ways of making Allah's word the highest".³⁹

Although the main *jihad* is not expected until the Caliphate is introduced, this does not mean that Muslims should not fight defensive wars. Thus, Muslims, Hizb ut-Tahrir members included, are enjoined to fight against an invader if attacked:

The fact that the Party does not use material power to defend itself or as a weapon against the rulers is of no relevance to the subject of *jihad*, because Jihad has to continue until the day of judgement. So whenever the disbelieving enemies attack an Islamic country, it becomes compulsory on its Muslim citizens to repel the enemy.⁴⁰

There is much loose rhetoric about *jihad* in party leaflets, which does not always underline these distinctions. And there is clearly some potential for a defensive *jihad* to be interpreted in a very broad fashion. But the main thrust of Hizb ut-Tahrir thinking seems to have remained intact: the *jihad* will come when the Caliphate is established.

5. The record

Interpreting these ideological contortions is difficult but they seem to mean that Hizb ut-Tahrir, in theory at least, plans a peaceful political struggle in most cases, seeking to increase its numbers and influence until its opinions reach a critical mass in society. This will somehow lead to a bloodless overthrow of the existing order. In the peculiar idiom of Omar Bakri Muhammed, the colourful former head of the British branch of the party, 'The

³⁴ '...when the society and the *Ummah* became rigid or indifferent towards the party, the party reviewed its study of the *sirah* of the prophet, in order to receive guidance from it... The party's conclusion from all this reassessment of the situation is that the action of seeking the *Nusrah* (help) ... is also part of the method which must be followed when the society becomes rigid or indifferent towards those who convey the *Da'wah* and the harm increases on them. Therefore the party added seeking the *Nusrah*, to the actions which it carries, and it started to seek it from the people who are in a position to give it'.

Methodology, op. cit., p. 38-39.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

³⁶ Taji-Farouki, *A Fundamental Quest*, op. cit., p. 109. This contrasts Hizb ut-Tahrir with radical groups inspired by *Qutb*, who called for immediate *jihad* against corrupt Muslim leaderships.

³⁷ ICG interview, Shymkent, June 2003.

³⁸ Sidik Aucbur, "The True Meaning of *Jihad*", *Khilafah Magazine*, May 2003. The author rejects as fabricated the much quoted *hadith* that says 'I have returned from the small *Jihad* to the big *Jihad*'. The Sahaba enquire: "What is the big *Jihad*?". The Prophet said 'The *Jihad* against inner desires'. The author also rejects the interpretation of *jihad* as defensive war, citing numerous battles by Muslims against other peoples. However, he does agree that Muslims are forbidden from forcing the non-Muslim to embrace Islam.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *The method to re-establish the Khilafah*, op. cit., pp. 126-127.

nation of Islam is like a woman... Inject her with thought until she becomes pregnant and then she will deliver the baby of the Islamic state'.⁴¹

In other cases, though, it clearly feels that the obligation of Muslims is to overthrow non-Muslim rulers, and this applies to those in a position to do so. Hence influential figures in the military – whether Hizb ut-Tahrir members or not – might be persuaded to mount a coup to remove an unbelieving leader. 'A bloodless coup is a perfectly acceptable way of achieving the overthrow of a government', says one HT leader.⁴² Most coups are not bloodless, of course, but it seems that the least violent method of overthrow is important: "We don't want to encourage any kind of civil war, for example", says the same spokesperson.

Pakistan offers an interesting theoretical example, although the potential for any significant Hizb ut-Tahrir influence seems minimal. The party there says it distinguishes between the Pakistani high command and junior officers and soldiers. The generals are the 'agents of international imperialism', says a Hizb leader, while the rest of the army is their potential ally.⁴³ In a press release, Hizb ut-Tahrir urges Pakistani soldiers to follow Mohammad bin Qasim's example at a time when 'kafirs (non-believers) are transgressing the honour of Iraqi sisters'.⁴⁴

Historically, the party's record provides no evidence of it being involved in terrorist activity against civilians, or in military actions against U.S. or Western interests. But there is good evidence of its involvement in a series of failed coups and attempts to overthrow governments in the Middle East. Some of the evidence for these incidents is disputed, but it seems clear that Hizb ut-Tahrir was involved in an attempted coup d'état in Jordan on several occasions in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was also accused of involvement in an attack on the military academy in Egypt in 1974, interpreted

by the government as preparation for a coup.⁴⁵ Far from denying involvement, party representatives admit that, 'It is no secret that Hizb ut-Tahrir has been involved in a number of failed coup attempts in the Middle East'.⁴⁶

In its recent literature, calls for the overthrow of 'corrupt Muslim leaders' have intensified. The U.S. military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq have lent increased radicalism to their rhetoric. In a recent article, an activist asserted:

The time has come for a change. The time has come to remove the rulers plaguing the Muslim world, either directly through the masses or through the strongest elements... the people are ready, the rulers have failed, what is left is for a general in Syria or Egypt, Pakistan or Turkey to feel sufficiently agitated that he picks up the phone.⁴⁷

Thus while it seems clear that ideologically and practically Hizb ut-Tahrir cannot be classified as a terrorist group, it is willing to persuade militaries to overthrow their governments, and in certain cases be involved in such military coups itself. Should it ever come to power, its willingness to use violence as an Islamic state would be more certain: it consistently emphasises that the duty of the Islamic state is to carry out military campaigns to free Muslim lands from the rule of 'unbelievers' and to wage war against Israel.

It is important to bear in mind that HT has never achieved any of its objectives, and its limited public support in much of the Islamic world means that it is unlikely to do so. Some suggest that this may lead to impatience among members as their goals seem as distant as they were when the party was founded more than a half century ago. This clearly has been a problem in the past: leaflets have urged members not to be impatient, and to be assured "...that the Islamic state will be established, even it takes time".⁴⁸

⁴¹ *Sunday Telegraph* [London], 7 August 1994.

⁴² ICG interview, Dr Imran Waheed, Hizb ut-Tahrir (UK) spokesperson, 5 June 2002, London.

⁴³ ICG interview with a Hizb ut-Tahrir (Pakistan) member, Islamabad, 7 April 2003.

⁴⁴ Press release at: <http://www.khilafah.com.pk/pr/03023pr.html>. Mohammad bin Qasim was the Muslim soldier who conquered the territory of what is now Pakistan in the eighth century.

⁴⁵ Taji-Farouki, *A Fundamental Quest*, p. 167.

⁴⁶ ICG interview, Dr Imran Waheed, Hizb ut-Tahrir (UK) spokesperson, 5 June 2003.

⁴⁷ Jalaluddin Patel, 'The Khilafah has been established (it now needs to be announced)', Editorial, *Khilafah* (April 2003) at www.khilafah.com.

⁴⁸ Hizb ut-Tahrir leaflet, 'The Da'wah Carrier is not responsible for the achieving the results', 20 July 2000. At www.khilafah.com.

C. INTERNATIONAL NETWORK

The ideology stemming from an-Nabhani's writings and from central figures in the leadership is one thing; the question of how far this ideology is accepted by local branches of the party is another. There is little information available on how monolithic the party is but the impression is of a central ideological base, with quite wide scope given to local leaders to carry on political activity in ways that suit local conditions. This seems to represent a shift, probably introduced in the early 1980s, from the movement's first years, when strict Leninist-like principles of party organisation were applied, and members were regularly expelled for divergence from the central party authority. How far this goes is not clear, but it seems unlikely that local branches can step beyond central elements of the ideology.

1. Middle East

Hizb ut-Tahrir's early activities took place mostly in Jordan, where it gained a following among Palestinians. Its activities were never fully legalised, although in 1964 a founding member, Ahmad Daour, won a seat in the parliament. In 1968 he was among those arrested after the government accused Hizb ut-Tahrir of attempting a military coup, and from 1969 the position of the party was much more fragile, with membership usually resulting in a six-year jail sentence.

Political liberalisation in Jordan in the 1990s gave the party more opportunity, but there was a further clampdown in 1993, when many members were arrested, and the authorities claimed they had discovered armed Hizb ut-Tahrir cells in the military department of Mu'ta University (an allegation ruled untrue in a subsequent court case). Nevertheless, the party continues to operate in Jordan, and there is some evidence that parts of the leadership are still resident there.

For most of his life an-Nabhani lived in exile in Beirut, and the more tolerant regime in the city made it a base for many party activities. Despite the presence of Palestinians at the head of the movement, Hizb ut-Tahrir never gained serious influence in the Occupied Territories, where it could not compete with radical groups organising populist resistance, such as Hamas, or with the

more nationalist elements represented by the Palestinian Liberation Organisation.⁴⁹ Although the party expresses something between sympathy and support, the intifada does not accord with its overarching ideology, which is that a *jihad* against Israel can only be launched in earnest once an Islamic state has been established.⁵⁰

The party was banned in Syria. Security forces carried out extensive arrests of members in 1999, which continued through 2002, although some activists were pardoned by President Bashar Asad. According to the Syrian Committee for Human Rights, 59 members remain in prison.

In Iraq the party seems to have lost any significant operational capacity under the regime of Saddam Hussein; in 1990 members were executed after calling on Saddam to introduce an Islamic state.⁵¹ After Saddam's fall in 2003, however, the party announced the opening of a branch in Iraq, although what that means on the ground is unclear. So far, it seems, the coalition has placed no restrictions on its activities.

Hizb ut-Tahrir was banned in Egypt after being implicated in the putative 1974 coup⁵² and further arrests in 2002, apparently involving three British members of the party. The party was also banned in other North African countries. In Tunisia party cells were broken up in 1983, and arrests of 80 members took place in 1991. In Libya attempts to influence Gaddafi's policies were short-lived, and a number of activists were imprisoned, apparently after he was offended by their criticism of his ideology. One source suggests that the party was involved in attempted coups in Algeria and Sudan,

⁴⁹ Taji-Farouki, *A Fundamental Quest*, op. cit., pp. 164-165.

⁵⁰ Once established, such an Islamic state would have, according to Hizb ut-Tahrir theory, a duty to pursue *jihad* against the State of Israel and its destruction. It should also embrace modern military technology, including nuclear weapons. It is understandable, therefore, why Israeli sources consider Hizb ut-Tahrir a potential threat to national security.

⁵¹ Taji-Farouki, *A Fundamental Quest*, op. cit., p. 154.

⁵² There is some confusion over Hizb ut-Tahrir's actual role in the incident, which effectively ended when would-be revolutionaries were seized as they tried to take arms from a military academy in Cairo. See *Ibid.*, p. 167, also Shereen Khairallah, "The Islamic Liberation Party: Search for a Lost Ideal", *Vision and Revision in Arab Society 1974*, Cenam Reports (Beirut, 1975), pp. 87-95.

but there is no independent confirmation.⁵³ In Turkey the party has been active but has faced repression by the state.

The results of Hizb ut-Tahrir work in the Middle East have been largely negligible, although the party has influenced the debate among Islamists at the edges. Nevertheless, among well educated Muslims, it is seen as a heterodox group with an unacceptable interpretation of much of Islamic scripture. Hizb ut-Tahrir seems to have an advantage in societies where there is only limited religious knowledge among Muslims, where the state itself is overtly secular, such as those in Central Asia, or among Muslim communities in Western Europe.

2. Western Europe

According to the Hizb ut-Tahrir leader in Sweden, Fadi Abdullatif, the party is growing by actively recruiting second-generation Muslim immigrants.⁵⁴ Since members of this group did not themselves flee tyrannical states as many of their parents did, they are often more critical of democracy and the inequalities of capitalism and correspondingly attracted to Hizb ut Tahrir's message of a just Islamic order. Moreover, Muslim immigrants often face religious or ethnic discrimination. The party's popularity among Muslims in the West has continued to grow, providing it a strong organisational, and possibly financial, base.

Germany became the first Western state to ban Hizb ut-Tahrir in January 2003, citing its anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli propaganda. However, the German authorities did not provide any evidence of links between it and terrorist groups. German security forces carried out further raids on known activists, now working illegally, in May 2003.

In Denmark the party has also garnered support among immigrants. In March 2003 its leader, Fadi Abdullatif, was convicted of breaking anti-racism laws, after he handed out leaflets allegedly calling for Jews to be killed. The group claims the quotes were taken out of context. The government has apparently considered banning the party, which

according to media reports has about 100 members.⁵⁵

In the UK Hizb ut-Tahrir remains very active, particularly in London and in towns with major Muslim populations such as Birmingham, Bradford and Sheffield. It has been notably successful in recruiting students, although it has been banned from many university campuses, because of its anti-Semitism, alleged threatening behaviour towards students of other faiths, and public objections to homosexuality.

Hizb ut-Tahrir developed a controversial UK reputation in the early 1990s that it has tried hard to live down. It grew quickly after the first Gulf war from a largely unknown organisation to perhaps the most notorious Islamist movement in Britain. Until January 1996, its leader in the UK was Omar Bakri Mohammed, a Syrian immigrant, whose inflammatory rhetoric made him a hate-figure in the British press, but a popular leader for some alienated and angry young Muslims.

Media controversy over Bakri Mohammed's apparent denial of the Holocaust and increasing tension on university campuses between Hizb ut-Tahrir and Hindi and Jewish students led to Bakri Mohammed's dismissal by the party's international leadership in 1996.⁵⁶ He went on to form Al-Muhajiroun, a more overtly radical group, which has been charged with channelling young Muslims to groups providing military training in Afghanistan and elsewhere.⁵⁷

The present leaders of Hizb ut-Tahrir in the UK present a much more media-friendly, moderate message, and have been careful to play down any possible misinterpretation of their ideas. They are quick to deny allegations of anti-Semitism and condemn acts of violence, but the basic ideological message remains the same.

⁵³ Taji-Farouki, *A Fundamental Quest*, op. cit., p. 154, citing Ihsan Abd al-Munim Samara.

⁵⁴ Video on Hizb ut-Tahrir produced in Sweden (2002).

⁵⁵ Associated Press, "Muslim group spokesman gets suspended jail sentence for posting flyers urging Jews be killed", 14 March 2003.

⁵⁶ Adam Lebor, *A Heart Turned East: Among the Muslims of Europe and America* (London, 1997), pp. 140-147.

⁵⁷ See Michael White, 'Al-Muhajiroun: the portal for Britain's suicide terrorists', at www.ict.org.il/articles.

3. Asia

From its origins in the Middle East, and its following among Muslims in the West, Hizb ut-Tahrir has attempted to spread its network throughout the Muslim world. Among its targets have been non-Arab Muslim countries, among them the states of Central Asia, Muslim countries in the Far East, such as Indonesia, and south Asia, primarily Pakistan. Two states, Indonesia and Pakistan, offer a contrasting view of its potential for political success.

Indonesia

Hizb ut-Tahrir apparently first appeared in Indonesia in 1983, brought in by an Australian of Jordanian-Lebanese origin named Abdurrahman al-Baghdadi. For the next fifteen years, it was mostly an underground movement on college campuses in Java. Its current spokesman, Ismail Yusanto, became attracted to the movement in 1985 when he was a geology student in the technical faculty of one of Indonesia's premier institutions, Gajah Mada University in Yogyakarta, Central Java.

The movement is still largely campus-based, but it took off when political controls eased in the aftermath of Soeharto's fall in May 1998. It now claims "tens of thousands" of members, and publishes a host of publications including a glossy version of the party's monthly bulletin, *al-Wa'ie*.⁵⁸ It has a particularly strong presence in Bogor, West Java, on the campus of the Bogor Agricultural Institute; in Yogyakarta, Central Java; in Jakarta; and Makassar, in South Sulawesi.

Hizb ut-Tahrir has been able to mobilise thousands of demonstrators in support of Islamic law (for example, in separate marches in Jakarta and Kendari in Southeast Sulawesi in October 2002) and against the U.S. war with Iraq (Jakarta, January 2003). Its members have not been involved in violence,

although the party was represented at the founding congress of the Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (the Indonesian Mujahidin Council) that included some members of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), the group accused of masterminding the bombing of Bali in October 2002. It also was very prominent in the support group for Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, the head of JI, at the opening of his trial in April 2003, joining forces again with Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia.⁵⁹

Like its counterparts elsewhere, Hizb ut-Tahrir (Indonesia) is committed to the reestablishment of the Islamic caliphate. But many of its campaigns focus on shorter-term gains. A packed meeting ICG attended in late 2002 dealt with how to instil a new moral sense in primary schools, but the leadership has a decidedly international outlook, with particular concern about Western policies on Chechnya, Afghanistan, and Iraq. It is very much concerned with the persecution of its fellow members in Uzbekistan.

Although Yusanto rejects Hizb ut-Tahrir participation in the political system as a party – indeed, rejects democracy as a political system – the group maintains good relations with those Muslim parties committed to the application of *Sharia*. For Hizb ut-Tahrir in Indonesia, the key means to achieving its goal seems to be recruitment: "Soeharto could be brought down with only 100,000 people, whereas in fact, Jakarta had 11 million people at the time", says its leader. "When our membership reaches into the millions, we can talk about social and political change."⁶⁰

So far there have been no government restrictions on the party or any of its activities. It freely holds rallies and meetings, which are well attended. Together with the Jamaah Tarbiyah – considered an extension of the Ikhwanul Muslimin and which became the Justice Party, the HT is among the two most radical Islamic movements in the country.

Pakistan

Compared with its rapid growth in Indonesia, Hizb ut-Tahrir has enjoyed much less success in Pakistan, where its history is much shorter – the chapter was effectively launched in November 2000. Although it claims there always were

⁵⁸ Articles include many on the importance of the caliphate; on the treachery of the House of Saud; on how the U.S. is accusing as a terrorist anyone who seeks to uphold Islamic law; on why separatism in Muslim countries is *haram* because the aim should be to unite, not divide, the *ummah*; and regular updates on the activities of Hizb ut-Tahrir around the globe. It has a sophisticated website (<http://www.al-islam.or.id>) and apparently attracts some of its followers through the site. *Al-Wa'ie* also advertises upcoming meetings in different cities around Indonesia with lectures on such topics as "Overcoming Poverty through Shariah"; "Creating a Clean and Effective Government"; and "Shariah and Education Policy".

⁵⁹ On the Jemaah Islamiyah, see ICG Asia Report No. 43, *Indonesia Backgrounder: How the Jemaah Islamiyah Terrorist Network Operates*, 11 December 2002.

⁶⁰ "Tidak Harus Hizbut Tahrir yang Mendirikan Khilafah", *Suara Hidayatullah*, Vol.15, No.6, October 2002, p. 25.

members in the country, the founders were mostly Pakistani expatriates.⁶¹

As most of its branches are, Hizb ut-Tahrir (Pakistan) is small and secretive. It has a pyramid-like organisation, at the apex of which is the Emir of the Pakistani chapter, whose identity is not known. Only one member, the official spokesperson, Naveed Butt, has been allowed to reveal his office.⁶²

However, its need for public exposure has motivated Hizb ut-Tahrir to hold public rallies and demonstrations. As a result of these rallies, some members are aware of each other's identities but most remain underground, forbidden by their leaders to participate in any public event. "We are not allowed to reveal our identity because of the world-wide repression against the Hizb ut-Tahrir", claims Naveed Butt.⁶³

The insistence on establishment of an absolute Islamic state, where *Sharia* would be implemented in full and immediately, places Hizb ut-Tahrir apart from other Pakistani Islamic parties, such as the components of the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal, which are willing to compromise on the establishment of an Islamic state in return for a share of political power.

Thus far, Hizb ut-Tahrir (Pakistan) has used peaceful means to spread its message. These include pamphlets, conferences, seminars, and *darooos* (religious lectures). Members also propagate its ideology individually, working mostly in urban centres. The party mainly targets the educated urban middle class, ignoring rural areas that are considered of little use to its political objectives. More specifically, it focuses on "opinion-makers" such as journalists, teachers, lawyers, trade unionists and

religious scholars, whom it believes are capable of influencing the public at large.

According to some Hizb ut-Tahrir members, the party's relationship with the Musharraf government was cordial at first. It was apparently encouraged by some intelligence agencies to set up an office after it decided to establish a public presence in Pakistan.⁶⁴ However, the police sealed the office on 26 October 2001 after the first public demonstration. After several public rallies, the police arrested a number of members, all of whom have subsequently been released. However, the government has not formally banned Hizb ut-Tahrir and might not feel the need for more drastic action because it has clearly failed to make any substantial inroads.

According to the journalist Ahmed Rashid, who has studied the movement, Hizb ut-Tahrir has had very little impact in Pakistan for two reasons. First, in Central Asia, it has benefited from the absence of competition. In Pakistan, it competes with several well-established parties such as the Jamaat-i-Islami for the same target audience, the educated classes. Secondly, because of a substantial and assertive Shia minority, Pakistani Islam is sectarian in nature, a phenomenon that does not exist in Central Asia. Since Hizb ut-Tahrir (Pakistan) is "not sectarian in its outlook, it is unlikely to succeed here".⁶⁵

Perhaps most significantly, though, Hizb ut-Tahrir lacks appeal for the Pakistani military, whose support and patronage had helped parties such as the Jamaat-i-Islami and the Jamiat Ulema Islam to establish and expand their political base. With its one-point pan-Islamic agenda, Hizb ut-Tahrir has little to offer the military. On the contrary, its goal of a Caliphate, and hence opposition to military rule, has isolated it from potential religious allies and deprived it of military patronage. It seems likely to remain on the fringes of Pakistani political life.

⁶¹ The events of 11 September 2001 have helped Hizb ut-Tahrir to expand its base somewhat, mainly within urban centres and among middle class youth. Since then the environment in the West is perceived by Pakistani orthodox Muslims as less sympathetic to religious, in particular Islamic, sensitivities, and some expatriate Pakistanis have returned home. Some were members of the Hizb ut-Tahrir in their adopted countries. It is this influx that has helped encouraged the party to acquire at least a limited presence in Pakistan. Typical of these members is the official spokesperson, Naveed Butt, who is an electrical engineer educated at Chicago University.

⁶² ICG interviews with members of Hizb ut-Tahrir (Pakistan), Islamabad, 8 April 2003.

⁶³ ICG interview, Naveed Butt, Islamabad, 11 April 2003.

⁶⁴ ICG interviews with Hizb ut-Tahrir (Pakistan) members, Islamabad, 7 April 2003.

⁶⁵ ICG interview, 4 March 2003. Previous accusations that Hizb ut-Tahrir is fiercely anti-Shia do not have much justification in the party literature. It claims to recognise all branches of Islam. See Hizb ut-Tahrir (UK), "The Inaccuracies of the Book '*Jihad* – the rise of militant Islam in Central Asia' by Ahmed Rashid". A more telling source is the anti-Hizb ut-Tahrir website run by radical neo-Wahhabis, where one of the main accusations against the party is that it accepts Shias. See www.htexposed.com.

III. HIZB UT-TAHRIR IN CENTRAL ASIA

The differing experiences of Hizb ut-Tahrir globally underline its dual image: it gains strength from having a centralised ideological base, which also provides some organisational support, but much local success comes from local leaders' response to particular conditions. In Central Asia the party has maintained a balancing act between its central ideology and its need to respond to local concerns to gain support.

Hizb ut-Tahrir grew out of the fractured landscape of Islam in Central Asia that emerged after Soviet controls on religion and politics were weakened in the late 1980s. Interest in political Islam was first awakened by movements such as the Islamic Renaissance Party in Tajikistan, and by a range of groups inspired by Saudi Wahhabi teachings in Uzbekistan, members of which later formed the militant Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), an ally of the Afghan Taliban.⁶⁶

The repression of these groups by governments, particularly in Uzbekistan, ensured that little religious plurality emerged. Instead, the way was prepared for more conspiratorial groups, an ideal environment for Hizb ut-Tahrir. Reports of its activity first emerged in Uzbekistan in the mid-1990s. Initial growth there seems to have spilled over into southern Kyrgyzstan, particularly in the wake of the mass repression of members after 1997. In 1998 Uzbek members apparently supported the establishment of a branch in Tajikistan, which flourished over the next several years. Since 2000, reports of activities in southern Kazakhstan have appeared as well. There have also been occasional reports of Hizb ut-Tahrir work in Turkmenistan's prisons.

⁶⁶ From bases in Tajikistan and Afghanistan, in August 1999 and August 2000, the IMU waged two unsuccessful military incursions into southern Kyrgyzstan, en route to Uzbekistan. Since the U.S. military action against the Taliban, however, IMU forces appear to have been largely destroyed or scattered. In December 2001, reports suggested that its leader, Namangani, had been killed in Afghanistan, and his followers had fled to Pakistan or had split into small groups inside Afghanistan. For more detail on the IMU, see ICG Asia Briefing, *The IMU and the Hizb ut-Tahrir: Implications of the Afghanistan Campaign*, 30 January 2002.

During 2002 many observers sensed a decline in Hizb ut-Tahrir activity – fewer leaflets appeared, and some researchers claimed that the reason was a fall-off in financing, perhaps caused by restrictions introduced after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the U.S. But the war in Afghanistan and the military action in Iraq also seem to have contributed to a radicalisation of views of some members, and a sharper tone in the party's publications.

A. WHY PEOPLE JOIN

Members give many reasons for joining Hizb ut-Tahrir related to the environment they live in, personal histories and government policies. There is no single issue but there is often a psychological response related to loss of social status, lack of belief in the future, and a desire to 'do something' about changes in society that deeply affect people's lives.

Socio-economic circumstances are relevant for many who join but to point to poverty as the main driver in recruitment is rather simplistic. One Hizb ut-Tahrir leader says: "The idea that poverty is what drives people to join is a myth. Look at how many well educated Muslims in the West are members. There are other reasons for radicalisation than poverty".⁶⁷

This assertion may be true of the West, but socio-economic factors clearly play a role in Central Asia, where the struggle for daily financial survival is uppermost in most people's minds. Some members seem to expect financial reward. Nevertheless, although many do point to the economic problems they face when explaining why they joined, there is a certain sense of creating victimhood in what they say.

When asked why people join, one member replied: "Look we live in poverty, this is not a normal life". His wife intervened: "What are you talking about? We are building an extension. We're going to buy an apartment – a nice one. He just wants everything...."⁶⁸

⁶⁷ ICG interview, Dr Imran Waheed, spokesperson Hizb ut-Tahrir (UK), 5 June 2003, London.

⁶⁸ ICG interview, Osh, April 2003.

Many members are, of course, truly poor, but more important is this wider sense of receiving a bad deal from society and the state. Their own aspirations have somehow been blocked, and the social change they see around them is disconcerting and often threatens their place in society or the family.

Many in Central Asia believe that members join Hizb ut-Tahrir because they are paid. A wife of a member says, “Only the young unemployed join up. They go because of the money...”⁶⁹ Some analysts report that members are paid U.S.\$50-\$100 for giving out leaflets, but there is no hard evidence of this. Members all deny they receive any payment for their work: “We only get money when we sell literature, then we take money and pass it on [to the leadership], and when we collect members’ fees – we also pass it on. But otherwise there is no other money at all...”⁷⁰ Court reports from Tajikistan, however, suggested that leaders did receive money, some of which was passed on to junior members, but most of which was spent on party activities.⁷¹

Even if there is some payment to members, it seems unlikely that many are involved purely because of financial benefits. It is hard not to agree with a Hizb ut-Tahrir member interviewed in Uzbekistan:

Somebody who knows me accused me of doing this all for money. So I said to him, ‘if I give you U.S.\$100 will you go and give out these leaflets in the bazaar?’ He was shocked, and refused, of course. Nobody would do this just for money, knowing they could get twenty years in prison or worse as a result.⁷²

More important than poverty and the possibility of earning money are a number of psychological issues. A main reason seems to be the lack of anything else to do, and the sheer pointlessness of many young men’s lives. One member explained how he got involved:

Time used to simply drag by for us. We sat on the street. And they [Hizb ut-Tahrir] were doing something. We started to talk to them,

my friends joined them, and I joined up as well. ...⁷³

This lack of a perspective for the future is a common theme among many young members. Those who recall the Soviet Union remember the certainty and stability that the system provided, and contrast it with today’s insecure world. Young men who perceive that their way in life is blocked by ‘the system’, by corrupt authorities or by other obstacles are particularly vulnerable to Hizb ut-Tahrir’s simple explanations of why they have not achieved success.

This blocking of ambition probably explains why a number of educated, apparently successful people join. Their thwarted aspirations encourage them to blame the system, and the system itself, with its self-centred corruption, nepotism, and lack of apparent concern for the greater good, encourages politicisation of essentially personal problems.

This is a reflection of systemic political and economic problems in Central Asian states that will not be overcome overnight. But many policies are simply short-sighted. Uzbekistan’s increasingly restrictive border regime – making cross-border trade all but impossible – has left many traders out of work and deeply discontented. Given that many Hizb ut-Tahrir members are already involved in private trade, it seems likely that such moves can only increase the party’s potential support base.⁷⁴ The issue of borders is interesting given Hizb ut-Tahrir’s call for a borderless and nationless Islamic state. For many Uzbek minorities outside the Uzbek state especially, such a vision is attractive, reflecting deep discontent with their post-Soviet status, cut off from compatriots by new and increasingly closed frontiers.

The political solution offered – the wise rule of a just Caliph – seems particularly appropriate for Uzbek political culture, in which researchers have noted an aspiration for a father-figure ruler whose personal qualities (such as just and fair) are more

⁶⁹ ICG interview, Osh, April 2003.

⁷⁰ ICG interview, Osh, February 2003.

⁷¹ Court protocol No. 73, Sughd provincial court, 28 March 2003.

⁷² ICG interview, Margilan, March 2003.

⁷³ ICG interview, Osh, March 2003.

⁷⁴ Some Uzbek officials assert that the border closures will serve to limit cross-border traffic in illegal literature and funding for Hizb ut-Tahrir. Given the illegal contraband networks that the closures have established, it seems unlikely to have any effect at all.

important than any political ideology.⁷⁵ Hizb ut-Tahrir offers a polity with the politics removed, an order in which most rules are already preordained, and an authority figure who would judge on the basis of god-given rules.

These essentially psychological reasons for joining are also very pertinent in southern Kyrgyzstan, where the political role of Hizb ut-Tahrir is less relevant in relation to the relatively liberal government. Nevertheless, in both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan increasingly authoritarian governments have also become the target of Hizb ut-Tahrir propaganda. Its willingness to address issues that are taboo in the mass media, such as high-level corruption, and the frequent lack of a viable political alternative, clearly helps attract a certain element of angry young men.

In Uzbekistan, Hizb ut-Tahrir has a particularly strong role as the only serious political opposition to an overwhelmingly repressive government.⁷⁶ No secular opposition parties are legal in an environment of widespread dislike of the regime. Inevitably, a certain part of the sympathy if not support for Hizb ut-Tahrir comes from those who primarily are politically opposed to the authorities rather than particularly supportive of the party's final goals. ICG has frequently interviewed young people who have expressed support for Islamism out of distaste for the government, not because of any particular desire for an Islamic state.

The problems thrown up by continuing social change also provide a ready audience for many Hizb ut-Tahrir messages. Its strictures on women find support among some men, many of whom find that the huge social upheavals of the past decade have undermined their status. Poverty has forced many young women into prostitution; this fact alone was raised by almost every Hizb ut-Tahrir member ICG interviewed. Pandering to the conservative views of the average Uzbek young man, the party provides a political and theological

justification for reasserting male supremacy in society.⁷⁷ Personal and social inadequacy is explained by reference to wider political and social changes forced on society by rulers following orders from the West.

Government repression clearly has some impact both in dissuading potential members and attracting others. One member in Uzbekistan explained that he had never really been interested in Hizb ut-Tahrir until his brother was arrested for membership. Then he, too, joined, disgusted with the way the police treated him. He was later arrested, but released under an amnesty.⁷⁸ Many women have become involved because their husbands or sons have been arrested, and wider community sympathy has been generated because of extensive kinship ties in traditional Uzbek families.

Few people interviewed suggested that Hizb ut-Tahrir's literature persuaded them to join by making an overwhelming intellectual case but it clearly has an impact on some. One member explained that the party's 'scientific' explanations of religious questions attracted him:

I come from a secular home, but I got interested in religion. But nobody could answer my questions, about how the world was created or things like that. My grandfather was religious but he would just say: 'God created it'. But he couldn't explain why the science we learned in school said something different. Hizb ut-Tahrir helped me understand what science said and answered my questions in a language I understood.⁷⁹

The party's modern language is more attractive to these young, secularised men than the complex religious formulas of the more traditional mullahs. Hizb ut-Tahrir is much less demanding in terms of

⁷⁵ See the interesting work by Morgan Y. Liu on ethnic Uzbeks in Osh province, inter alia, "Recognising the Khan, Authority, Space and Political Imagination among Uzbek Men in Post-Soviet Osh, Kyrgyzstan" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 2002).

⁷⁶ See ICG Asia Report No 46, *Uzbekistan's Reform Program: Illusion or Reality*, 18 February 2003 for information on political, religious and economic repression in Uzbekistan.

⁷⁷ Local attitudes are often more conservative than Hizb ut-Tahrir ideology would allow. In Tajikistan members refused to be judged in a court presided over by a woman, although party ideology permits women to be judges. ICG interview with judge of the city court of Khujand Mavdjuda Sharipova, Khudjand, January 2003; ICG interview with Dr Imran Waheed, Hizb ut-Tahrir (UK) spokesperson, London, 5 June 2003.

⁷⁸ ICG interview, Ferghana province, April 2003.

⁷⁹ ICG interview, Ferghana province, March 2003.

religious knowledge than other Islamic sects: there is no need to learn Arabic or study deeply the many books of religious scholars. All that a member needs to know is already distilled in a short list of books and pamphlets written in easy to understand contemporary idiom.

As the above examples make evident, there is no easy answer as to why people join. Most of the attraction for young men in Central Asia can be found in a complex mixture of motives: psychological, political and social. The desire to be part of a close-knit group, which provides mutual support, psychological and perhaps financial, also plays its part, and fits well with traditional Uzbek social patterns, in which men often form close groups – whether linked by kinship or not – that meet regularly for meals or other social events.

The search for an element of certainty in a changing society, at both the micro-level (the group) and the macro-level (belief in a future order) is an important element in Hizb ut-Tahrir's attraction. The simplicity of the order and its ideology resembles that of many religious sects, and the psychological profile of the average member is perhaps closer to that of a fringe religious sect than of a radical political party.

B. EXTENT OF SUPPORT

Media reports sometimes claim that Hizb ut-Tahrir has as many as 100,000 adherents in Central Asia.⁸⁰ By any reckoning, this seems an exaggeration. Exaggerating the support is useful for both security services (keen to increase budgets and influence) and Hizb ut-Tahrir. In reality, numbers are probably much smaller than either would admit, although still significant.

In Uzbekistan, at least 4,000 Hizb ut-Tahrir members are in prison, and most observers suggest that they represent a significant percentage of the membership. According to one source, in February 1999 Zuhridin Husniddinov, now presidential adviser on religious issues and a former National Security Service (NSS) officer, claimed at a closed conference that there were 6,500 to 7,000 members

in Uzbekistan.⁸¹ In the absence of more reliable statistics, this seems realistic, although possibly slightly deflated for internal purposes. It seems likely there has been some growth since 1999, but it is impossible to quantify this even approximately. A well-informed scholar in Tashkent has suggested that figures of up to 15,000 are possible in 2003.⁸²

In Kyrgyzstan security sources claim that membership is about 1,000 to 1,200. Others claim that it is much bigger but figures between 1,000 and 2,000 receive the most support. A senior security officer said, "They pretend that there are many of them to receive financing. But there is not really much serious activity here".⁸³ In late 2002 police held files on more than 600 people in Osh and about 680 in the Jalalabad region whom they consider members or sympathisers.⁸⁴ There may, of course, be members who are not known but the police claim otherwise. Outside these southern regions Hizb ut-Tahrir has only limited support, although there are occasional reports of activity in the north.

It is difficult to get any reliable membership figures for Tajikistan, but arrests in 2000, when there was a mass campaign against the party, suggest that the figure is in the low rather than high thousands. Court proceedings against alleged Hizb ut-Tahrir leaders in March 2002 suggested that they had recruited more than 1,000 members.⁸⁵ In Kazakhstan, observers estimate membership in the low hundreds, and maybe only dozens.

It is hard to imagine that there are more than 20,000 members in the whole of Central Asia. Considering the political conditions under which they work, and

⁸¹ ICG interview, Islamic specialist, Tashkent, May 2003.

⁸² ICG interview, May 2003.

⁸³ ICG interview, Jalal-Abad, March 2003.

⁸⁴ ICG interviews, Osh, Jalalabad, December 2002. These police registers [*profilakticheskii uchet*] are widely used by Central Asian police forces, as a way of monitoring 'unreliable' citizens. There is always some doubt over the validity of police figures. One Kyrgyz security official admits that technical problems create obstacles: 'We don't have computers, we can't create our own network, [to establish] how many, and who has been arrested. [If] we could do lists of names in each region, we would know what the dynamic was...' ICG interview, Bishkek, December 2002.

⁸⁵ Court protocol No. 73, Sughd provincial court, 28 March 2003.

⁸⁰ Hizb ut-Tahrir spokespersons themselves claim not to know how many adherents they have in Central Asia. ICG interview, Dr Imram Waheed, 5 June, London.

the difficulty of creating any political party in Central Asia's societies, this is still a significant figure, but far below some estimates.

C. WHO THEY ARE

1. Regions and ethnicity

The majority – though by no means all – of Hizb ut-Tahrir members appear to be from the Ferghana Valley region (including the Andijan, Ferghana, and Namangan provinces of Uzbekistan; the Sughd province of Tajikistan, and the Osh and Jalal-Abad provinces of Kyrgyzstan). The concentration of arrests and the state crackdown in these areas have intensified resentment among this population, which had already felt oppressed and largely excluded from power by the post-Soviet Central Asian regimes.⁸⁶ Southern Kazakhstan has also witnessed a rise in reported activity that is partly among the indigenous ethnic Uzbek minority and some Kazakhs, but is probably also bolstered by Uzbeks from Uzbekistan who have crossed into the relative safety of Kazakhstan.

Within Uzbekistan the overwhelming proportion of Hizb ut-Tahrir activity seems to be in the Ferghana Valley and Tashkent. A partial analysis of those arrested between 1997 and 2001 shows that 23 per cent were from Andijan province, and 35.2 per cent from Tashkent city. Much lower numbers were from the other provinces of the Ferghana Valley – Ferghana itself, and Namangan province. The western Karakalpakstan and Navoi provinces had no representatives in the sample.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Kathleen Collins, 'Clans, Pacts, and Politics: Regime Transition in Post-Soviet Central Asia', *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 3 (July 2002).

⁸⁷ The figures are calculated on the basis of arrest records gathered by the Memorial human rights organisation, based in Moscow. They cover 1,072 members of Hizb ut-Tahrir arrested between December 1997 and August 2001. This probably represents less than one-quarter of those arrested during this period. There are a number of caveats to these figures: many members may not show up as such in the statistics; they may depend on the efforts of the police in different regions; police may have concentrated efforts on younger, poorer members; the statistics themselves are gathered from a number of sources, not all of which may be completely reliable; and of course they represent only a limited sample of the total arrested, let alone of the total membership.

In Tajikistan the main centre has been the Sughd province in the north, and particularly the town of Khudjand and neighbouring districts. There are also increasing reports of activities in Dushanbe, and some in southern towns such as Kulob. But these are generally thought to be the work of small groups or individuals, rather than representing a major change in the geographical profile of the group.⁸⁸

In Kyrgyzstan the centre of activity remains two southern provinces: Osh and Jalal-Abad. The southern Batken region has witnessed much less activity, probably because it has a much smaller ethnic Uzbek population. Mass migration of southerners to Bishkek suggests there might be some scope for growth in the north, and there are reports of activities in Bishkek, Tokmok and Issyk-kul. However, Hizb ut-Tahrir membership remains overwhelmingly ethnic Uzbek, while southerners who migrate to the north tend to be ethnic Kyrgyz. Whether the party's ideology will prove attractive for them remains doubtful.

Hizb ut-Tahrir has attempted to expand its ethnic base. This seems to have met with only limited success, although leaflets are published in both Kyrgyz and Tajik. In Tajikistan many alleged leaders tried in March 2002 were ethnic Tajiks, but court records suggest that most members were ethnic Uzbeks.⁸⁹

In Kyrgyzstan security sources claim that the membership consists is up to 90 per cent ethnic Uzbek, 3 to 4 per cent ethnic Kyrgyz and 4 to 5 per cent ethnic Uigurs.⁹⁰ Interviews with members and police officers suggest that these figures are probably fairly accurate.

2. Membership profile

'Alisher' is 30, wears a fairly snappy suit and tie, and has a car and a mobile phone. He seemed to find the surroundings in which he talked with ICG, a dilapidated house in Ferghana province, slightly unsettling, as if he was used to more luxury. He looked like a prospering small businessman but he was a Hizb ut-Tahrir member of some five year's standing.

⁸⁸ ICG interviews, local officials, Dushanbe, Kulob, May/June 2003.

⁸⁹ ICG interviews, Dushanbe, April 2003.

⁹⁰ ICG interview, senior NSS officer, Kyrgyzstan.

Although the majority of members still come from the unemployed, there is a strong element of what might be called the 'educated lower middle class' in the movement, particularly among the leadership. Many have been involved in private trade in some way, and some clearly have reasonable financial backing. Many come from fairly secular backgrounds and have few of the external elements of puritanism associated with Wahhabis, such as beards or not smoking.

It seems likely that much of the early leadership of Hizb ut-Tahrir in Central Asia was well educated. Farhad Usmanov, who was killed by police in 1999, was among the early leaders, and came from a well-known religious family in Tashkent. Among those arrested was prominent Uzbek writer Emin Osman, who was detained in February 2001 and died a month later, apparently after being tortured.⁹¹

But assertions that Hizb ut-Tahrir is a movement of intellectuals are far from the truth. The majority who join are poor, badly educated, and unemployed, particularly in Kyrgyzstan. A police officer in Kara-Su who knows them well says: "They work in cafes, hairdressers, shoe repair shops, or trade at the bazaar".⁹² Security services in southern Kyrgyzstan claim that 90 per cent of members are unemployed, 90 per cent do not have higher or middle specialised education, and more than 60 per cent come from poor backgrounds. Most are young, with some 70 per cent in the 18-30 age group, 25 per cent aged 30-40, and only about 5 per cent over 40.⁹³

In Uzbekistan the party seems initially to have had a more educated base, possibly because much of the leadership was originally based there. Some 16 per cent of a sample of those arrested had higher education, while only 6 per cent had not finished high school. Nevertheless, 56 per cent were unemployed, while 8 per cent were businessmen, followed by collective farm workers (5 per cent), teachers (4 per cent) and students (4 per cent). Since many unemployed in Uzbekistan actually are well educated, these figures may be somewhat misleading. Age-wise the figures mirror those of other countries. Although ages ranged from 15 to

60, 82 per cent of those arrested were between 21 and 36 in 2000.⁹⁴

This is only a rough snapshot of Hizb ut-Tahrir but it shows that members are relatively representative of many groups in the wider population, on average slightly better educated, but more likely to be unemployed than otherwise. The leadership seems to have come from fairly good background, well educated, and with some financial support, but the mass membership still relies heavily on the unemployed, small traders, and artisans.

In Tajikistan Hizb ut-Tahrir adherents have overwhelmingly come from Sughd (formerly Leninabad) province, its most industrial, literate, and secular region. A judge said: "Many are from good families – there's no material interest there, just ideological".⁹⁵ Nevertheless, again the mass of members are unemployed youth, although there are also a fair number of students. Of the 118 Hizb ut-Tahrir members who were detained in 2000 by security services in Sughd province, 64 per cent were between 21 and 30, 72 per cent were unemployed, 11 per cent were students, 2 per cent teachers and 1 per cent Muslim clergy.⁹⁶

Most interesting, and potentially worrying, is that critics and sympathisers alike note that even Central Asians with little or no religious training or upbringing have become avid Hizb ut-Tahrir followers. Indeed, it is not the traditional religious conservatives who support the party, but for the most part youths with little knowledge of Islam, who read the leaflets and literature and educate themselves.

⁹⁴ Original figures from Human Rights Organisation 'Memorial' The breakdown of employment is for a subsample of 739 for which such information is available. Education information was available for 754 people.

⁹⁵ ICG interview with judge of the city court of Khujand Mavdjuda Sharipova, Khudjand, January 2003.

⁹⁶ ICG interview, Dust Dustov, Head of the Sector on Interethnic Relations, Hukumat, Sughd province, Khudjand, 2003. These statistics probably underestimate the level of education of Hizb ut-Tahrir members. First, better educated members are more likely to have relatives who will pay for their release or protect them in some way. Secondly, the better educated are probably among the leaders and less likely to get arrested while distributing leaflets or engaging in similar public actions.

⁹¹ BBC report, 10 March 2001.

⁹² ICG interview, police officer, Karasu, Osh Province, April 2003.

⁹³ ICG interview, Osh, April 2003.

The reason Hizb ut-Tahrir is attractive to Muslims from relatively secular backgrounds is probably its somewhat modern image and ability to speak their language. Whereas the traditional imam might quote parts of the Q'uran (often in Arabic), and provide rather ritualistic answers to secular questions, Hizb ut-Tahrir is much better able to respond in a way that reflects the world view with which these young people were brought up.

Hizb ut-Tahrir remains an overwhelmingly male organisation. It does openly call for women to become members but they seem still a very small percentage, perhaps 6 or 7 per cent in southern Kyrgyzstan, according to security sources. Most are relatives – wives or mothers – of male members. It is not clear whether they take part in distributing leaflets: some members say they do, others deny it. Women have become active in Uzbekistan, but mainly in staging demonstrations in defence of imprisoned relatives.

D. PARTY STRUCTURE

Penetrating Hizb ut-Tahrir's structure is difficult. Interviewees refuse to answer questions on 'organisational issues', and often do not understand the structure themselves. Nevertheless, what can be gleaned from researchers and security services suggests that the organisational structure is identical across the region, at least in theory. It relies on a cell structure akin to early Communist organisations, with strict internal discipline to avoid infiltration and maintain ideological purity.

At the lowest level members are organised in *daira* or *halka* (cells), normally of five members. The head of each cell – the *mushrif* – directs its members. At the district level or at the head of a large *mahalla*, or local neighbourhood committee (assuming there are several cells), the leader is termed a *Musa'id*, who organises activities through several assistants (*Nakib*). The regional representative (*Mu'tamad*) is appointed by the central political council (*Kiiadat*), of the international party, headed by the overall Amir of the party (since May 2003 the Palestinian, Ata Abu-l-Rushta).

On the basis of scant evidence, links between the international party and the local branches seem to be sporadic and ad hoc, rather than regularly organised. There is clearly some scope for local

branches to write their own leaflets, and make their own tactical decisions – when to distribute leaflets, and where, for example. Some of these members take the texts of leaflets off the website themselves and translate them on their own initiative. Ideological shifts, though, seem unlikely to come from below: moving far from the party's central ideology is likely to lead to expulsion.

At the local level, individual members usually create new cells by recruiting heavily from existing informal social networks, such as kinship and clan. They also use the close ties of the Uzbek minorities (in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) to expand the party in maximally safe ways.

The cell's leader is the only person who has access to the next cell in the organisation's structure. The result is a hierarchical or pyramid-like structure that is very decentralised. Members know few other members and so can betray little information about the organisation.

The leadership has seemingly remained elusive in some areas, with security services apparently able to penetrate only to the regional level. But a good part of the leadership is believed to have been arrested in Uzbekistan, and possibly in Tajikistan, while in Kyrgyzstan the police claim to have it under close observation. "Leaders? We know them all", claims one Kyrgyz police officer, rather unconvincingly.⁹⁷

Initially it seems likely that the Uzbek, Tajik and Kyrgyz sections of the party were part of one entity, based in Uzbekistan. There is certainly evidence that the Tajik branch was initiated and led from Tashkent.⁹⁸ There seems to be only limited cross-border links among members at the lower and middle level, although probably there is some cross-border traffic in books, leaflets, and money. Few members have much information on what is going on in other countries however, suggesting that any 'Central Asian network' is limited to the leadership, or more likely exists only on an ad hoc basis.

⁹⁷ ICG interview, Osh, February 2003.

⁹⁸ Court protocol No. 73, Sughd provincial court, 28 March 2003. The accusation claims that Tajik leaders of the organisation were subordinate to a certain 'Alisher', based in Tashkent, who appointed the leadership and arranged for delivery of literature and funding. This is of course court evidence and therefore not above suspicion.

It is not clear where leaflets are printed. In November 2002 Kyrgyz police seized a car carrying 5,000 leaflets, allegedly being delivered from Uzbekistan.⁹⁹ Most researchers tend to believe, however, that leaflets flow in the other direction, from the more open atmosphere of Osh and Jalal-Abad, into Uzbekistan.¹⁰⁰ Initially, literature seems to have gone from Uzbekistan into Tajikistan, but Tajik police claimed in 2002 to have discovered a small printing press used by the party, suggesting that production is localised where possible.¹⁰¹

Internal discipline is vital for this kind of party structure, and there is a range of punishments for members who break the rules, up to and including expulsion. 'If you commit *haram* (act forbidden by Islam) three times, then the members do not speak to you, won't meet you for three or six months', a member said. 'Although if you have some problems in that time, they'll come and help you'.¹⁰² Others suggest that punishments for offences not warranting expulsion include buying flour for the poor, or observing fasts.¹⁰³

Most operations are conducted in top-down fashion, with individual cells awaiting instructions before acting. However, it seems there is some scope for independent actions at the cell level. A member in Karasu admitted that in 2001 he and his fellow members had gone to the election booths and written on the bulletins "We will vote only for a Caliphate".¹⁰⁴ According to him: "We decided this ourselves, our group, but there was no command from above..."¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, other members have apparently had similar ideas. One in Aravan said: "At the elections we vote against everybody;

at the referendum our boys wrote: "We want a caliphate"."¹⁰⁶

Not all those involved in Hizb ut-Tahrir activities are necessarily full members. A *muyayit* is considered a sympathiser, but not an active member. According to a member:

a *muyayit* can agitate [on our behalf], but cannot explain everything. They speak to people, and then bring them to us. Or we can have lessons at a *muyayit*'s house, if for example, its impossible to do it at my place. They give us money. And generally help us, sometimes they give out leaflets for us...¹⁰⁷

These structures necessarily limit the extent to which Hizb ut-Tahrir can develop into a mass movement. But that is not necessarily its aim – it is effectively a small, elite vanguard designed to move Islamic societies towards an Islamic state. In the circumstances of Central Asia, the number of members may not be the most vital element. One activist said:

We don't call on people to join Hizb now, we explain to people what the Koran says, what we should do. It is not compulsory to be a member of Hizb, some aren't Hizb members, but all know Hizb ideas.... Not every Muslim should become a member of Hizb. But he should do as Allah orders. ...there are enough members of Hizb already.¹⁰⁸

All this organisation and printing of leaflets costs money, although probably not huge amounts. There is little information, however, on how the organisation is financed. The Kyrgyz security services know little but suspect that much financing is internal: from membership fees, though some money comes from outside. "It would be an exaggeration to say they received financing from international terrorist organisations", said one senior officer. Some suggest they have received financing from local businessmen, but there is no direct evidence to support this.¹⁰⁹ Another senior

⁹⁹ Kabar news agency, "Khalifat zhiv, V Kyrgyzskom Oshe perekhvacheni 5 tys. Listovok "Hizb ut-Tahrir", pribyvshykh iz Uzbekistana" [the Caliphate is alive, In Kyrgyz Osh 5,000 leaflets of Hizb ut-Tahrir have been seized, arriving from Uzbekistan], 12 November 2002.

¹⁰⁰ ICG interview, B. Babadjanov, Tashkent, May 2003.

¹⁰¹ Alexei Igushev, 'Hizb ut-Tahrir remains active in Central Asia', *Eurasianet Insight*, 2 April 2003, www.eurasianet.org.

¹⁰² ICG interview, Osh, February 2003.

¹⁰³ ICG interview, police officer, Karasu, Osh province, February, March 2003.

¹⁰⁴ ICG interview, Karasu, January 2003.

¹⁰⁵ ICG interviews, Hizb ut-Tahrir members, Osh, February 2003.

¹⁰⁶ ICG interview, January 2003.

¹⁰⁷ ICG interview, Hizb ut-Tahrir members, Osh, February 2003.

¹⁰⁸ ICG interview, Karasu, January 2003.

¹⁰⁹ An internet article [D. Khudjviri, 'Ostrovok demokratii prevrashchaetsya v ... ostrovok ekstremizma', www.centrasia.ru, 2 December 2002] accused Bayaman

officer claimed: “They seek sponsorship from local businessmen, and their leadership receives money. But they hide that from ordinary members, they may report that they spent money on recruitment, but the money stays in their pockets...”¹¹⁰

Some have suggested that Hizb ut-Tahrir is linked to criminal groups. In Tajikistan police officers claim that they are involved in criminal activities, including drugs and arms sales, and have been involved in racketeering.¹¹¹ There is little evidence for any of this, and most ordinary members seem a long way from this type of criminality, although some young people in Uzbekistan suggest that HT is becoming an alternative mafia at some bazaars.

No Hizb ut-Tahrir activities – essentially limited to distributing poor-quality leaflets and books – require massive financing. It is plausible, therefore, that a good proportion can be funded from the membership fees paid by those who work. Additional ad hoc payments from the international organisation are probably vital in the initial stages. It is also not clear how the transnational party is funded, although Muslim leaders in Britain have suggested that it has sources in the Gulf.¹¹²

Given the widespread illegal money-laundering and capital transfers that occur in Central Asia, it is not

Erkenbayev, a member of parliament and leading businessman in Kara-Suu, of financing the party. According to the same article, for some time in 2002, Erkenbayev reportedly owned a company in Jalal-Abad called ‘Bin-Laden’. In an interview with ICG, he denied any links to Hizb ut-Tahrir, and suggested that the article originated in Uzbek security service circles that were trying to undermine his cross-border business dealings. He claimed to be in favour of an Islamic state, although his concept of such a state seems to be limited to the addition of some elements of the *Sharia* to the constitution. ICG interview, Osh, 13 February 2003.

¹¹⁰ ICG interview, Jalal-Abad, December 2002.

¹¹¹ ICG interview, senior police officer, Dushanbe, February 2003.

¹¹² Dr Zaki Badawi, a well known Muslim cleric in the UK, says he thinks Gulf money is behind Hizb ut-Tahrir: ‘Not the Saudis, they dislike them, almost all the governments dislike them, because they are revolutionaries, saying all the regimes are illegitimate. But just as all roads lead to Rome, all finances lead to the Gulf. There are people in the Gulf who will encourage any radical movement, because they hate the regimes and they want to get at them, but they cannot do that openly, so they sponsor any movement that is anti-establishment’. Cited in Adam Lebor, *A Heart Turned East: Among the Muslims of Europe and America* (London, 1997), p. 145.

particularly difficult to arrange transfers of money into the region, even by legal means. During a court case in Sughd in 2003, police alleged that a party leader received regular bank payments of several thousand dollars from the U.S.

These transfers, however, may have become more difficult to arrange in the last year, or financing to the central party may have slowed. Several sources agreed that financing seemed to have diminished as evidenced by fewer leaflets printed and their lower quality. According to police sources, members admit financing has become more difficult.

E. ACTIVITIES

1. Propaganda

In Central Asia, Hizb ut-Tahrir works primarily through the dissemination of literature. Most commonly this involves unsuspecting residents finding a one-page leaflet left in their mailbox during the night. Most leaflets appear to be printed in Central Asia. Indeed, the poor quality of paper and type suggest production probably on home computers and copiers of low quality. Leaflets may be given out at the bazaar in some places – Kyrgyzstan, for example – although the overnight flyer is more common after there have been wide-scale arrests.

A large number of Hizb ut-Tahrir books have also spread throughout the region. These are believed to be imported. Most recently, the organisation has produced videocassettes, tape recordings, and CDs of leaders’ speeches and sermons. There is speculation that many of these materials were produced in the Middle East or Europe. Some are in Arabic but others are in Central Asian languages. Over 300 audiocassettes have been confiscated in Kyrgyzstan.¹¹³

The internet is Hizb ut-Tahrir’s main tool for disseminating its message around the world, in multiple languages. It is explicit in its desire to use modern technology to promote Islam. During the 1990s, Uzbek security services increased surveillance of electronic mail and blocked access to the party’s websites. Nevertheless, many computer users manage

¹¹³ ICG interview with Bolot Djanuzakov, Deputy Head of the Department on Defence and Security of the Presidential Administration, Bishkek, 15 January, 2003.

to access sites through other channels, and e-mail is difficult to block, although it is probably monitored to a certain extent.

Hizb ut-Tahrir tactics appear to be changing somewhat. There seems to have been internal objection to the reliance on leaflet distribution, which exposed members to serious risk. The number of leaflets and the level of distribution appears to have gone down significantly during 2002. One activist in southern Kyrgyzstan even said: 'Now we do not distribute leaflets. There are other ways. We have found more powerful ways than leaflets. The most powerful way is to walk around and talk to people...'¹¹⁴ In fact, leaflets are still distributed, on average one new one every couple of months, but otherwise there is little sign of public activity. It seems likely that the party will continue to work through informal conversations, which puts them at much less risk of arrest and allows them to put their case more fully to people.

2. Demonstrations

Another method that Hizb ut-Tahrir has pioneered has been demonstrations in defence of imprisoned members. All these have been by women, on the basis that police are much less likely to arrest or maltreat them than their menfolk.

The largest incidents have been in Uzbekistan. On 2 July 2001, about 400 mothers, sisters, and wives (some accompanied by young children) of Hizb ut-Tahrir prisoners protested in Tashkent and Andijan, demanding the government end abuse of the men. Approximately 40 to 50 women were arrested and beaten in Tashkent, about 30 in Andijan. Reports conflict whether all have been released.¹¹⁵ Similar demonstrations have continued in 2002 and 2003. On 7 March 2003 women attempted to lead apparently coordinated protest marches in several cities.

Small groups of women have also protested in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, where the governments have dealt with them more leniently. In March 2001, 150 women – many Hizb ut-Tahrir members, not just supporters – demonstrated in Karasu

district in Osh province where there is a particularly active group.¹¹⁶

Both the trials and the release of members have also been used for publicity. Trials are particularly useful theatre. In some countries Hizb ut-Tahrir statements at trials have been reproduced as part of the party's wider literature.¹¹⁷ According to a member from Kyrgyzstan (Karasu), more people showed up at his trial and then release than visited him on the birth of his children.¹¹⁸ Members claimed that several hundred persons attended the funeral of a member from Osh who died in prison. But whether this is really a sign of wider social support, or merely the solidarity of kinship groups and local neighbourhoods, is hard to ascertain.

3. Prison work

Work in prisons is also important for Hizb ut-Tahrir, both to support members who are incarcerated and to proselytise among other prisoners. In Kyrgyzstan this is done more or less openly:

We help those who are in prison, both our own [members] and other prisoners. We give money for cigarettes once a month; once or twice a year we give presents. For example, last Kurban-Ait we gave *plov* (traditional dish of rice and lamb) to all the cells; we made 35 kilograms. And this Kurban-Ait we passed cakes – every cell got one cake. And to our own [members] we send packages once or twice a month.¹¹⁹

In Uzbekistan such things are more difficult but the women's support network is probably used for deliveries. Many members claimed they have had considerable success inside prison converting ordinary criminals to Islam but there is little verifiable information.

¹¹⁴ ICG interview, Hizb ut-Tahrir member, Karasu, January 2003.

¹¹⁵ See Muslim Uzbekistan, www.caliphate.com/home/printable.php?DocumentID+1812 and IWPR, 15 July 2001.

¹¹⁶ ICG interview, police officer, Karasu district, Osh Province, Kyrgyzstan, April 2003.

¹¹⁷ There are several on the Hizb ut-Tahrir website. See for example the defence speech by a member in Turkey, before an Ankara court on 28 February 2001. Available at www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org

¹¹⁸ ICG interview with Hizb ut-Tahrir member, Karasu, Kyrgyzstan, January 2003.

¹¹⁹ ICG interview, Osh, February 2003.

This aspect also seems to be somewhat divergent from the general party line, which has tended to argue that there should only be ‘spiritual’ rewards for those who suffer in the name of the cause. The sense of solidarity represented by assistance to prisoners is an important part of the way the movement attracts and retains members in Central Asia but it seems to be somewhat specific to the region.

4. Violence?

In general, Hizb ut-Tahrir’s range of activities in Central Asia is rather limited. Being forced to work underground means that there is little it can do to engage the mass of the population. Leaflets only reach small numbers. In some ways, this gives the organisation an advantage: if there were an open political system, the probable failure to attract crowds like those seen in Jakarta to marches or demonstrations would show that there was very limited public support for the party’s ideas. While it remains underground, it can more easily persuade itself that the Caliphate may be just around the corner.

But there is obviously a danger of frustration building in the organisation if it makes no impact on the political system. Leaders point out that despite the intense repression that members have faced, there has been no resort to violence.¹²⁰ Indeed, there has never been a proven case of Hizb ut-Tahrir involvement in any violent or terrorist act in Central Asia, and none of the accusations of arms caches or violent activity stand up to scrutiny.¹²¹ Some government officials professed to believe that the very paucity of hard evidence is a sign of preparation for some potential armed activities. One highly-placed official said, “There have been no terrorist acts yet, but Hizb stores weapons, there are facts...”¹²².

¹²⁰ Dr Imran Waheed, Hizb ut-Tahrir (UK) spokesperson, 5 June 2003.

¹²¹ The government of Uzbekistan has claimed that Hizb ut-Tahrir was involved in a series of bombings in Tashkent in February 1999, which killed sixteen people. The evidence produced by the government was deeply flawed, and its version of the incident remains contested. Security forces frequently claim to find weapons or ammunition in the possession of members but few observers take these claims seriously.

¹²² ICG interview, Bishkek, January 2003. In 2002 Kyrgyz police claimed to discover an arms cache in the possession

Hardly anyone in the security services really believes that Hizb ut-Tahrir is an armed movement, although government officials are always quick to point to it or to the IMU whenever a criminal act is committed. Most Kyrgyz security officials ICG interviewed agreed no direct security threat emanates from the party. Even Uzbek officials pointed to a potential turn to violence rather than any current direct threat.

Nevertheless, given the vagueness of Hizb ut-Tahrir’s ideological commitment to non-violence, it would be surprising if there was not dissent among some members. Most follow the party line in interviews, insisting that they are opposed to violence, and there is little reason to doubt their sincerity. But occasionally there is a sense that some are frustrated by the policy of non-violence. N., a member from Osh, talked about the hated police: ‘Everybody says we are extremists. But if we were extremists, we would bury them [the police] alive’.¹²³ As he spoke, he was credible.

Dissatisfaction with non-violence was certainly present among some members who fled to Afghanistan. Among the sizeable documentation, including video and audio tapes found in the remains of the IMU camp, was a short memoir written by a former member of Hizb ut-Tahrir from Uzbekistan who had fled in 1999 and ended up with the IMU. It strongly denounced Hizb ut-Tahrir non-violence, claiming the party was “throwing in the fire many worthy young Muslims”, each of which could have been a “loyal and worthy fighter for Islam”.¹²⁴

of a Hizb ut-Tahrir member in Arslanbob, including three grenades, 48 pistols, and 240 bullets. Hizb ut-Tahrir denied that it had anything to do with the arms, and the case was not proven. Apart from this, the only other arms found during arrests of members in Kyrgyzstan in 2002-03 were 44 bullets ‘discovered’ during an arrest in Kara-Su. According to human rights activists, police themselves admitted to the arrested man that they had put them there. When the mother of the arrested man attempted to throw the bullets in the toilet, police officers protested, admitting that they had to return them to the police armory from which they had originally taken them. ICG interviews, Osh, April 2003.

¹²³ ICG interview, Osh, April 2003.

¹²⁴ His story is entitled *Nur topdim – bermaiman* (I found the light – I will not let it go), and was published by the IMU in August 2001. The manuscripts and documents were found by a U.S. journalist, and many of them,

5. Shahadat (Martyrdom)

Following the funeral of a Hizb ut-Tahrir member in Osh who died in prison from tuberculosis, his death was celebrated as that of a martyr. Some 400 people apparently attended. One said later: "I have no doubt that any one of us would give up his life. If the choice was my faith or life, I would choose my faith. Another said, 'It is better to die, than to live like this'.¹²⁵

The theme of martyrdom seems to have become fashionable in Hizb ut-Tahrir circles. At its most extreme, it was expressed by a member in Osh:

It's better to go to Palestine, take a grenade, and blow it up. That's how to act against Jews. [ICG: Do you want to go to Palestine?]. Yes, I want to become a martyr.¹²⁶

Not all members have this view. Another said, 'its not right, blowing yourself up, like in Palestine, we have a different aim'.¹²⁷ This confusion over martyrdom is symptomatic of the wider party ideology, which although theoretically opposed to such actions, is rhetorically sympathetic.

Others saw potential for martyrdom in their own countries, but in a different way:

Life Allah himself takes away. There are many martyrs now. My dream is to become a martyr – they kill our boys in prison. To die in the hands of the enemy is the greatest dream.¹²⁸

Much of this is pure bravado. Most members are extremely circumspect and do not admit their membership to people they do not trust. Nevertheless, there are reports of members almost courting arrest by openly distributing leaflets or talking incautiously to fellow-workers about their beliefs. A scholar witnessed the arrest of a member in Tashkent:

including this document, were studied by Uzbek scholar B. Babadjanov.

¹²⁵ ICG interviews, Osh, February 2003. Several members also said they wanted to go and fight in Iraq against U.S. forces but a lot of this seems to have been brave statements to impress interviewers rather than any serious intent.

¹²⁶ ICG interview, Osh, April 2003.

¹²⁷ ICG interview, Osh, April 2003.

¹²⁸ ICG interview, Karasu, Osh province, April 2003

In September 2001 I witnessed the arrest of a young man aged 22 at Chorsu market for distributing Hizb ut-Tahrir leaflets. The police started to beat him up in front of the crowd. The police warned anybody who tried to intervene that they would get in trouble too. The boy, however, remained surprisingly calm and constantly shouted 'Allah Akbar'. He also managed to shout out an obviously recited phrase: 'Wake up Brothers! Depose this unbelieving Jew Karimov and elect a Caliph from amongst yourselves'.¹²⁹

This kind of behaviour is interpreted by members as a form of martyrdom, but it is not clear if it is a specific policy or a personal choice. There have been no cases, however, of suicide bombings or other forms of violent martyrdom among Hizb ut-Tahrir members, and there is little likelihood of the party moving in that direction given its ideological background and historical record.

F. WHAT HIZB UT-TAHRIR WANTS

Hizb ut-Tahrir's agenda in Central Asia largely reflects the broader goals and methodology of the party's international network. Its literature in the region makes the same two central demands: creation of an Islamic society and establishment of an Islamic state, the Caliphate. The Central Asian branches closely model their materials on the central party's agenda, reproducing faithfully its proclamations, along with those from other countries of interest. But they also issue their own leaflets that reflect the party's specific agenda in Central Asia.

The global leaflets are in the Kyrgyz, Uzbek and Tajik languages and distributed as widely as possible. Typical is a leaflet, apparently from the Kuwait section of the party, against the U.S. military deployment in the Gulf, issued in January 2003.¹³⁰ More have followed about Iraq, which seems to have struck a chord in Central Asia. Other typical themes include a call to defend Palestine from its Israeli occupiers and strong criticism of the

¹²⁹ ICG interview, B. Babadjanov, May 2003.

¹³⁰ Hizb ut-Tahrir, 'Amerikaning oshkora tazhovuzi karshisida musulmon hokimlarining bir-birlarini khorlarcha yordamsiz tashlab kuiishlari' [The despicable submission of the rulers before the open American aggression], Kuwait, 29 January 2003.

U.S. occupation of Iraq. All these leaflets are also published on Hizb ut-Tahrir's websites, from where local groups seem to take them and translate them.¹³¹

Some of the more abstract global issues sometimes seem far from the everyday concerns of many Muslims in Central Asia. The Palestinian issue, for example, has much less resonance than in Arab countries. This attitude may have changed somewhat during the war in Iraq, when widespread opposition had little opportunity for expression. In Uzbekistan, in particular, the government's support for the war did not permit any criticism to be voiced, despite the objections of an apparently overwhelming majority to U.S. military action. Under such conditions of censorship, any group that put out material critical of the war was bound to find a ready audience.

The second category of leaflet links global and ideological concerns to local issues. It is not clear how themes are chosen for such leaflets but they probably arise naturally in discussions among the leadership in reaction to local events. Only some of these leaflets appear subsequently on Hizb ut-Tahrir websites, and it is not clear whether there is a process of clearance with the central leadership.¹³²

The leaflets discuss poverty, unemployment, and difficult social conditions of Central Asians. This attempt to manipulate popular dissatisfaction with government policies is part of the party's general philosophy. Taqiuddin an-Nabhani wrote that:

The success of a collective movement is measured by its ability to instigate resentment among the masses and to extort them to express their resentment each time the regime undermines or manipulates their ideology according to its own whims and interests...¹³³

¹³¹ ICG interview, Osh, April 2003.

¹³² It is not clear if these leaflets are cleared with the central leadership. In the UK a representative says that local parties are free to compose their own leaflets as long as they do not go against the central tenets of the party's ideology. ICG interview, Dr Imran Waheed, 5 June 2003, London.

¹³³ Taqiuddin an-Nabhani, *Structuring of a Party*, Al-Khilafah Publications (London, 2001), translation from Arabic of Attakattul el-Hizbi, pp. 24-25.

In Uzbekistan a leaflet in October 2002 focused on the results of President Karimov's restrictive policy against bazaar traders, which has had a profound impact on most of the population.¹³⁴ In Tajikistan a recent leaflet dealt with a range of socio-economic problems including those of migrants to Russia, land mines on Tajikistan's border with Uzbekistan, gas and electricity supplies, and corruption of government officials:

All government officials, starting with the president, compete with each other in building grandiose multi-storey houses and dachas, and travel in the most fashionable cars.¹³⁵

This type of complaint, common among ordinary people but rarely visible in the highly censored media, probably has more impact than any global or ideological calls. As a religious leader in Tajikistan generally opposed to Hizb ut-Tahrir admitted: 'You might not like them, but you can't deny they are the only people telling the truth about Tajikistan'.¹³⁶

President Karimov of Uzbekistan is a frequent target. The messages brand his rule as 'tyranny of the Jew' and consistently demand his removal. A recent leaflet harped on Karimov and his persecution of Muslims, stating that 'Jews control the MVD and SNB (security agencies), and pursue Hizb ut-Tahrir members, their homes, relatives, neighbours, and family members'. A frequent theme is that when Karimov is overthrown, Muslims will be free to live under the justice of the Caliphate. One leaflet states:

We ask the Almighty, that he carry away all our troubles, defend us, destroy the Jew Karimov, and his comrades in arms, and call us all from the darkness of the tunnel to the light,

¹³⁴ Hizb ut-Tahrir, 'Karimov karorlari Uzbekistondagi musulmon xalqin yanchib tashlash uchun chikarilgan kurollar jumlasidandir' [The laws of Karimov are weapons for repressing the Muslims of Uzbekistan], 4 October 2002. See ICG Asia Report No. 46, *Uzbekistan's Economic Reforms: Illusion or Reality?* 18 February 2003.

¹³⁵ Hizb ut-Tahrir (Tajikistan), 'Muborizai hukumati Tojikiston bar ziddi ahli da'vat' ['The struggle of the Government of Tajikistan against the chosen people'], 3 March 2003.

¹³⁶ ICG interview, Dushanbe, April 2003.

and unite us all under the flag of the holy Islamic Caliphate. We hope only in this.¹³⁷

There are rarely any purely religious themes in leaflets: all religious issues are related to overarching political questions. One common theme is the incorrectness of certain Central Asian religious traditions from Hizb ut-Tahrir's view of Islam. Navruz, the ancient Zoroastrian holiday that is celebrated at the beginning of spring in Afghanistan, Iran and Central Asia, is widely but falsely believed by many Central Asians to be a Muslim holiday. Hizb ut-Tahrir's leaflet says: 'Navruz is the holiday of the unbelievers and pagans...Muslims! How long will your rulers, servants of unbelievers, force you to celebrate the holidays of the unbelievers?'¹³⁸ Of course, little of this has any impact on wider society, which continues to celebrate any holiday it can.¹³⁹

Other local propaganda in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan has focused on repression by security forces. One leaflet in February 2003 was devoted to the death of a Hizb ut-Tahrir member, Ubaidullo Tukhtasin, in prison on 31 January 2003, who was declared a *shahid* (martyr).¹⁴⁰ In Uzbekistan Hizb ut-Tahrir often publicises the arrests of members or asks human rights groups to intervene on behalf of members. A typical call "to human rights organisations" requested investigation of the suspicious disappearance of two members after their arrest on 6 August 2002. Human rights groups often assist in such cases, although the text of the Hizb ut-Tahrir appeal expresses some scepticism: 'Why do [human rights groups] exist? To defend all people independent of their religion, race and nationality, or to defend the rights of everybody except Muslims?'¹⁴¹

The defence of prisoners in Uzbekistan has also become an international issue for the party, which mounted a campaign in London in 2003 highlighting human rights abuses there.¹⁴²

There is, of course, a much wider range of theoretical literature, 'adopted' by Hizb ut-Tahrir, much of it published in local languages, but little of this is apparently read by local members, at least at the lowest level.¹⁴³ Although the party claims to work in the sphere of ideas, it would be wrong to consider it an intellectual movement. Most members are reasonably well educated, but essentially simple folk, with only limited inclination to read major theoretical works on Islamic concepts. Much of the education many received came orally from their teachers, and their discussions are fairly simplistic, within the bounds of what they have been taught. This limits the possibility for intellectual 'dialogue' with Hizb ut-Tahrir. Indeed, most members show no interest in real discussion of their ideas and appear for the most part incapable of moving beyond their very narrow worldview.

¹³⁷ Hizb ut-Tahrir, "Muborak iidi Ramazon tabrigi" [Congratulations with blessed Ramadan], 5 December 2002.

¹³⁸ Hizb ut-Tahrir, 'Navruz kimning bairami?' [Whose holiday is Navruz?], Kyrgyzstan, 20 March 2003.

¹³⁹ In similar vein, a leaflet issued in March 2003 in Kyrgyzstan inveighed against International Women's Day, widely celebrated in the former Soviet Union on 8 March. According to one member: 'Klara Tsetkin invented the 8 March holiday, but she herself was a prostitute'. ICG interview, Osh, April 2003.

¹⁴⁰ Hizb ut-Tahrir, 'Dikkat shahid!' [Attention, Martyr!], 5 February 2003, Kyrgyzstan.

¹⁴¹ Hizb ut-Tahrir (Uzbekistan), "Obshchestvenym organizatsiyam po pravam cheloveka" [To Human Rights Organisations], 7 February 2003, reprinted in Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, "Ezgulik", Informatsionnyi

biulleten [Information Bulletin], March (No. 8), 2003, Namangan.

¹⁴² See www.1924.org.

¹⁴³ This has been noted by ICG researchers and others. The Uzbek scholar B. Babadjanov says: 'Some of my interviews with Hizb ut-Tahrir members left me at a dead end: I carefully prepared for such meetings, conscientiously reading their literature and leaflets and on that basis formed a series of questions for my interviewees. However, I could never receive a coherent answer, and if I could get an answer, interviewees relied, not on a particular piece of party literature, but on the opinion, for example, of *mushrifs*. They were pleasantly surprised by my knowledge'. ICG interview, Tashkent, May 2003.

IV. THE IMPACT

The impact of this relatively small political group on wider society is difficult to assess. Hizb ut-Tahrir claims wide success in spreading its ideas and influence through society. Many others assert that the party's influence is minimal and shrinking.

Most extensive is probably the sympathy Hizb ut-Tahrir members gain as victims of unpopular repressive regimes. As dissatisfaction with the Uzbek government has mounted, sympathy for Hizb ut-Tahrir has increased.¹⁴⁴ Attempts by the authorities to isolate families of party members apparently had some initial success but the impact of this social ostracism seems to have faded. Relatives of members in Uzbekistan recall the fatwa of the Muftiate that called on neighbours to shun them. 'There was a time when that had some effect', recalls one father. 'But now they come and help me when I have problems'.¹⁴⁵

This kind of support is largely a show of solidarity against a widely disliked regime and particularly against brutal, unpopular police. There is much less evidence that it reflects real political support, though party members sometimes claim otherwise.

Views about the depth of support are also mixed in Kyrgyzstan. Members naturally claim growing public backing. One said: 'Everybody takes leaflets freely now. It's rare for someone to give a leaflet in to the police – sometimes they sell them for vodka'.¹⁴⁶ Another claimed: 'Before when people heard about the Caliphate, they were afraid. But now they say "I wish the Caliphate would come sooner"'.¹⁴⁷ Police generally deny there is widespread public support for the movement, although they often encounter resistance from neighbours and relatives when they attempt an arrest, particularly in tight-knit Uzbek communities. They face significant problems finding witnesses prepared to testify in court against Hizb ut-Tahrir members.¹⁴⁸ Again, however, this may be more the result of solidarity against a perceived common enemy – the police – than evidence of genuine commitment.

Some public support comes from the authority that a few Hizb ut-Tahrir leaders gain in the community, particularly if they combine piety with moral influence and business enterprise. A policeman said:

When Mulodjanov was arrested, they said to us: he came here to live, gave a lot of people here work, opened an ice-cream factory and a teashop – now there are no drunkards here, young people don't smoke hashish, he gave twenty people work.¹⁴⁹

'I don't know anything about Hizb ut-Tahrir', said a relative of an Osh member, 'but I know people who were drug addicts, and have become good people'.¹⁵⁰

This impression of the party as a movement that improves society by helping with personal problems seems limited to a small part of the population who have experienced this impact directly. It is also not encouraged by Hizb ut-Tahrir, which scorns charitable or social work as a distraction from the political struggle. For most people, especially ethnic Kyrgyz in southern Kyrgyzstan, Hizb ut-Tahrir is akin to a strange religious sect, far from the realities of everyday life and with no real influence on their thinking.

Instances of passive support do not demonstrate significant backing for the party's political goals. There is very little evidence of popular commitment to an Islamic state in the sense that Hizb ut-Tahrir advocates in any Central Asian country. There may be limited support for some elements of *Sharia* in more conservative areas but this is generally limited to strictures against what is seen as a decline in morality, calls for legalisation of polygamy, or coordination of traditional rituals and state requirements in issues such as marriage.

In many countries, Hizb ut-Tahrir has focused on opinion makers in an attempt to impact on policy. In Central Asia, at least, this has met with little success. Although members like to claim they have access to highly placed officials from time to time, the reality is rather less inspiring. One said:

¹⁴⁴ ICG interviews with Ezgulik leader Ahmad Adbullaev in Namangan, Uzbekistan, 9 January 2003.

¹⁴⁵ ICG interview, Fergan province, April 2003.

¹⁴⁶ ICG interview, Aravan, February 2003.

¹⁴⁷ ICG interview, Osh, 2003.

¹⁴⁸ ICG interviews, police officers, Karasu, April 2003.

¹⁴⁹ ICG interview, senior police officer, Jalal-Abad, March 2003. Mulodjanov is the alleged Hizb ut-Tahrir leader in Arslanbob, in southern Kyrgyzstan.

¹⁵⁰ ICG interview, Osh, April 2003.

I have talked [about Hizb ut-Tahrir] to the chairman of our village council, the chairman of the *mahalla* [local neighbourhood] committee, the director of our school. I knew one important person, and now I go to see him once a month. If he has people with him, he says to them: do you want to meet a Hizb? Have you ever seen a Hizb? And then I talk. He has a good opinion of Hizb ut-Tahrir. He just says, we are rushing things...¹⁵¹

Members are particularly fond of claiming sympathisers among the security structures. One said: 'The head of the prison said to us, "You really say the right things, but why don't you say this to Akayev? Does Akayev know about this?"'¹⁵² Another claimed some police refuse to arrest members.¹⁵³ Some policemen do seem more sympathetic, or at least wary of taking excessive measures for fear of adverse reaction from the community. One Uzbek policeman told ICG:

They say to us: 'If you continue to persecute us, when you die nobody will come to your funeral.' That would be shameful for us...If you struggle against them too hard, the imam won't come to your house.¹⁵⁴

But most interviewees in the security forces treat Hizb ut-Tahrir with a large degree of contempt, and see it as a fringe group posing little or no threat. Members themselves do not attempt to infiltrate state structures. They say they are not allowed to work in the police, the security structures, or in local government – 'anywhere where the Constitution functions strongly', as one put it.¹⁵⁵ Without real support among the authorities, and having little impact on wider thinking in society, Hizb ut-Tahrir on its own seems destined to have only limited impact on Central Asia. The key questions may relate to its potential to spawn other, more violent groups or to act in alliance with armed Islamist organisations.

V. THE ISLAMIST MOVEMENT

A. DIVISIONS INSIDE HIZB UT-TAHRIR

Despite its fairly authoritarian structures, disputes and divisions clearly have emerged from time to time within the party in Central Asia. These have primarily revolved around tactics.

Not all divisions have necessarily been about the desirability of more radical actions. Babiyar Babadjanov researched one splinter group, the so-called Akramiyah, founded by Akram Yuldashev in 1996 in Andijan. Although he retained much Hizb ut-Tahrir thinking, including the commitment to 'intellectual' rather than 'violent' struggle, Yuldashev attempted to adapt the tactics to the specific conditions of Central Asia, notably the Ferghana Valley. He pursued the idea of small Islamic community development, with members joining together to establish small industrial or agricultural enterprises. Common funds were formed that were distributed to members or sympathisers in need. This kind of socio-economic program seems to have been particularly effective in the difficult economic conditions of the Ferghana Valley and also to have mirrored people's desire for reconstituted communities in an era of rapid social change.¹⁵⁶

Some have suggested that a more radical group could emerge from Hizb ut-Tahrir. In 1999 in Uzbekistan a fairly significant group from the Tashkent branch set up its own party, Hizb-an-Nusra (Party of Victory). The details are not entirely clear, but it seems to have been dissatisfied with the propaganda method of political struggle, which had led to the arrest of a significant proportion of the younger membership, but it may also have been ready for more violent methods.¹⁵⁷

Some do seem to find the distribution of leaflets too dangerous, or pointless. One said:

¹⁵¹ ICG interview with Hizb ut-Tahrir member, Osh, February 2003.

¹⁵² ICG interview, Osh, April 2003.

¹⁵³ ICG interview, Aravan, February 2003.

¹⁵⁴ ICG interview, Jalal-Abad, December 2002.

¹⁵⁵ ICG interview, Osh, April 2003.

¹⁵⁶ Similar economic 'solidarity groups' have been observed by ICG in southern Kyrgyzstan among Wahhabi communities. They essentially consist of simple credit unions, with provision for members to work together in collective enterprises.

¹⁵⁷ See Bakhtiyar Babadzhonov, 'O deyatelnosti Hizb ut-Tahrir al-islami v Uzbekistane' [On the activities of Hizb ut-Tahrir al-islami in Uzbekistan], in Malashenko and Olcott (Eds.), *Islam*, pp. 164-165.

I even tried to object to the leadership...: why do they separate themselves from people, why do they call themselves 'Hizb'... why do they give out leaflets? But then they explained to me, that in the Koran there is a verse: 'From the Muslims will emerge one *ummah*, which will call itself as it likes, and will say, what is good, and what is bad'.¹⁵⁸

The potential for splits and breakaway groups should not be exaggerated. One of the interesting features of Hizb ut-Tahrir is how few seem to leave once they have joined. Most police officers interviewed for this report could only recall the occasional instance. One member did admit that sometimes people did leave or were expelled: 'Only the weak leave Hizb ut-Tahrir. If somebody breaks their oath – they expel him, and do not give him any tasks. They don't trust him'.¹⁵⁹ A member of five years' standing could only think of three cases:

One had a drunken father, who hated us... whenever we prayed he would always throw us out, he put pressure on his son, went to the police. And the son could not withstand the pressure of his father, and left Hizb ut-Tahrir. The second who left was persuaded to leave by the police. The third – he went mad in the police detention centre and became an informer. ...When he came out of prison, he still hung around us, but started smoking drugs.¹⁶⁰

This level of commitment seems to be only partly the result of ideology. Some suggest that there are punishments for those who leave, but there is no real evidence of what these might entail. More likely, group psychology plays a major role. The close ties that build up among members provide an important alternative community for many members, who often feel that they have lost close ties in society in some way. Frequently members seem to become cut off from their former friends, and sometimes relatives.¹⁶¹ Returning to the wider society is probably very difficult. Hizb ut-Tahrir groups themselves often

seem to encourage this break with society, at least in the initial stages of membership.

Regardless of the reasons, this attachment to the organisation means that the prospect of a significant split from below is fairly unlikely. Small groups may break away, but it seems probable that only a serious change in tactics from above would affect the group's attitudes. Hizb ut-Tahrir is unlikely to fade away, although it may also grow little. It could become fairly stagnant, with declining influence, which might encourage some members to reconsider its tactics and adopt a more radical stance.

B. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE IMU, THE IRP AND HIZB UT-TAHRIR

One option for Hizb ut-Tahrir to expand its influence is to join with other groups that have similar aims but different tactics. As noted above, there is ambivalence in its ideology about working with others, but the potential is clearly there and justified by the vague concept of appealing for outside assistance, or *nusrat*. However, the party has always rejected other Islamist movements as not following the correct tactics. The founder, Taquiuddin an-Nabhani, wrote, 'Not a single correct structure, that aimed at the revival of the *ummah*, was established in any of the Islamic countries during the past century'.¹⁶² But this has not stopped cooperation in certain circumstances, and given the frequent assertions by governments in the region that Hizb ut-Tahrir is merely one face of a united armed Islamist movement, it is important to explore whether these links exist and what potential there is for them to develop.

The only other significant Islamist movements in Central Asia have been the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) in Tajikistan and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).¹⁶³ The IRP moved from being an armed opposition during the Tajik civil war to a legal party taking part peacefully in the constitutional process. The IMU, however, increasingly became part of the international militant Islamist movement linked to the Taliban in Afghanistan and operated from

¹⁵⁸ ICG interview, Osh, March 2003.

¹⁵⁹ ICG interview, Aravan, March 2003.

¹⁶⁰ ICG interview, Aravan, January 2003.

¹⁶¹ There are frequent reports of Hizb ut-Tahrir members being in conflict with their parents over membership. Others say their parents are happy that at least they are not involved in drugs or crime.

¹⁶² An-Nabhani, *Structuring of a Party*, op. cit., p. 19.

¹⁶³ A wide range of smaller groups appeared in Uzbekistan in the early 1990s. Most have disappeared, either because of government repression, or because members left to join the IMU.

military bases, initially in Tajikistan and later in Afghanistan.

The IMU has received the most international attention in recent years, especially since its dramatic, if unsuccessful, military incursions into southern Kyrgyzstan in August 1999 and August 2000 shocked the region and exposed the weakness of Central Asian militaries. It was a guerrilla-like movement of perhaps 3,000 fighters that sought political and religious ends through force. Its bases and much of its organisation were destroyed during the U.S.-led military intervention in Afghanistan in 2001.¹⁶⁴

The relationship between Hizb ut-Tahrir and the two groups is very different. The party is largely hostile to the IRP, accusing it of 'selling out', by accepting the peace agreement and taking up posts in the government. Its attitude was summed up in a recent leaflet:

Although Islam never makes peace with *kufir* [unbelievers], the leader of the IRP, A. Nuri, not possessing adequate level of religious and political knowledge, in exchange for several [government] positions, made peace with the government of Tajikistan. As a result the government paralysed this movement. The party became a toy, acting only in the interests of the government.¹⁶⁵

This tension between the IRP and the Hizb ut-Tahrir is mutual, especially at leadership level. Some ordinary members are more sympathetic, partly because of their own criticism of the IRP's stance. But there seems almost no chance of any alliance between the two groups: the IRP is intent largely on survival in the increasingly intolerant Tajik political system and avoids any possible connotation of links to more radical movements.

The relationship with the IMU is more interesting. There have been several unconfirmed reports of meetings between Hizb ut-Tahrir leaders and those of the IMU and the Taliban. The supposed substance of these meetings is uncertain. The leader

of Hizb ut-Tahrir (Indonesia), Ismail Yusanto, claims that the party discussed with Taliban leader Mullah Omar the idea of his leading the movement for a caliphate, but that he was not interested in anything but Afghanistan.¹⁶⁶

Whether this might have led to some cooperation if there had been no intervention in Afghanistan is difficult to ascertain. A representative in London noted that there would be little point asking the IMU for assistance, since it did not have significant military capabilities.¹⁶⁷ After the fiasco of the IMU's armed interventions in Kyrgyzstan, it seems likely that Hizb ut-Tahrir concluded there was little to gain and much to lose from an alliance with such an incompetent fighting force.

There are also considerable theological differences between Hizb ut-Tahrir and the wider neo-Wahhabi philosophy shared by the Taliban, al-Qaeda and similar groups. Little love is lost between Wahhabis in Central Asia and their HT 'brothers'. They reject each other as profoundly wrong on fundamental theological questions, notably the acceptance of certain *hadith* (sayings attributed to the Prophet Mohammed). The main anti-Hizb ut-Tahrir website is Wahhabi-run, praises the Taliban, and rejects Hizb ut-Tahrir as 'secular modernists'.¹⁶⁸

Nevertheless, the ideological basis of the IMU, ostensibly part of the wider Taliban-led forces in Afghanistan, was not always so clear-cut, and its documents demonstrate considerable sympathy with and admiration towards the Hizb ut-Tahrir, although there is evidence of frustration with its refusal to take up arms against the government. IMU documents contain no significant critiques of Hizb ut-Tahrir, though in notes on the party's activities, IMU officials frequently object to its peaceful tactics, asserting that 'we have to talk to the government in the only language they understand'.¹⁶⁹

The attitudes towards the IMU of ordinary Hizb ut-Tahrir members in Central Asia are interesting and

¹⁶⁴ For more detail, see ICG briefing, *The IMU and the Hizb ut-Tahrir: Implications of the Afghanistan Campaign*, 30 January 2002.

¹⁶⁵ Hizb ut-Tahrir (Tajikistan), 'Muborizai hukumati Tojikiston bar ziddi ahli da'vat' ['The struggle of the Government of Tajikistan against the chosen people'], 3 March 2003.

¹⁶⁶ 'Tidak Harus Hizbut Tahrir yang Mendirikan Khilafah', *Suara Hidayatullah*, Vol.15, No.6, October 2002.

¹⁶⁷ ICG interview, Dr Imran Waheeb, Hizb ut-Tahrir (UK) spokesperson, 5 June 2003, London.

¹⁶⁸ See the articles at www.htexposed.com. The site links to www.islamuncovered.com, a popular pro-al-Qaida website.

¹⁶⁹ These conclusions are based on IMU documents analysed by B. Babajanov, and also viewed by ICG.

slightly ambiguous, as an excerpt from an ICG interview with a HT member demonstrates:

- ICG: What do you think of the IMU?
HT: They are our brothers
ICG: Do you support them?
HT: Yes, I support anyone who supports Allah.
ICG: They want to overthrow the government.
HT: Ah, I don't support that...¹⁷⁰

potential for future alliances with other groups may depend on whether some emerge in the future from the ranks of the IMU and possibly from other disaffected groups within Central Asian society.

Another long-standing member was less equivocal: 'Everywhere people want to build Islam. The IMU – I also consider them brothers, the Taliban, Wahhabis, are also brothers... But they don't have a program'.¹⁷¹

Others were more openly against the IMU. 'We have nothing in common with the IMU, we condemn them. ...they also read the Koran, but they have different views. We need to prepare people towards the Caliphate'.¹⁷² But it is important to point out that most members have little knowledge of the wider Islamist movement. Asked what he thought of the Wahhabi movement, a member admitted he had only read about it in an encyclopaedia.¹⁷³

The differences in tactics seem too great to overcome at the lower level, without significant ideological manoeuvring on the part of the transnational leadership. Given the serious damage caused to IMU capabilities by the U.S.-led intervention in Afghanistan, it is unlikely that a serious alliance would be particularly useful to the Hizb ut-Tahrir. The party's insistence that any military action should be carried out only when there is a chance of success, and its general opposition to terrorism, seems genuine. It does seem possible though that at least a part of Hizb ut-Tahrir, particularly in Uzbekistan, might respond to a call for more radical measures, but at present it probably has more to lose than to gain from such a move.

Overall, there is no evidence of significant organisational or ideological links with the IMU, beyond some possibly desultory contacts during the Taliban era in Afghanistan. Whether there is any

¹⁷⁰ ICG interview, Osh, April 2003.

¹⁷¹ ICG interview, Karasu, Osh Province, April 2003.

¹⁷² ICG interview, Jalal-Abad, April 2003.

¹⁷³ ICG interview, Karasu, Osh province, April 2003.

VI. STATE RESPONSES

The evidence suggests that Hizb ut-Tahrir is far from presenting a present-day threat to the stability of the Central Asian states in any direct sense. There is no evidence that it has any military capabilities, only limited evidence that it would even contemplate a call to arms under present conditions, and no evidence that it has significant support in structures such as the army, which could be used in pursuit of its goals.

Instead it is a relatively small, radical group, with little influence on wider society and almost none on opinion-makers in present political systems, whose ideas have gained little acceptance outside the ranks of marginalised young men. Why then are Central Asian governments so afraid of it?

There is a good reason, and a bad one. The good reason to be afraid is that Hizb ut-Tahrir has developed a following of thousands of young men who are committed to overthrowing regional governments and establishing an Islamist order. They are highly ideological, psychologically manipulated, and vulnerable to more radical instructions from above.

Although they have so far proved resistant to calls from other groups to join an armed struggle, such a development cannot be excluded. It is unlikely, for the reasons outlined above, but not impossible, and so it is understandable that governments wish to control the group and ensure that it does not expand significantly or gain wider social support. They should also be concerned to avoid the kind of radicalisation of its members discussed above.

The bad reason to emphasise fear of the party is that its existence is useful for regimes trying to maintain authoritarian systems in an environment of international pressure for reform. Where systems are built around the existence of internal and external enemies, it is difficult to move forward without undermining the very basis of the system itself. All the countries of the region are prone to use the 'Islamic threat' as a justification for overgrown security forces, lack of democracy and restrictions on freedom of expression. Too often Hizb ut-Tahrir is a useful excuse to avoid challenging the status quo. Too often Western governments, caught up in a global 'war on terror' take such an excuse at face value.

There is much more of a danger that the kind of policies governments have adopted will themselves contribute to the growth and radicalisation of the organisation, and in doing so unwittingly expand its influence from the margins to the centre.

A. UZBEKISTAN

The Uzbek regime first began targeting Hizb ut-Tahrir in 1997, although it was a little known organisation compared with the militant Islamist groups that the government claimed were operating at the time in the Ferghana Valley. Mass arrests began in 1998 and were followed by major show trials, primarily in Tashkent and the Ferghana Valley. These were almost always characterised by confessions, most likely forced through torture.

After the assassination attempt on President Karimov in February 1999, which the Uzbek government blamed on 'Islamic terrorists', including Hizb ut-Tahrir, arrests dramatically escalated again. The party itself claims that more than 8,000 of its members were arrested at one time or another during this period.¹⁷⁴ The Uzbek security services claim that 4,200 were still in prison in 2002.¹⁷⁵ The Independent Organisation for Human Rights in Uzbekistan puts the total of political prisoners at that time at 7,600, of which 7,400 were 'religious' prisoners, and 4,200 members of Hizb ut-Tahrir.¹⁷⁶

Particularly in the late 1990s, courts dealt out extremely long sentences – fifteen to twenty years in prison – for members, who often were convicted on the flimsiest of evidence. Since 2001, these terms have fallen somewhat. In recent cases, activists have received about nine to twelve years.¹⁷⁷ Those convicted are charged with anti-constitutional activities, inciting religious hatred, and attempted overthrow of the state.

¹⁷⁴ Hizb ut-Tahrir (Tajikistan), 'Muborizai hukumati Tojikiston bar ziddi ahli da'vat,' ['The struggle of the Government of Tajikistan against the chosen people'], 3 March 2003.

¹⁷⁵ Galina Bukharbaeva, 'Uzbekistan: Islamic Group Driven Underground', IWPR, 7 August 2002.

¹⁷⁶ ICG Interview with Mikhail Ardzinov, head of Independent Human Rights Organisation of Uzbekistan, January 2003. This does not take into account releases under the amnesty of December 2002.

¹⁷⁷ BBC, 'Uzbeks Imprisoned for Religious Activities', 5 October 2001

Increasingly damaging to the Uzbek government's international reputation is its treatment of prisoners, especially religious prisoners. Multiple reports have emerged of the common and even systematic use of torture by the police and security services to terrorise and dehumanise the latter. There is a regular lack of food and water, and intense overcrowding for all. Conditions are generally far worse for Hizb ut-Tahrir members than for ordinary prisoners.

1. A Change in Policy Since 9/11?

Significant international pressure on Uzbekistan during 2002 to improve its human rights record had some limited success. The number of arrests fell somewhat, although hundreds were still detained. Two human rights groups were registered, allowing them to work legally. In two cases, policemen and security service officials were imprisoned for murdering Hizb ut-Tahrir members in their custody. Nevertheless, much of the change was cosmetic, and the progress does not seem to have continued into 2003.

In November 2002, the Uzbek government finally agreed under U.S. pressure to admit the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture into its prisons.¹⁷⁸ The resulting report was damning and corroborated statements by Human Rights Watch, which has documented arrests, extensive pre-trial torture, falsified trials, and prison conditions. According to Human Rights Watch:

Religious prisoners arrested and tried during the campaign's earlier years continue through the present to suffer torture and persecution as they serve out their prison sentences. In 2002 prison officials beat and raped Muslim prisoners to force pious men to renounce their faith and beg forgiveness, in part a dark consequence of the amnesty process. Local activists and former prisoners themselves testified that prison officials routinely demanded that prisoners disavow their religious beliefs or affiliations in order to attain freedom, or even simply to avoid physical mistreatment. In 2002 numerous

convicts died under suspicious circumstances, but the authorities did not investigate their deaths.¹⁷⁹

The use of torture does not appear to have diminished significantly. Two Hizb ut-Tahrir members, Muzaffar Avazov and Khuzniddin Alimov, were apparently killed on 8 August 2002 by being submerged in boiling water. In May 2003 a further case was reported, when Orif Eshanov died apparently as a result of torture.

Some hope was invested in the announcement of amnesties for political and religious prisoners, first in August 2001, and then in December 2002. According to official figures, about 860 religious prisoners were released under the first amnesty, and over 900 in the second, but there is no independent confirmation of these figures.

The amnesties do represent some progress. However, by not applying it to those with longer sentences, the Karimov regime avoided releasing the vast majority of religious prisoners (whose terms averaged fifteen years in 2001).¹⁸⁰ Secondly, prisoners were informally forced to repudiate their beliefs in verbal or written statements before they were released, sometimes under pain of torture. Many refused and were not amnestied. Thirdly, there have been multiple reports that prison authorities demanded bribes from families before release.¹⁸¹ In some cases those released were harassed or rearrested.¹⁸²

2. Alternative policies

The primitive nature of Uzbekistan's policies towards Hizb ut-Tahrir is recognised by some of the country's intellectual elite. In 1999 an analytical centre close to the government wrote an internal memorandum suggesting that reliance only on law enforcement methods was ineffective.¹⁸³ But the real decision-makers in the government are united in their commitment to present policies. Interior Minister Zokir Almatov; Deputy Prime Minister Karamatov; and President Karimov himself, all see

¹⁷⁸ Yuri Chernogaev, "Predsedatel' oon utverzhdaet, chto v Uzbekistane primimayutsya pytki," www.news.ferghana.ru/detail.php?id=1161&code_phrase=pravda cheloveka, 7 December 2002.

¹⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper, "Religious Persecution of Independent Muslims in Uzbekistan From September 2001 To July 2002", 21 August 2002, p. 9.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 7-8.

¹⁸¹ Human Rights Watch, (2002), p. 9.

¹⁸² Ibid (2002), p. 10.

¹⁸³ Internal memorandum (1999), in ICG's possession.

little reason to change course, partly for ideological reasons, and partly, in the case of the security forces, because the 'Islamic threat' is useful for their political position.

Other policies promoted by the government are generally counterproductive. Requiring government-controlled imams to preach against Hizb ut-Tahrir while praising President Karimov in the same sermon, advantageously positions Hizb ut-Tahrir in opposition to a much disliked regime. The government ban on religious education in mosques ensures that conventional religious education – conducted secretly in people's homes – is legally on a par with the party's study circles.

Instead of promoting authoritative Muslim voices against groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, the government has done its best to silence them. Leading religious scholar and former Mufti Muhammed Sodik Muhammed Yusuf was first exiled and then only reluctantly permitted to return in 2001. Yet he is restricted in his public appearances, and his books remain largely unpublished, despite his strong message against both Hizb ut-Tahrir and Wahhabi groups. Instead, the government relies on the weak fatwas of a discredited Muftiate, known more for its loyalty to the regime than its knowledge of religious affairs.

Most dangerously, the government has been unable to separate pious Muslims, some with political views opposed to the government but opposed also to political radicalism, from groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir. The internal report cited above also noted that '...incompetent actions by the authorities turn legitimate use of law enforcement methods with regard to religious extremists into a struggle with Islam itself, which makes the ideology of Islamic extremism more attractive...'¹⁸⁴ Widespread repression has also caught up innocent Muslims in the net and widened the pool of the population willing at least to sympathise with Hizb ut-Tahrir, and most importantly, very unwilling to assist the government in combating any real threat that might emerge from such groups.

All these policies have sharply polarised society. On one side is the regime, largely unable to improve living standards or kick-start a dying economy. On the other is a political vacuum with

no legal political parties and no freedom of expression. Hizb ut-Tahrir fits neatly into this vacuum, not necessarily because of innate radicalism among Uzbek Muslims, but primarily because the system allows no political alternative.

Indeed, the system has become almost dependent on internal and external enemies to justify its continuing paralysis: if there is no serious military threat from Hizb ut-Tahrir or the IMU, it is not clear why the state needs such bloated interior security forces, or why it can reserve the right to interfere in citizens' lives. Hizb ut-Tahrir serves as a useful excuse for authoritarian policies, from closing borders with neighbouring Kyrgyzstan, to maintaining internal roadblocks and excessive powers for the security services. If it did not exist, the system on which much of the state is constructed would be under threat.

B. TAJIKISTAN

From 1997 to 1999, Tajikistan was perhaps the most liberal of the Central Asian regimes with regard to Islamist movements and parties. After the signing of the Tajik Peace Accords, which legitimised the constitutional role of the IRP, the government's position on Hizb ut-Tahrir could be described as benign neglect.

From early 2000, however, when it became clear that Hizb ut-Tahrir had expanded quickly in the North, the government's stance became harsher. It set up an expert commission to investigate the nature of the party's organisation and demands, which concluded that it was a threat to the state. Widespread arrests followed in 2000 and 2001. Local human rights advocates believe that pressure from the Uzbek government on President Rakhmonov led to this harsher treatment.¹⁸⁵ Security officials tend to agree: 'If Rakhmnov doesn't clamp down on Hizb ut-Tahrir, what will Karimov say to him?' asked one officer.¹⁸⁶ Arrests increased substantially in that period, and prison sentences rose from five to eight years to anywhere from twelve to eighteen years. In 2002, arrests and prison terms began to drop but there have been a number of new cases in 2003. Official statistics put

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ ICG interview with human rights advocates Ravsanovi a Makhtamova and Alexander Rakhmanov, and Aziz Dinoshoev, Khodjent and Dushanbe, 10-13 January 2003.

¹⁸⁶ ICG interview, Khudjand, May 2003.

the total of criminal cases against Hizb ut-Tahrir through this period at 130, involving 400 persons but of whom only 120 were actually detained and 50 to 60 sentenced.¹⁸⁷

Officials claim they have arrested some of the top leadership and that a major trial in March 2002 convicted several local leaders.¹⁸⁸

After 11 September they went underground. There is a decline in activity. The reasons? The work of the security services, arrests: after 11 September the security forces opened their eyes. There is no real threat now....There are no leaders now.¹⁸⁹

Nevertheless, leaflets have continued to appear. Analysts say they detect a new style to them and that more are showing up in Dushanbe and other areas outside Sughd province. There is no direct evidence that the party membership is growing, although arrests continued regularly in 2003.

There is no discussion of legalising Hizb ut-Tahrir in Tajikistan. Most security and political officials see it as an anti-constitutional organisation that can threaten a still weak state. While legalisation might be possible in Western societies, they claim, it is not possible in Tajikistan. One police general explained this point of view:

For the English, Hizb is not a threat. They have stable salaries, a stable society: if a Hizb goes too far, the police will get to work, and hit him on the head with a truncheon. But we have a weak state, without a strong ideology.¹⁹⁰

Some have criticised the security forces for not conducting better intelligence work. One former KGB general said of their shortcomings:

They don't know Arabic, they don't have the technical capacity: if there were no problems in the security services, there wouldn't be any need for arrests now. Its more likely that

Hizb ut-Tahrir has their person in the security forces, than the security forces [are] inside Hizb ut-Tahrir.¹⁹¹

Another highly placed official admitted: 'The security forces have not been able to get inside their organisation: only at the very lowest and middle levels'.¹⁹²

However, the authorities have not relied only on the security forces. Many local officials have used different methods to root out members. In Leninskii district, near Dushanbe, a local activist said: 'We did a lot of work. We said, if the Hizb ut-Tahrir appear again, we will exile them, and everybody signed an agreement – we went round houses and gathered signatures from everybody. ...The most effective method is when you say, "we'll throw them out"'.¹⁹³

Unlike in Uzbekistan, there have been some attempts in Tajikistan to attract members away from the group through alternative Islamic education. In early 2003 teachers in one prison claimed that fifteen of 90 Hizb ut-Tahrir prisoners ended their membership after the lessons.¹⁹⁴ But when asked what arguments the teachers used, the answers seemed primitive:

I told them the organiser of Hizb ut-Tahrir was a Jew; also in their books it says that men are allowed to embrace women; also in their books its says that men are allowed not four wives, but five or six.¹⁹⁵

The lessons – called 'Correction on the Islamic Path' – take place twice a week and include basic reading for those who need it and the principles of Islam. The teachers are sponsored by Iran, and receive U.S.\$10 per month. Many also teach in the Islamic university or other institutions.¹⁹⁶

Additional efforts by religious leaders or others to counter Hizb ut-Tahrir influence seem to have been

¹⁸⁷ ICG interview with senior official, March 2003.

¹⁸⁸ Court protocol No. 72, Sughd regional court, 28 March 2003. The court convicted Abdukhalil Yusupov and Iskander Raupov, both Tajiks, of being leaders of the movement in Sughd province.

¹⁸⁹ ICG interview, senior security official, Dushanbe, February 2003.

¹⁹⁰ ICG interview, Dushanbe, February 2003.

¹⁹¹ ICG interview, Tajikistan, February 2003.

¹⁹² ICG interview, Khudjand, February 2003.

¹⁹³ ICG interview, Obidjan Davlatov, rais, Jamoat Kushtep (Leninskii district), February 2003.

¹⁹⁴ ICG interview with Ruza Bulbulov, prison teacher of Islam, Dushanbe, February 2003.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. Hizb ut-Tahrir does permit men to shake hands with women but the other points are false.

¹⁹⁶ ICG interview Ruza Bulbulov, prison teacher of Islam, Dushanbe, February 2003.

less effective. The increasing state interference in religious affairs and the dependence of much of the religious hierarchy on state structures do little to create authoritative alternative voices, particularly for young people. Greater government pressure on the IRP could also backfire, creating further dissatisfaction with the increasing compromises that the party leadership is forced to adopt to survive. An emasculated legal Islamist party will inevitably create a vacuum which more radical groups may fill.

C. KYRGYZSTAN

Kyrgyzstan's policy on Islam generally, and on Hizb ut-Tahrir in particular, has gone in phases, balancing between the general tolerance for beliefs that has characterised much of government policy, and the increasing authoritarianism and influence of security forces.

These competing demands are present in all discussions of policy towards Hizb ut-Tahrir. The General Procurator has called for harsher sentences, saying 'unfortunately the fight against religious extremism has not produced the expected results because light penalties are given to those propagating extremist views'.¹⁹⁷ Kyrgyzstan's ombudsman, Tursunbai Bakir Uluu, has questioned whether the party's ideas are in fact as threatening as the government claims. He suggests that although it is extremist, it has relatively little support and is not engaging in violence or terrorism.¹⁹⁸

Within the security services, opinions are mixed. Many officers, particularly in the south, suggest that imprisoning members merely creates martyrs and draws attention to the group. Others, probably a minority, assert the opposite: that their hands are tied by the courts, and they need stricter laws and longer sentences.¹⁹⁹ Hizb ut-Tahrir members claim that arrests are one of their best forms of propaganda. 'The state helps us: they put us in

prison and people find out about us, and understand the true face of the state'.²⁰⁰

Criminal cases against members rose sharply in 2001, from eleven the year before to 86, but fell to 41 in 2002.²⁰¹ Compared with neighbouring Uzbekistan, the attitude of the authorities is much more lenient. A first offence usually warrants a police warning and fine of U.S.\$50 to U.S.\$100. A subsequent offence may result in a prison sentence of three to five years. Most cases are prosecuted under Article 299 of the Criminal Code, which forbids instigating religious and ethnic tension.²⁰²

Although there is broad agreement that Hizb ut-Tahrir is a potential destabilising force and little support for legalising its activities, there is less agreement on what to do about it. In the past senior officials have been quick to lump it together with the IMU or other terrorist groups, in an attempt to discredit it. This merely undermines government propaganda: there have been several occasions when officials initially blamed Hizb ut-Tahrir for terrorist or other violent attacks but were subsequently forced to retract. Such statements undermine trust in the authorities and boost those who claim that the government manipulates the issue.

A middle-range policy seems to be emerging that is meant to keep Hizb ut-Tahrir in check but avoid too much repression for fear of radicalising their ranks or stirring inter-ethnic tensions. 'We know who they are', said one official, "and we make sure they

²⁰⁰ ICG interview, Hizb ut-Tahrir member Aravan, February 2003.

²⁰¹ ICG interview with senior security official, December 2002, Bishkek.

²⁰² In 2002, the state authorities reported that there were 49 incidences of dissemination of religious literature and 41 criminal cases; in 2001, there were 112 instances and 86 criminal cases. In 2000, there had only been eleven prosecutions, the majority of which were in Osh and Jalal-Abad provinces (especially in the Karasu district). In Osh province in 2002 twenty people were arrested, and seventeen criminal cases brought. Police seized 4,785 leaflets, 105 books, six copies of the journal *Al-Wa'ie*, 31 audiocassettes, sixteen videocassettes, and 44 bullets. In Jalal-Abad in 2000 there were five criminal cases, in 2001 52 criminal cases and 20 administrative cases, all based on accusations of arousing religious enmity, and in 2002 there have been 28 cases, 24 of them criminal cases and four administrative cases. In 2002, seventeen of the 24 criminal cases reached the courts, and seventeen people were convicted. ICG interview with senior official, Bishkek.

¹⁹⁷ *Kyrgyz Tuusu*, Bishkek, 1 May 2001.

¹⁹⁸ ICG interview with Tursunbai Bakir Uluu, 15 January 2003, Bishkek.

¹⁹⁹ ICG interviews, police officers, Osh, Jalal-Abad, Karasu, January-April 2003.

remain within certain limits. If they step outside, then we act'.²⁰³

This policy may be effective in ensuring some stabilisation of the situation but it does not please everyone in Hizb ut-Tahrir. A female member claimed:

We don't have any problems with the police now: they don't even beat us up. The boys think they should move to Talas [in north Kyrgyzstan], because if the militia don't beat us, it means we haven't earned anything: if the police oppose us, the reaction of people is much stronger.²⁰⁴

Since the police are probably the most unpopular institution in Kyrgyzstan, this logic is likely accurate. Hizb ut-Tahrir can always gain some sympathy if it claims persecution by the police. This is especially true in southern Kyrgyzstan, where the police tend to be mainly ethnic Kyrgyz, while Hizb ut-Tahrir members are predominantly ethnic Uzbeks. There have been several cases where arrests have almost sparked inter-ethnic tensions, with neighbours and friends in tight-knit Uzbek communities opposing Kyrgyz police. A softer policy serves to avoid such potentially dangerous flashpoints.

Other more liberal policy ideas have included initiating a dialogue with the authorities. In early 2001 this was seriously on the agenda. After a series of disagreements over where the meeting would take place and who would participate, the meeting was cancelled. Hizb ut-Tahrir members feared it would lead to their arrest, the government that it would be the equivalent of recognising the party's legitimacy.

In reality, this kind of dialogue would probably lead nowhere. While well educated members in the West are happy to discuss their issues in the media, few members in Kyrgyzstan seem capable of engaging in this kind of two-way conversation. 'You can't talk to them', says a leading official, 'they are convinced of the rightness of their cause, and don't listen to other points of view'.²⁰⁵ Since the party does not wish to compete within the existing political system, it also seems unlikely that

legal recognition would afford any great advantage to the state.

The other approach has been an increasing effort to use imams in official religious structures to combat the party. A more pro-government Mufti was elected in August 2002, and in December 2002, the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims adopted a *fatwa* against Hizb ut-Tahrir. All imams are also instructed to speak out against it during Friday prayer. Although this may have some impact, the state runs the danger of developing a state-led religious system that will lose credibility with many believers. The more it controls the message, the less impact it has. The other problem is that few imams are capable of arguing with Hizb ut-Tahrir doctrines: they do not read its literature and are not sufficiently versed in theology to point out where they go wrong.

Also, most religious figures do not afford Hizb ut-Tahrir the kind of importance that the government does. As a religious leader in Jalal-Abad said: 'Hizb ut-Tahrir can't do anything. They say: "we're going to build the Caliphate", and I say to them, your leader announced that a long time ago, but you haven't built a village, let alone the Caliphate'.²⁰⁶

The wider policies of the government are probably more important than any attempts to initiate dialogue or intervene in religious structures. Reform of the security services is a key issue, and a strong line against abuse of power in arrests and in the courts is vital. Police should end their attempts to plant arms and other incriminating evidence on activists and attempt to prove guilt within existing criminal statutes.

The authorities also need to conduct a more coherent campaign against criminal groups and networks in the south. Many incidents that the government is quick to label as the work of 'Islamic extremists' are actually much more about growing organised crime, much of it linked to the drugs trade or lucrative cross-border contraband with Uzbekistan. Acting against these networks now will prevent any possible future manipulation of Hizb ut-Tahrir by a dangerous nexus of drug

²⁰³ ICG interview, Osh, April 2003.

²⁰⁴ ICG interview, Aravan, February 2003.

²⁰⁵ ICG interview, Osh, April 2003.

²⁰⁶ ICG interview, Dilmurad Orozov, Kazi, Jalal-Abad province, deputy Mufti, April 2003, Jalal-Abad.

traffickers and Islamist groups from outside the region.

Moves to integrate the Uzbek minority into the national life of Kyrgyzstan would be a major step towards limiting the attractiveness of Hizb ut-Tahrir to disaffected Uzbek youth. Improving the lot of the ethnic Uzbeks does not just depend on Kyrgyzstan, however. Central Asian Hizb ut-Tahrir originated in Uzbekistan and much of its continuing *raison d'être* is the wide range of policies promoted by the government in Tashkent that provide fuel for popular resentment. Instead of using the 'Islamic threat' to bolster security forces and military budgets, Kyrgyzstan might use it as a weighty argument for why Uzbekistan should open up cross-border trade, ease travel for all nationalities in the south, and begin to improve its economic policies. Undermining the appeal of Islamist sentiments in Central Asia is a joint responsibility of governments: at present the only cooperation is in the narrow field of intelligence-sharing and hard security.

VII. THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND HIZB UT- TAHRIR

The international community has a difficult role to play in combating Hizb ut-Tahrir. On the one hand, it faces a global threat of terrorism from Islamist groups, and there is significant pressure on Western governments to increase the emphasis on security cooperation with Central Asian states at the expense of traditional emphases on human rights and reform. On the other hand, backing repressive government policies towards groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir will not only backfire by probably radicalising members but will also confirm many members (and many other Muslims) in their conviction that the West's role in Central Asia is that of uncritical supporter of dictatorial regimes, intent on stamping on any sign of Muslim activism.

A. ANTI-WESTERN SENTIMENT

There is little doubt that the military interventions led by the U.S. in Afghanistan and Iraq have bolstered anti-Western sentiment in Central Asia, not just among radical Muslims, but in the wider community as well.²⁰⁷ There is little trust in Western motives, and this is clearly seen in the attitudes of Hizb ut-Tahrir to international organisations and Western states.

As outlined above, the party's literature has always expressed deep scepticism and antipathy towards the West. Much of it has been focused on Israel, European subjugation of Arab lands, and what is seen as the West's immoral political and economic system. Recent leaflets have included much more rhetoric against the U.S. This has fed into criticism of the relationship between the West and Central Asian regimes: one recent leaflet in Uzbekistan accused the U.S. of actively supporting the Karimov regime's oppression of good Muslims. It read:

...as the Jew Karimov turned to the service of America, she [America] shows him real material and spiritual support in his war with Islam and Muslims. For this reason America,

²⁰⁷ These attitudes will be assessed in more detail in a forthcoming ICG report.

which at the current moment is the brain centre for Karimov, directs to Uzbekistan, through Japan and the World Bank, millions of dollars, and teaches him [Karimov] in this way, how and by what means to better wage war.²⁰⁸

This anti-Americanism is nothing new, and reflects wider scepticism about Western motives in Central Asia. But the war in Iraq, in particular, does seem to have accentuated Hizb ut-Tahrir rhetoric against the West. Much of it reflects general popular opposition to U.S. foreign policy, but occasionally it sounds much more extreme: 'America and her policies is enemy number one. America should not exist'.²⁰⁹

This geopolitical stance is matched by a wider anti-Western feeling that is particularly acute among Hizb ut-Tahrir members, although some of their sentiments can be found among other parts of the populations. The party has been strongly opposed to the involvement of international organisations in Central Asia and has issued sharp criticisms of their activities.

In a leaflet in Tajikistan, Hizb ut-Tahrir claims: '...the organisations Red Cross and *Médecins sans frontières* conduct experiments on the population by spreading various infectious diseases. As a result, mainly children and old people die'.²¹⁰ This kind of misinformation feeds into an older mistrust of external organisations, some of which comes from Soviet stereotypes.

This kind of paranoia and misinformation is widespread among Hizb ut-Tahrir members. One in Jalal-Abad said:

We know the UN well. There should either be Islam or the UN. They are not compatible. If there will be a Caliphate, there will be no UN, no division into different countries. The UN works like a spy. They don't arrest Communists and Democrats, but they arrest

us. It is not Akayev who is at fault. The UN forces him to do it...²¹¹

Particularly unpopular among members in Kyrgyzstan for some reason is the largely innocuous Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, an international foundation linked to the Social Democratic Party in Germany, which has conducted seminars on family planning. One member asked, 'Why does Ebert [Friedrich Ebert Stiftung] worry that Muslims have a lot of children? They say in Uzbekistan women are forced to insert coils'.

Much of the anti-Western feeling that is expressed is largely mindless prejudice invoked by images of the West involving pornography, prostitution and homosexuality. These are themes repeatedly brought up by members, although not all are as aggressive as an interviewee in Jalal-Abad:

The worst thing is that boys and girls study together, that's how everything starts. There should also be separate buses for men and women, and mosques and schools. Men are becoming like women now, and women like men. ...Did you know there are brothels in Jalal-Abad now? How can I walk with my children past such houses? That's democracy. In America they are not people anymore, they have turned into animals, and we are going in the same direction...²¹²

Some of these views are impossible to counter by public diplomacy or other means. They are based on prejudices that are not amenable to argument. But any effort to undermine their position is worthwhile, and has a positive impact on the rest of the population. Discrediting Hizb ut-Tahrir ideas about Western reality would be a useful step to countering the party's popularity.

1. Banning HT?

Whatever the dubious nature of Hizb ut-Tahrir ideology, a clear line should be drawn between terrorist organisations and armed groups on the one hand and those such as Hizb ut-Tahrir that do not carry out acts of violence. The existence of Hizb ut-Tahrir underlines the need for a nuanced approach

²⁰⁸ Hizb ut-Tahrir Leaflet, Uzbekistan, December 2002.

²⁰⁹ ICG interview, Osh province, April 2002.

²¹⁰ Hizb ut-Tahrir (Tajikistan), "Muborizai hukumati Tojikiston bar ziddi ahli da'vat," ['The struggle of the Government of Tajikistan against the chosen people'], 3 March 2003..

²¹¹ ICG interview with Hizb ut-Tahrir members, Jalal-Abad, April 2003.

²¹² ICG interview with Hizb ut-Tahrir member, Jalal-Abad, April 2003.

to Islamist organisations, even the very radical. Lumping them together with violent groups such as al-Qaeda merely undermines the campaign against terrorism and gives ammunition to those radicals who claim that the West is acting against free speech and Islam in general.

Uzbekistan in particular has put considerable pressure on Western governments to ban Hizb ut-Tahrir, claiming that it is a terrorist organisation and threatens global security. So far the U.S. has resisted calls to add the party to its list of international terrorist organisations. It is important for other Western states also to resist such demands: the ban introduced by Germany in 2002 has done nothing to improve the security of German citizens but has merely added fuel to the arguments of hard-liners in Uzbekistan.²¹³ Driving Hizb ut-Tahrir underground is likely to lead to its radicalisation and make its actions even harder to predict than at present.

There is, of course, a need for close monitoring of Hizb ut-Tahrir activities by Western states. But it is as important to push Central Asian governments to step back from their highly repressive actions against members. Not only do such actions radicalise members in Central Asia, but they serve as a major campaign cause for members in the West. Close U.S. association with repressive regimes in Central Asia is a prime recruiting argument for the organisation in the West.

2. Human rights and freedom of belief

The U.S. embassy has probably done as much as any other in Tashkent to promote human rights observance, on a case-by-case basis, for Hizb ut-Tahrir members – certainly more than most European embassies. But little of this human rights work gets significant coverage. There is a widespread view among Central Asians, both in government and in opposition, that the U.S. stance on human rights is largely cynical.

U.S. officials point to the highly critical position taken by the government in its annual human rights reports. But these are seldom taken seriously by governments in the region. Public statements by

U.S. officials on specific human rights abuses, on the other hand, are few and far between. The sense from outside is of a compartmentalisation of human rights issues from ‘high’ politics concerning security or economic interests. This may or may not be true, but it is certainly the perception of much of the population, and it provides a certain credibility to the arguments of groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir.

Private discussions with government ministers are no substitute for public statements of concern that ensure a public distancing of the U.S. government from repressive policies in the region. This may upset some local governments but the alternative for the West is much worse, and the geopolitical impact for the U.S. is likely to be minimal. President Karimov will not close a U.S. military base because a visiting delegation makes a public statement on the lack of freedom of religion in the country.

Other states need to take a much stronger line with repressive governments in the region. European governments are noticeably less active in general than the U.S. on human rights issues. The OSCE also needs to continue its work in the human dimension and its participating states to maintain funding for important projects in this area, irrespective of the complaints of some Central Asian governments.

3. Wider policy issues

The international community also needs to redouble efforts to shift governments towards reform on a range of wider policy issues.

4. Closed political systems

Hizb ut-Tahrir thrives in closed political systems, where there is little alternative for independent participation in politics. In Uzbekistan some very basic freedoms need to be introduced, with the legalisation of secular political parties and the freedoms to organise and take part in elections at the top of the agenda. In Tajikistan the small ruling elite needs to accept the reality of opposition parties taking part in a real political process and also end harassment of the Islamic Renaissance Party. In Kyrgyzstan an increasingly closed political elite will lead to frustrations for those left outside the system and contribute to greater instability, an environment which Hizb ut-Tahrir can only use to its advantage.

²¹³ Germany acted, however, primarily because of the anti-Semitic nature of Hizb ut-Tahrir activity, which is, of course, a specially sensitive subject for the German state due to twentieth century history.

5. Freedom of speech

Hizb ut-Tahrir does gain a certain influence with its strong criticism of governments and leaders, none of which appears in much of the regional press. Opening up the media to greater criticism is vital in Uzbekistan, which continues to enforce widespread censorship. The situation is better in Kyrgyzstan, but there is constant pressure on the independent press, and state television and other state outlets need significant reform. In Tajikistan there has been some progress in media freedom, but too many subjects remain largely taboo – except to the writers of Hizb ut-Tahrir leaflets.

6. Economic failure

Economic reform is not a panacea for undermining radicalism. Rapid change, coupled with serious corruption, and rapid rises in wealth differentials, have probably contributed to the rise of Islamist movements in countries such as Egypt and Iran. But in Central Asia it is unlikely that reforms will have this side effect; all these negative aspects of 'reform' are already present, without any of the positive benefits. Improving the socio-economic environment is important, but much more than just GDP growth needs to be addressed. Wider issues of education, employment and governance also have to be tackled in order to make an impact on the blocked aspirations of many young people. Political pressure needs to be placed on Uzbekistan to liberalise its border regime: discontent among trading classes too easily feeds into support for radical political opposition movements.

7. Security sector reform

The actions of police forces in Central Asia are also contributing to radicalisation. Human rights need to be at the top of the agenda, with attention continuing to focus on torture and abuse of prisoners. This needs to be a central part of international policy, not merely a compartmentalised add-on to bilateral security relations. Support for security services needs to be linked to serious reform, and assistance and advice provided to forces committed to change. In particular, helping police forces build up support in communities is important.

8. Intelligence-gathering

Intelligence work is vital, of course, as a form of early warning, and further research and monitoring of groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir is significant for the West. But present over-reliance on Central Asian security services seems to lead to poor information-gathering. The Uzbek security services, the most powerful in the region, work in a narrow political perspective and are significantly limited in their ability to analyse information objectively. Developing independent sources and increasing open research into the issue, will help produce better policy.

B. CONCLUSION

Many questions remain unanswered about Hizb ut-Tahrir's organisation – both globally and in Central Asia. Its financing and the depth of its international and domestic support is unclear. Its program and methods are still vague at best, and its commitment to non-violence is conditional, not absolute. Its importance should not be overestimated: it has a small, but significant following in four Central Asian states, but there is little real popular support for its fundamental long-term aim of building an Islamic state.

The rise of Hizb ut-Tahrir and the environment in which it prospers cannot be separated. It would be naive to link the rise of Islamist sentiment and widespread poverty directly: the situation is much more complex and nuanced than that. But the party's founder, an-Nabhani, understood exactly what would block the development of his movement:

[Radical] ... movements do not emerge when affluence prevails, natural rights are secured, prosperity is ensured, and people are selected to hold important positions based on their competence.²¹⁴

Those responding to HT should take his words literally. Affluence, rights, prosperity and an end to corruption, should be at the heart of policies to undermine support for radical Islamist movements in the region. The overarching decline in political freedom and the continued decline in social and economic conditions that characterise the Central Asian states, set the background conditions for Hizb ut-Tahrir to gain support and to further its anti-secular, anti-Western, anti-corruption agenda.

There is a role for the security forces but they should not be the only agency which has responsibility for policy towards groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir. Extreme repression in Uzbekistan has not stopped the party's activities; all the evidence suggests that it has only become more radical and that government repression has in some cases exported Islamist activists to neighbouring states.

Hizb ut-Tahrir poses serious challenges to the international community's commitments to freedom of speech and human rights. Its views are opposed to the liberal and democratic consensus at the heart of most international organisations and agreements. It is playing a negative role in Western societies, radicalising young Muslims, a few of whom move on to more militant groups and may possibly end up involved in violence. But banning it would serve little purpose and only ensure it re-emerges as an even more secretive and conspiratorial group, with even less possibility for monitoring its activities, and less vulnerable to pressure to refrain from more radical positions.

The international community, for its part, has not managed to foster an environment for political and religious liberalisation in Central Asia. On the one hand the U.S. and EU (through the OSCE and bilateral relations) have continually emphasised the need for greater adherence to international standards of human rights. On the other hand, U.S. policy has led to close bilateral relations with governments that have given little sign of serious commitment to religious tolerance and political pluralism.

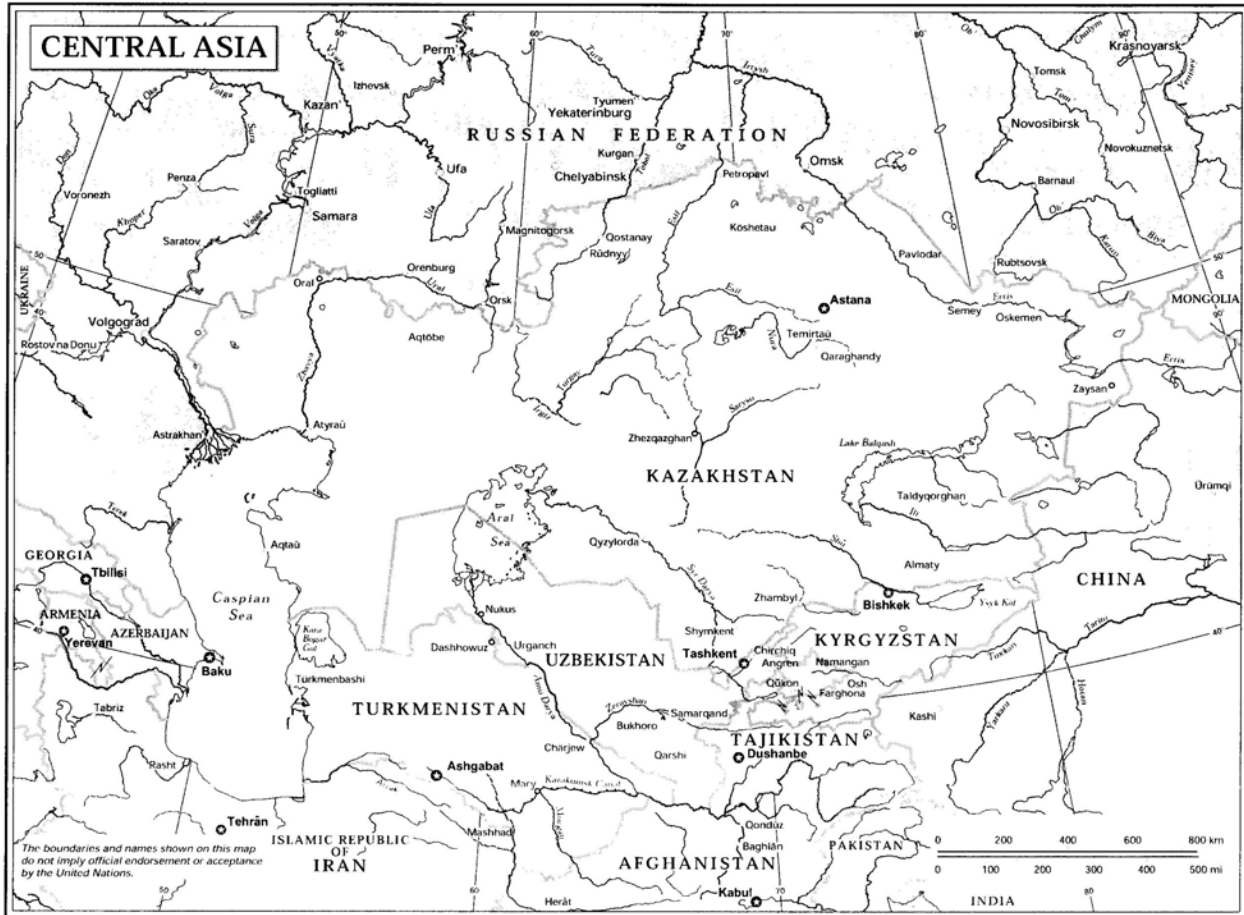
Hizb ut-Tahrir has gained popularity because it offers an alternative to a sometimes grim reality. The utopia of a Caliphate may be unachievable, but the idea of a just order, in a state with open borders, and a fair economy, has attracted thousands of supporters. Its ideology will not be beaten by force alone; real reforms across the board are needed to undermine its support. Real socio-economic improvements will take time, but liberalisation is likely to undermine Hizb ut-Tahrir's status rather than increase its support. Present state policies, particularly in Uzbekistan, are much closer to creating the conditions in which radicalism thrives than to eradicating it.

Osh/Brussels, 30 June 2003

²¹⁴ Taqiuddin an-Nabhani, *Structuring of the Party*, pp. 24-25.

APPENDIX A

MAP OF CENTRAL ASIA



APPENDIX B

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP

The International Crisis Group (ICG) is an independent, non-profit, multinational organisation, with over 90 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

ICG's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, ICG produces regular analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers.

ICG's reports and briefing papers are distributed widely by email and printed copy to officials in foreign ministries and international organisations and made generally available at the same time via the organisation's Internet site, www.crisisweb.org. ICG works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The ICG Board – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring ICG reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policy-makers around the world. ICG is chaired by former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari; and its President and Chief Executive since January 2000 has been former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans.

ICG's international headquarters are in Brussels, with advocacy offices in Washington DC, New York, Moscow and Paris and a media liaison office in London. The organisation currently operates twelve field offices (in Amman, Belgrade, Bogota,

Islamabad, Jakarta, Nairobi, Osh, Pristina, Sarajevo, Sierra Leone, Skopje and Tbilisi) with analysts working in over 30 crisis-affected countries and territories across four continents.

In *Africa*, those countries include Burundi, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone-Liberia-Guinea, Somalia, Sudan and Zimbabwe; in *Asia*, Indonesia, Myanmar, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Kashmir; in *Europe*, Albania, Bosnia, Georgia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia; in the *Middle East*, the whole region from North Africa to Iran; and in *Latin America*, Colombia.

ICG raises funds from governments, charitable foundations, companies and individual donors. The following governments currently provide funding: Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the Republic of China (Taiwan), Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Foundation and private sector donors include Atlantic Philanthropies, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Ford Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, William & Flora Hewlett Foundation, Henry Luce Foundation Inc., John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, John Merck Fund, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Open Society Institute, Ploughshares Fund, Ruben & Elisabeth Rausing Trust, Sasakawa Peace Foundation, Sarlo Foundation of the Jewish Community Endowment Fund and the United States Institute of Peace.

June 2003

APPENDIX C

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* Released since January 2000.

** The Algeria project was transferred to the Middle East Program in January 2002.

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