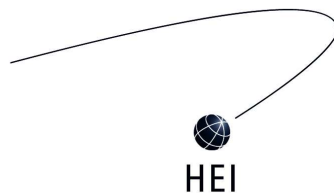


# Hizb ut-Tahrir – The Next Al-Qaida, Really ?

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**PSIO**

Federal Department  
of Foreign Affairs DFA  
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## About the author

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Jean-François Mayer was born in Fribourg, Switzerland, in 1957. He received both his master's degree (1979) and his doctorate in history (1984) from the University of Lyon. In 1985-1986, he worked with Swiss Radio International, and from 1987 to 1990, he was in charge of a research project attached to a programme on "Cultural Pluralism and National Identity" of the Swiss National Science Foundation. Between 1991 and 1998, Jean-François Mayer worked as an analyst in strategic and international affairs for the Swiss Federal Government, also serving as the secretary of the government's Situation Conference.

Jean-François Mayer returned to the field of academic research in the late 1990s, and has been teaching at the University of Fribourg - as well as occasionally at foreign universities - as a lecturer in religious studies. He is the author of over ten books (in six languages) and numerous articles, primarily dealing with religious developments in the contemporary world. A full list of his publications can be found at [www.jf.mayer.name](http://www.jf.mayer.name).

Since 2000, Jean-François Mayer has launched several websites. He is the founder and chief editor of Religioscope ([www.religion.info](http://www.religion.info)), an independent, bilingual website offering news and analyses on the role and place of religion in our world. He is contributing editor of *Religion Watch*, a New York-based monthly newsletter monitoring trends in contemporary religion ([www.religionwatch.com](http://www.religionwatch.com)).

In addition, Jean-François Mayer provides services as a consultant. His firm, JFM Recherches et Analyses ([www.jfm.info](http://www.jfm.info)), was founded in August 1999.

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# Preface

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The Graduate Institute of International Studies created the PSIO in 1994 to facilitate collaboration between the international and academic communities in Geneva and worldwide. It is both a research program aiming to further the study of international organization(s) and a forum designed to stimulate discussions between academics and policy makers within the environment of the Graduate Institute and Geneva. The Program harkens back to the original mandate of the Graduate Institute with the establishment of the League of Nations in Geneva and recognizes the growing importance of Geneva as one of the world's centres for international organizations.

For ten years, the PSIO has been steadily expanding and diversifying its activities. In November 2002, the PSIO was invited by the Political Affairs Division IV (Human Security) of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAE) to oversee the scientific activities of a dialogue project between secular and Islamic constituencies in Tajikistan. Throughout the year 2003, a group of twenty-two political representatives of Islamic and secular background have been discussing the meaning of secularism in a Central Asian society and the way to accommodate political Islam in the process of nation-building. This dialogue process resulted in the elaboration of a joint compromise document as well as the writing of individual contributions by the participants on various key issues addressed in the dialogue process. In addition, foreign experts were involved to support and assess the dialogue process and to bring new light through research articles on some of the major stakes related to the dialogue process.

The present paper is one of the achievements of the project's scientific work. It was completed thanks to the financial support and the strategic collaboration of PDIV. It deals with one of the new challenges that not only Central Asian and Muslim societies but also Western countries and international organizations have to face. By promoting research and

spreading knowledge on the new forms of international political Islam the PSIO aims at providing policy-makers and the international community with relevant academic findings and analysis. Thus, it hopes to stimulate a scientific reflection where stereotypes, passion and resentment become less significant and which can hopefully lead to the formulation of peaceful and productive international political strategies.

Dr. Daniel Warner  
Executive Director  
PSIO

# Hizb ut-Tahrir – The Next Al-Qaida, Really?

*Jean-François Mayer*

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‘Hizb ut-Tahrir to replace Al-Qaida?’ Such was the question asked in the title of an article published on 8 September 2003 by the news agency Rosbalt.<sup>1</sup> Views very critical of the international Muslim political party Hizb ut-Tahrir<sup>2</sup> – as well as of other militant Islamic groups – have been expressed for some time in the former Soviet Union. There have also been several attempts to link it – or at least some of its members – to violent actions, such as the March and July 2004 events in Uzbekistan, although initial allegations in that case were received with scepticism by most observers and the group itself firmly rejected them. Harsh repression has been inflicted on members of the movement in Central Asian countries, a fact documented by international media as well as by human rights organizations.

In the West too, since 2003, there have been a number of articles suggesting that Hizb ut-Tahrir might present a serious threat. Among the primary English-language sources of such views, one finds a frequently quoted report published in late May 2003 by the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think-tank based in Washington, DC.<sup>3</sup> The author of the report, Ariel Cohen, is a research fellow at the foundation. According to Cohen, the US should

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<sup>1</sup> Samvel Martirosyan, ‘Hizb ut-Tahrir to Replace Al-Qaida?’ from <http://www.rosbaltnews.com>.

<sup>2</sup> Some authors use the spelling Hizb al-Tahrir: I have rather chosen to adopt the spelling found in all recent publications of the party in English.

<sup>3</sup> Ariel Cohen, *Hizb ut-Tahrir: An Emerging Threat to U.S. Interests in Central Asia*. Heritage Foundation Backgrounder, No. 1656, 30 May 2003.

'prevent Hizb ut-Tahrir from destabilizing Central Asia'.<sup>4</sup> Cohen describes Hizb ut-Tahrir as a clandestine, totalitarian organization. 'Leadership for large regions (e.g. the former Soviet Union), countries, and local areas is kept secret', Cohen emphasizes<sup>5</sup> – conveniently forgetting to mention that disclosure of membership is a sure way to jail in some Central Asian countries, as well as in a number of other places around the world, and that Hizb ut-Tahrir organizes public meetings and is easily accessible by media in those parts of the world where it can operate freely, going as far as to publish the names and pictures of contributors to its English magazine, *Khilafah*. While the organization tends to be somewhat secretive, it is certainly not clandestine in such places.

Cohen quotes several virulent statements by the party and states: 'Anti-Americanism, extremism, and preaching the violent overthrow of existing regimes make Hizb ut-Tahrir a prime suspect in the next wave of violent political action in Central Asia and other Muslim countries with relatively weak regimes, such as Pakistan and Indonesia.'<sup>6</sup> Anti-American the party is without any doubt, and it is no less certain that Hizb ut-Tahrir would be delighted to present a threat to US interests (and no doubt hopes it does!). But it remains to be seen if anti-Americanism should be equated with a potential for terrorism. Regarding the 'violent overthrow of existing regimes', we will see later that Hizb ut-Tahrir's methodology is somewhat more complex.

While some remarks in Cohen's paper on the situation in Central Asia seem to be well-founded, when it comes to Hizb ut-Tahrir, his assessments look conjectural, despite their boldness.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> In his book on Central Asia, Ahmed Rashid suggests that 'there are strong links and co-operation between the rank and file' of Hizb ut-Tahrir and of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), 'especially when the members come from the same village or town'; he also reports that many members 'admired' Osama bin Laden. But he concedes that Hizb ut-Tahrir has 'still not taken the path to violence', although he considers such a development as a real possibility, due to repression by Central Asian regimes (Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002, pp. 132–136).



Hizb may launch terrorist attacks against U.S. targets and allies, operating either alone or in cooperation with other global terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda. A Hizb takeover of any Central Asian state could provide the global radical Islamic movement with a geographical base and access to the expertise and technology to manufacture weapons of mass destruction. The U.S. and its allies must do everything possible to avoid such an outcome.<sup>8</sup>

Although Cohen does not seem to be very familiar with Hizb ut-Tahrir, since he does not even quote the only in-depth academic research ever conducted on the movement,<sup>9</sup> his paper suggests not only that Hizb ut-Tahrir is a terrorist organization ('alone or in cooperation with other global terrorist groups'), but also creates an artificial link with another hot topic, i.e. weapons of mass destruction.

Such statements could be considered as mere speculations by an isolated lobbyist. But Hizb ut-Tahrir has recently received increased attention and met increased opposition from various quarters, not only in Central Asia. In February 2004, the Nixon Center, another Washington-based think-tank, organized a closed conference on Hizb ut-Tahrir in Ankara, Turkey. While there was a general agreement among participants that Hizb ut-Tahrir 'as a group has never been involved in terrorist activities',<sup>10</sup> some suggested that it acted as 'a "conveyor belt" for producing terrorists', training people in a radical mindset who will sometime later channel their activism into terrorist organizations.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, there have

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However, according to members of Hizb ut-Tahrir, the insinuation 'that the party will turn violent and has links with the IMU' is inaccurate: the comments attributed to a member 'contradicted the party's ideas'. Representatives of Hizb ut-Tahrir report that they have repeatedly attempted to contact Ahmed Rashid in order to make their views known, but say they have not succeeded. They are even considering writing a rebuttal of the book (personal communication from a member of Hizb ut-Tahrir, 4 November 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Cohen, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> Suha Taji-Farouki, *A Fundamental Quest: Hizb al-Tahrir and the Search for the Islamic Caliphate*. London: Grey Seal, 1996. This 240-page book offers an excellent overview of the history and ideology of the party. While not agreeing necessarily with every detail, members of Hizb ut-Tahrir seem also to consider it to be a fair work.

<sup>10</sup> 'Transnational Islamic Militant Group Finds Central Asian Base'. In *Religion Watch*, Vol. 19, No. 6, April 2004, pp. 5–6.

<sup>11</sup> Zeyno Baran, 'The Road from Tashkent to the Taliban: An Islamist Terror Group is Undermining a U.S. Ally'. In *The National Review*, 2 April 2004 from <http://www.nationalreview.com>. Throughout the 50-year history of

been suggestions in Germany that Hizb ut-Tahrir might play a role as an 'intellectual forerunner' (*geistiger Wegbereiter*) of violence.<sup>12</sup>

The purpose of this paper is not to provide a new analysis of Hizb ut-Tahrir in Central Asia, since the author is no expert on that area.<sup>13</sup> In June 2003, a report by the International Crisis Group (ICG) provided a detailed analysis of Hizb ut-Tahrir in the area, based on field research, including interviews with members there.<sup>14</sup> According to the authors, '[t]he 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 senses. 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 ...'.<sup>15</sup> There have been allegations of Hizb ut-Tahrir members being involved in violent actions, but none of them seems substantiated by evidence. Of course, there is no way to say with certainty that these are just fantasies. But one should remain very cautious when confronted with claims of unclear origins. Moreover, if it were to prove true that members of the party have indeed become involved in terrorism, it would represent a disturbing development, but it would still be necessary to assess whether they acted on their own or on instructions from the party.

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Hizb ut-Tahrir, there have obviously been a few identified cases of people who at some point had belonged to the movement and later became active in other, violent organizations. As in any other political milieu, Islamic militants sometimes undergo ideological moves and then switch affiliations.

<sup>12</sup> Comments by German expert Uwe Hallbach, Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit, on German TV channel ARD, 15 January 2003.

<sup>13</sup> There is an obvious need for an analysis of Hizb ut-Tahrir documents circulated in Central Asia in order to compare them with literature distributed by the movement in other parts of the world and assess how far they may diverge in some cases – although this is unlikely, given the party's emphasis on ideological uniformity.

<sup>14</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Responding to Hizb ut-Tahrir*. ICG Asia Report, No. 58, 30 June 2003. The report can be downloaded from the ICG website: <http://www.crisisweb.org>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 33. Addressing the Asia Society, Barnett Rubin (from the Center on International Cooperation, New York University) comes to similar conclusions: 'Their rhetoric is bloodcurdling', Rubin allows, 'but there is no violence so far' ('A Summary: Radical Islam in Central Asia', 7 May 2003 from <http://www.asiasociety.org/speeches/centralradicalislam.html>).

The purpose of this paper is to share a few reflections on Hizb ut-Tahrir, which might also contribute to a discussion on issues of radicalism and radicalization, as well as on the construction of threats. At the end of the Cold War, many security analysts were looking for new threats of all sorts to replace the vanished threat from the Soviet bloc. A variety of 'new threats' was discussed, military as well as non-military. One of them was 'fundamentalism', which seems usually to mean Islamic radicalism for most analysts.<sup>16</sup> Nobody can blame analysts for looking for such new threats and challenges: their role is to foresee what might happen in years to come. At the same time, it is obvious that threats can also be fabricated, especially if they relate to latent fears and concerns. In addition, identifying threats is a profitable industry for some politicians, analysts and academic entrepreneurs. Consequently, assessments of a potential threat should constantly look for sound evidence, not just allegations or speculations.

Hizb ut-Tahrir was a perfect candidate for being seen as a new threat. Partly this is because there are very few people with any expertise on Hizb ut-Tahrir. In addition, the movement – which is not averse to making the headlines – has a radical discourse, as we shall see later, and is not afraid of making its views widely known. Its extensive use of the Internet makes it easy for anybody to find these views online, so that it requires little effort to collect a number of fiery statements made by the party.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, Hizb ut-Tahrir is a quite unique

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<sup>16</sup> In a recent book, the present author has presented critical considerations about the widespread and indiscriminate use of the label 'fundamentalism' (Jean-François Mayer, *Les Fondamentalismes*. Geneva: Georg, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> The word 'party' is used frequently in this text, since it is a label used by Hizb ut-Tahrir in order to define itself. 'Hizb ut-Tahrir is a political party whose ideology is Islam': such is the way in which its adherents describe it. But it is not a party as we know it in the West. Among other distinctive features, it does not take part in elections in the context of a democratic system. It should be emphasized here that it is the democratic principle that is rejected, i.e. a political system in which human beings are entitled to legislate, since Allah is the sole legislator. Elections would be permitted within the context of an authentic Muslim system, but – according to Hizb ut-Tahrir – there is no such place on earth today. Regarding those issues, see various articles in *Khilafah Magazine*, Vol. 13, No. 2, June 2001, and also *Democracy is a System of Kufr*. London: Al-Khilafah, 1995. (Note: The name of this publishing house varies in the publications it produces: in some it is Al-Khilafah Publications, in others it is Khilafah Publications. For the sake of clarity, the name has been standardized to Al-Khilafah throughout.)

case of an international Islamic party, with branches – open or underground – in several dozen countries around the world, including Western countries (although it took root in the West to a large extent without any plan to do so, due to the presence of a growing number of members who had to go into exile). If one monitors the world media for news on Hizb ut-Tahrir on a daily basis, it appears that, from its beginnings in 1952–53 in Palestine, the party has come to operate in a variety of contexts beside the Arab world, the West and Central Asia: it is also found in countries as diverse as Turkey, Azerbaijan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indonesia.<sup>18</sup> Even more amazing is the fact that it seems to follow the same line and approach in all these countries, which represents quite a feat in maintaining uniformity and ideological cohesion.

This paper will focus on Hizb ut-Tahrir literature in English,<sup>19</sup> supplemented by insights derived from personal contacts with members in several countries. It should be noted that the movement has published many books, periodicals and pamphlets. It has not yet been possible to read all of them. However, after studying hundreds of pages of Hizb ut-Tahrir literature, it soon becomes obvious that much of its content comprises variations and comments around themes covered in the work of the founder, Taqiuddin an-Nabhani (1909–77). Publications issued specifically for different parts of the world seem merely to be local applications of the same beliefs and lead to similar conclusions.<sup>20</sup> This tells us also how crucial party members consider their ideology,<sup>21</sup> which means that it is equally important to take the ideology seriously: members can be expected to act to a large extent according to

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<sup>18</sup> There is little doubt that, over the past decade, activities in Britain have also served as a platform for gaining access to countries where Hizb ut-Tahrir had not been present before. Regarding the Islamist presence in Britain, see Dominique Thomas, *Le Londonistan: la voix du djihad*. Paris: Editions Michalon, 2003. (This book does not deal much with Hizb ut-Tahrir and focuses on other groups, but helps one to gain a better understanding of the context.)

<sup>19</sup> The author wants to make clear here that he has not had access to party literature in Arabic or in Central Asian languages.

<sup>20</sup> Branches of Hizb ut-Tahrir in each country are free to choose topics on which they want to launch a campaign, since they know best what the local concerns are and what may allow them to reach a wider group of people.

<sup>21</sup> Of course, the development of Islam into an ideology is not unique to Hizb ut-Tahrir: other thinkers on an Islamic revival, such as Mawdudi (1903–1979) in Pakistan, made similar attempts in their own ways.

it. One should avoid the frequent tendency (and mistake) of discounting a group's ideology, as if it were just pretence.

There is no doubt that Hizb ut-Tahrir's discourse is a radical one and that its statements are fiery. Living as we do in media-conscious times, one could even suspect Hizb ut-Tahrir of making deliberately provocative statements in order to attract attention and spread its message. However, it is also true that there is an uncompromising dimension in its ideology. For instance, the party has published a slim volume on *The Inevitability of the Clash of Civilisations*, i.e. 'the clash between Islam and *kufr*'.<sup>22</sup> In this book, as well as in other works, it also emphasizes the Islamic legitimacy of offensive, and not only defensive, jihad, thus contradicting the attempts by many Muslim thinkers to present a softer view of Islam: the sacred texts 'command that we initiate fighting against them [i.e. disbelievers], even if they do not initiate against us.'<sup>23</sup> Another example is in a book written by and for British Muslims, in which members of Hizb ut-Tahrir in Britain devote several pages to showing that in an Islamic state it is necessary to kill apostates (unless they repent), and that this should be considered 'as a vital issue', since when 'the understanding of Islam also weakened, slackness in the killing of the apostate occurred.'<sup>24</sup>

It is not necessary to say that such statements can easily be used by people who want to 'prove' that Muslims in general or Hizb ut-Tahrir in particular are dangerous extremists.<sup>25</sup> This led to the banning of the organization in Germany in January 2003, due to this country's special sensitivity to issues of political extremism, as well as to statements that were perceived by German authorities as anti-Semitic: 'This organization promotes the use of violence to achieve political goals and also wants to provoke violence', said Interior

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<sup>22</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir, *The Inevitability of the Clash of Civilisation*. London: Al-Khilafah, 2002. *Kufr* means disbelief; a *kafir* is an infidel or non-believer.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>24</sup> Members of Hizb ut-Tahrir in Britain, *The Method to Re-Establish the Khilafah and Resume the Islamic Way of Life*. London: Al-Khilafah, 2000, p. 11.

<sup>25</sup> It is interesting to observe that, at least in Britain, the leaders of Hizb ut-Tahrir now seem to make systematic attempts to correct reports presenting them as extremists: along with media consciousness, there is a probably a growing awareness of the need for good public relations.

Minister Otto Schily when announcing the ban. 'It pursues the political goal of destroying Israel and calls for the expulsion and killing of Jews.'<sup>26</sup> While Hizb ut-Tahrir does oppose Zionism and the state of Israel absolutely, it rejects 'decisively the charge of anti-Semitism', according to a statement by its representative in Germany.<sup>27</sup>

Statements and actions by Hizb ut-Tahrir often irritate those Muslims attempting to promote a 'soft' image of Islam in the West. The uncompromising approach of Hizb ut-Tahrir has been a feature of the party since its beginnings:

If the Muslim Brotherhood was a conservative movement, the L[iberation] P[arty] was its opposite: radical and dedicated to the resurrection of the caliphate by overthrowing corrupt Arab states. If the Muslim Brotherhood could be described as a member of the loyal opposition in Jordan and supporter of the institution of monarchy based on lineage to the Prophet Mohammad, the LP was outspoken in its criticism of the Jordanian regime and the monarchy.<sup>28</sup>

The key difference is that Hizb ut-Tahrir strongly rejects 'the error of "gradualism"': the gradual approach to implement Islam is not acceptable in its eyes and betrays a faulty understanding of Islam, since it would mean that Allah has sent something impractical that has to be made practical by Muslims. Moreover, it 'is a flawed view of the reality of political change': members of Hizb ut-Tahrir are eager to remind the world that the Prophet brought a radical change 1 300 years ago, that the establishment of Communism in the Russia was a radical change too, etc.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> 'Net Around German Islamic Fundamentalists Gets Tighter', in *Deutsche Welle*, 17 January 2003. Beside countries with a Muslim population, the party was also outlawed in Russia in February 2003.

<sup>27</sup> Posted on <http://www.khilafah.com>, 4 November 2002.

<sup>28</sup> Beverley Milton-Edwards, *Islamic Politics in Palestine*. London and New York: Tauris, 1996, p. 65. The 'Liberation Party' referred to is Hizb ut-Tahrir: this is a translation of the party's name sometimes used in English. An-Nabhani clearly explains that it is a wrong approach to just promote moral reform in order to reform societies in an Islamic direction, since this does not reform erroneous conceptions, which are at the root of the corruption of societies (Taqiuddin an-Nabhani, *Structuring of a Party*. London: Al-Khilafah, 2001, pp. 15–18).

<sup>29</sup> Members of Hizb ut-Tahrir in Britain, op. cit., p. 65.

This radicalism, as well as the fact that Hizb ut-Tahrir completely rejects national states and wants to establish a single Islamic state covering all Muslim countries and, ultimately, the entire world, gives to its views a strong utopian flavour. Aspirations to an ideal world are also obvious in discussions with members: while they are keen analysts of the political environment and constantly monitor the news in order to gain a deeper understanding of world developments and to apply the party's interpretations to them, there is sometimes a quasi-millennarian hope for the advent of the caliphate, constantly contrasted with current realities. This is connected to a deep longing for social justice.

The party thinks that the Islamic state – based upon pure Islamic principles, which no state abides by at this point – will first be established in one country, and from there will grow to cover an ever-increasing territory, finally encompassing all Islamic countries. The initial stage should take place in Arab territories, since people there speak Arabic, which is an essential part of Islam. This does not prevent work from already taking place in non-Arab territories, however.<sup>30</sup> But it would probably come as a surprise to the founder of Hizb ut-Tahrir that the movement currently attracts more adherents in Central Asia than in other parts of the world.<sup>31</sup> However, Karl Marx did not expect that Russia would become the first Communist country!

In all its publications, Hizb ut-Tahrir constantly expresses the need for the caliphate (*khilafah*)<sup>32</sup> as a solution to all the problems of the Muslim world: 'Seventy-eight years ago, the Jewish criminal Mustafa Kemal committed the mother of all crimes, by eliminating the Khilafah system ....' One of the party's websites has put a tally on the top of each of its pages: 'The Islamic State (Khilafah) was formally abolished ... days ago', with each day adding one more to the total number (there were 28 952 days on 6 June 2003).<sup>33</sup> 'Ever

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<sup>30</sup> An-Nabhani, op. cit., pp. 6–7.

<sup>31</sup> According to reports presented at the February 2004 conference in Ankara, Uzbekistan and Indonesia are currently the countries in which the party has the most members.

<sup>32</sup> The word *khilafah* (caliph) means 'one who replaces someone else who left or died': the *khilafah* acts as the successor to Prophet Muhammad as military and political leader of the Muslim state. The word *khilafah* describes the government of the Muslim state, headed by the *khilafah*.

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.islamic-state.org>.

since Britain and the Western states destroyed our Khilafah on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 1924, this Ummah did not witness a single day of happiness.<sup>34</sup> Muslims are enjoined not to live without the *khilafah*, so all necessary efforts should be made to rectify such an unacceptable situation.

As we have seen, Hizb ut-Tahrir does not believe in gradualism, but rather that a method must be followed to conduct political work that will lead to the establishment of an Islamic state. This method should be patterned on the model provided by the Prophet Muhammad. The party refers to its founding in terms of 'the formation of a *hizb* (group) that interacted with the society with the objective of bringing a change in the system'.<sup>35</sup> The same intellectual and political struggle needs to be conducted today in order to achieve the re-establishment of the *khilafah*.<sup>36</sup>

In order to follow the example of the Prophet, the party has defined three stages of action:

1. The stage of culturing, i.e. 'finding and cultivating individuals who are convinced by the thought and method of the party' and who will then carry out the party's ideas;
2. The stage of interaction with the *ummah*,<sup>37</sup> in order 'to establish Islam in life, state and society'; and
3. The stage of taking over the government 'and implementing Islam completely and totally, and carrying its message to the world'.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Khilafah Magazine*, Vol. 11, No. 2, p. 8.

<sup>35</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir, *Education and Identity: The Dilemma of Muslims in the West*. London: Al-Khilafah, 2003, p. 53.

<sup>36</sup> Of course, while claiming that the *Khilafah* is the solution to all the problems of the Muslim world, it is obvious that the party does not consider the mere nominal re-establishment of the *Khilafah* as a solution in itself: it has to go hand in hand with the return to a truly Islamic way of life. Hizb ut-Tahrir is aware that the *Khilafah* was no longer what it was supposed to be in its final period, but the disappearance of the *Khilafah* is in itself a sure sign that there is no longer any true Muslim state, since the *Khilafah* is an absolute requisite for such a state.

<sup>37</sup> The Arabic term *ummah* refers in the *Qur'an* to the community of believers.

<sup>38</sup> *The Methodology of Hizb ut-Tahrir for Change*. London: Al-Khilafah, 1999, p. 32.



Hizb ut-Tahrir currently finds itself at the second stage of its political struggle. This involves challenging and exposing without either fear or compromise, 'the kafir states and its rulers', as well as 'the imperialist disbelieving states which have power or influence in Muslim lands', whatever the consequences might be for the members in these attempts.<sup>39</sup> The Prophet too first attacked the Quraysh 'by defaming their gods and insulting them, and he challenged their creeds and cursed them' – but without using force against rulers.<sup>40</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir insists that Islam 'obliges the Muslims to oppose the rulers with opinion and to account to them for their actions', quoting the Messenger of Allah, who is reported to have said that 'The best jihad is the word of truth spoken to a tyrant ruler'.<sup>41</sup>

This is exactly what Hizb ut-Tahrir has been doing in various parts of the world, including Central Asia. Governments there, unwilling to endure milder criticism, are even less willing to tolerate the harsh tones of Hizb ut-Tahrir's propaganda.

There are some important consequences of this methodology, which also stem from the fact that the party considers that no country today lives according to the rules of an Islamic state. Certainly, shariah permits the use of arms to fight against a ruler in cases where 'the ruler shows clear *kufr*',<sup>42</sup> but only 'if there exists, most likely, the capability of removing the ruler' and, moreover, only if the land is *dar ul-Islam*, if the rules of Islam were implemented and the ruler subsequently showed open *kufr*. Other methods should be used in a land of *kufr* – and today, this means everywhere.<sup>43</sup> No current ruler governs according to the shariah, so these rules do not apply to them. To change the ruler would do no good, since it is the system itself that needs to be changed: 'The reality is of uprooting an entire *kufr*

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 35–36. According to the rules of the party, a member exhibiting weakness or submissiveness during an encounter with the authorities should be sanctioned (Taji-Farouki, op. cit., p. 141).

<sup>40</sup> *The Methodology of Hizb ut-Tahrir for Change*, op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>41</sup> *Democracy Is a System of Kufr*, op. cit.

<sup>42</sup> And only in such a case, 'due to the presence of authentic *Ahadeeth* which oblige the obedience to the Khaleefah even if he is unjust, but as long as he does not order a sinful action. ... It is not allowed to rebel against the ruler except when he displays *Kufr Buwaah* (clear *Kufr*) ...' (ibid., p. 40).

<sup>43</sup> *The Methodology of Hizb ut-Tahrir for Change*, op. cit., pp. 21–22.

system, including it's [sic] ruler, to again establish Dar ul-Islam. ... So military struggle is not the method of re-establishing the Khilafah.'<sup>44</sup>

Actions by a group or structure 'are limited to the intellectual aspect and not related to any other actions ... until the Islamic state is established, where then the practical aspects start in the state'.<sup>45</sup> The power to conduct jihad belongs to the Islamic state only. Jihad is indeed a 'method used in achieving the Islamic State's foreign policy objectives'.<sup>46</sup> 'The performance of Jihad necessitates the existence of a state possessing armed forces'.<sup>47</sup> Jihad is a method for spreading Islam, and it is justified in a way similar to the thinking on war of French revolutionaries or Communist states: 'the objectives of warfare for the Khilafah State was not to annihilate the people, but to enable them to taste the true meaning of justice and liberation and for the corruption and oppression of the kings, presidents, tyrants and superpowers, to become no more.'<sup>48</sup> This implies that Hizb ut-Tahrir itself has no authority to call for jihad.

However, in the context of a Muslim world where calls for jihad resonate everywhere (to the extent that even rulers with a secular ideological background have resorted to them in crisis situations in recent years, as we saw in the case of Saddam Hussein in Iraq), the party's approach to jihad puts it in a somewhat difficult situation, as Suha Taji-Farouki has explained in one of her articles.<sup>49</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir 'has been calling with mounting intensity for the eradication of Israel by *jihad* since the early 1980s', but this means calling for action by the Muslim states, the Muslim masses and the armies of Muslim countries, and not the party itself organizing the jihad – in fact, it calls on them to re-establish the caliphate so that jihad can be launched.<sup>50</sup> Although the party considers that, in the absence of the

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<sup>44</sup> Members of Hizb ut-Tahrir in Britain, op. cit., p. 69.

<sup>45</sup> An-Nabhani, op. cit., p. 69.

<sup>46</sup> Zahid-Ivan Salam, *Jihad and the Foreign Policy of the Khilafah State*. London: Al-Khilafah, 2001, p. 62.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>49</sup> Suha Taji Farouki, 'Islamists and the threat of *Jihad*: Hizb al-Tahrir and al-Muhajiroun on Israel and the Jews'. In *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 4, October 2000, pp. 21–46.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

caliphate, jihad becomes an individual duty (*fard 'ayn*)<sup>51</sup> for the Muslim inhabitants of countries and those of neighbouring countries when a Muslim country finds itself under attack, its emphasis on the need of a caliphate for an effective jihad 'has become a justification for its indefinite postponement, as attention is directed instead to the goal of establishing the caliphate. Indeed, it has virtually removed *jihad* from the party's practical agenda'.<sup>52</sup>

Despite their absolute condemnation of the current situation in the so-called Muslim world, Hizb ut-Tahrir's members do not at all see themselves as the only true Muslims. In fact, despite the current conditions in the Muslim world, they would not label ordinary Muslims as bad Muslims, but rather tend to see themselves as the vanguard of the reformation of the Muslim world and – most of all – as the bearers of a fully Muslim political solution. This contrasts strongly with the views of some radical Islamic groups, which justify their violent actions by claims of a general state of apostasy. An-Nabhani writes: 'It is vital that the party bloc does not consider itself as an entity separate from the Ummah it lives with. Rather it must consider itself a part of this Ummah, because the Ummah are Muslims like the members of the bloc. The members of the party bloc are not better than any of the Muslims, even if they understand Islam and work for it.'<sup>53</sup>

Consequently, while it is not a problem for them to work in local mosques (and they do when they can), they are not at all eager to co-operate with other Muslim political formations, since they see them as misguided (once again, without labelling them as non-Muslims, which is significantly different from some radical groups that see themselves as the only true Muslims). There were some unsuccessful attempts at co-operation with a group such as the Muslim Brotherhood – of which An-Nabhani had been a member before founding Hizb ut-Tahrir – around the mid-1950s, but these did not succeed: Hizb ut-Tahrir

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<sup>51</sup> The issue of the distinction between *fard 'ayn* and *fard al-kifaya* has played an important role in many contemporary debates launched by radical Islamic movements.

<sup>52</sup> Taji-Farouki, op. cit., 2000, p. 30. Taji-Farouki rightly remarks that, while 'Hizb al-Tahrir's emphasis on *jihad* is designed to play to a climate where radical solutions win popular support', the long-term goal of establishing the caliphate has a clear priority (p. 40).

<sup>53</sup> Taqiuddin an-Nabhani, *Concepts of Hizb ut-Tahrir*. London: Al-Khilafah, n.d., pp. 70–71.

and the Muslim Brotherhood were mostly in competition, and the party 'did not want to lose its distinctive identity'.<sup>54</sup> In principle, membership of the party is also open to Shi'ites, although there seem to be no Shi'ites belonging to it.<sup>55</sup>

There are occasions when the party publicly disagrees with Islamist figures or movements. For instance, it has criticized the famous (Qatar-based) Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi because of some of his *fatwas*.<sup>56</sup> In November 2003, shortly before the party was banned in Pakistan, Hizb ut-Tahrir's spokesman in that country, Naveed Butt, had called the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) (i.e. the Islamic alliance of six parties ruling the North-West Frontier Province) a 'part of imperialistic democracy, which could not be called Islamic'.<sup>57</sup> However, those are what could be described as 'intra-Islamic' debates. When facing the outside world, i.e. non-Muslims and developments such as the 'war on terrorism', the party perceives itself as part of the wider *ummah* and wants to be seen as such.

The party does not feel a need to apologize for any deed committed by Muslims and, generally speaking, prefers an offensive to a defensive stance. A good example of its attitude was provided by the October 2001 issue of *Khilafah Magazine* when it commented on the terrorist attacks of the previous month in America. The editorial attempted to provide an analysis, without any statement condemning the attacks: a world used to pictures of American bombs dropping on many lands 'witnessed planes dropping on buildings in downtown Manhattan'. Then the author, Taji Mustapha, questioned the American understanding of these events and America's reactions to them. His analysis led him to conclude that the war against terrorism is actually 'a war against Islam and

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<sup>54</sup> Ahmad S. Moussalli, *Historical Dictionary of Islamic Fundamentalist Movements in the Arab World, Iran, and Turkey*. Lanham and London: Scarecrow Press, 1999, p. 92.

<sup>55</sup> However, some members may be less open to Shi'ites than the official stance would lead us to think: Pepe Escobar reports a discussion he had in the Fergana Valley with a member who explained to him that, once an Islamic state would be established, 'like Jews, all Shi'ites living in Central Asia ... would also have to leave' ('Peaceful Jihad'. In *Asia Times Online*, 25 November 2003 from <http://www.atimes.com>).

<sup>56</sup> See *Khilafah Magazine*, Vol. 11, No. 1, September 2000, pp. 12–15. A *fatwa* is an opinion on a point of law.

<sup>57</sup> *Daily Times* (Pakistan), 22 November 2003 from <http://www.dailytimes.com.pk>.

Muslims'. The editorial ended with a call for Muslim unity.<sup>58</sup> A recurrent theme throughout this issue of *Khilafah* was the denunciation of the latest US initiatives from various angles and a political analysis of these developments: 'The politics of terrorism is obviously a strategy adopted by America to gain a stranglehold on the world and to fight against anybody who tries to rebel against her policy.'<sup>59</sup> Rather than commenting on the attacks themselves, each article attempted to show the need for the caliphate and criticized US and, more generally, Western capitalist policies. However, the attacks were condemned, but only on page 21 and without lengthy comment:

To achieve the return of the Khilafah the Muslims need to change the situation in the Islamic world – this change requires the political and intellectual struggle – in emulation of the Messenger (saw). Islam did not permit the carriers of Da'wa to sidestep the method of the Prophet (saw) and use material force to change the world situation and establish a state. Islam forbade Muslims to hijack civilian airliners and kill non-combatants.<sup>60</sup>

The approach was similar after the attacks in Madrid in March 2004. 'Who did it?' asked the cover of the April issue of *Khilafah*. An analysis by Javed Ansari examined the Madrid bombings in relation to 'the attempts to demonise Islam'. While the article was largely a denunciation of the West, there were two passages unambiguously condemning the attacks: 'It was an inexcusable act of violence against civilians and a great tragedy', wrote the author, while reminding his readers that, in comparison, 'the loss of Muslim lives is inconsequential to the West'.<sup>61</sup> Later, however, Ansari re-emphasised that 'even where jihad is valid there are explicit rules preventing the killing of civilians' and that, consequently, all similar attacks are 'categorically condemned and prohibited by Islam'.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *Khilafah Magazine*, Vol. 14, No. 2, October 2001, p. 4.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>60</sup> Jalaluddin Patel, 'How Should Muslims View the Attacks in America?', *ibid.*, p. 21. Note that the term 'saw' that appears in brackets in the quotation is an abridged form of a sentence used by Muslims to express reverence for the Prophet when uttering or writing his name.

<sup>61</sup> Javed Ansari, 'Madrid Bombings and the Attempts to Demonise Islam'. In *Khilafah Magazine*, Vol. 17, No. 4, April 2004, pp. 8–11 (p. 10).

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Since Hizb ut-Tahrir rejects any violent activism at this stage as well as participation in elections, how does it hope to come to power? Here the concept of seeking *Nusrah* (assistance, material support) comes into play: after the Prophet had built a party, he looked for people who could assist him in order to seize power and implement Islam.<sup>63</sup> He 'sought Nusrah from the leaders who possessed power. He did it despite the ugly response from tribe after tribe. He insisted on seeking Nusrah and he repeated this many times and did not cease in seeking it. ... This persistence ... indicates in a clear manner that seeking the Nusrah was an order of Allah (swt)'.<sup>64</sup> In the times of the Prophet, those were 'the powerful tribes and their leaders. However, today, in most cases, this power lies in the militaries of the Muslim countries'.<sup>65</sup> If armed forces in the Muslim world would rise against their leaders for the sake of Islam, a return to an Islamic system would become possible: 'Seek the power from those who have it in order to implement Islam, and without a doubt the people of power in the Muslim world are the armies, who are the sons, fathers and brothers of the Muslims', advises Imran Waheed, spokesman for Hizb ut-Tahrir in Britain.<sup>66</sup>

The model of the Prophet, which Hizb ut-Tahrir intends to follow in order to seize power and restore the caliphate, may involve approaching other persons of influence as well: 'we are ... obliged to do what the Messenger (saw) did in that we must contact those people who are important and carry weight in the Islamic lands to open the door for what lies behind them and to secure the popular base.'<sup>67</sup> Those different aspects were summarized in

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<sup>63</sup> *Khilafah Magazine*, Vol. 11, No. 2, October 2000, pp. 10–11.

<sup>64</sup> Asif Khan, 'The Search for the Nusrah'. In *Khilafah Magazine*, Vol. 16, No. 1, January 2003, pp. 18–21 (p. 18). (The term 'swt' is an abbreviation of an expression used by Muslims whenever the name of Allah is pronounced or written.)

<sup>65</sup> *The Methodology of Hizb ut-Tahrir for Change*, op. cit., p.107.

<sup>66</sup> Imran Waheed, 'How to Re-establish the Khilafah? The Method of Muhammad'. In *Khilafah Magazine*, Vol. 11, No. 2, October 2000, pp. 8–11 (p. 11).

<sup>67</sup> Khan, op. cit., p. 20. Typically, in the *Daily Times* (Pakistan) article of 2 November 2003 previously quoted, the party's spokesman in Pakistan explained that there were two methods for achieving the *khilafah*: 'either approach five or six powerful persons of a country, convince them about the Khilafah system or prepare the public to pressure the top five or six persons to bring change.' He added that Hizb ut-Tahrir was using both methods.

a text about ways in which members in Britain can support the work for the re-establishment of the *khilafah*:

We may have family, friends, or contacts abroad who are in the Muslim army, or who are politicians, journalists, writers, in the intelligence service, lecturers at university, judges, or community leaders. These are individuals that we have an added responsibility to discuss with, for they may have a lot of influence over the people within society and could play a vital role in changing the public opinion of society towards the need for the Khilafah and the removal of the current corrupt regimes, if they themselves accepted the call. Those in the Muslim army could give the *Nusrah* (material support), one of the vital components in the method to establish the Khilafah and protect it once achieved.<sup>68</sup>

Hizb ut-Tahrir is definitely not a pacifist movement. But at this stage it is not a violent movement in its deeds, although its discourse is a radical one, for it denounces compromise, interfaith dialogue, etc. as 'dangerous concepts'.<sup>69</sup> Still, one could speculate how far outsiders listening to such discourses, but not necessarily familiar with all the nuances of the ideology of Hizb ut-Tahrir, might only pay attention to the virulent denunciations of the West and of rulers in countries with a Muslim majority. Reading Hizb ut-Tahrir's literature could indeed fuel resentment against the West, since the latter is constantly presented as oppressing the Muslim world and conspiring against it. One should add that here Hizb ut-Tahrir only builds on feelings that are already widespread in Muslim communities (including communities established in the West): an articulate party activist explained to the author of this paper how his political consciousness had been awakened by his attendance as a teenager at Friday prayers in mosques in England, listening to the ever-growing list of Muslims suffering around the world and being prayed for: in Palestine, Afghanistan, Somalia, Chechnya, Kosovo ....<sup>70</sup> In some ways, Hizb ut-Tahrir is also a reflection of these wider trends, even if it expresses its feelings in a much more articulate manner.

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<sup>68</sup> Sisters of Hizb ut-Tahrir, Britain, *The Responsibility of Muslim Sisters in Britain*. London: Al-Khilafah, 2003, p. 41.

<sup>69</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir, *Dangerous Concepts to Attack Islam and Consolidate Western Culture*. London: Al-Khilafah, 1997.

<sup>70</sup> Personal discussion with a member of Hizb ut-Tahrir, January 2004.

Another element is the differences between the circumstances and political environment of intellectuals in London and militants in Central Asia. The party's members in Britain are unlikely to endure physical persecution, while adherents in Uzbekistan might risk their lives and be tortured or put in jail for many years. Although there is little evidence that Hizb ut-Tahrir's leadership might change its ways because of such circumstances, it is not impossible that some militants in Central Asia could become impatient and no longer be willing to tolerate such persecution – and thus, while retaining some of the principles and orientations taught by Hizb ut-Tahrir, create splinter groups. Considering their plight, some of those splinter groups might give up the current non-violent methods and feel tempted to act in more radical ways. Indeed, offshoots of Hizb ut-Tahrir already exist in Central Asia: an article by Alisher Khamidov has briefly described two of them.<sup>71</sup> One should pay careful attention to such developments, since one of the assets of Hizb ut-Tahrir in Central Asia has been less competition from other Islamist groups than in other parts of the world.

Most Hizb ut-Tahrir members will continue with their non-violent methods – and in fact it is remarkable to see how many Islamic militants around the world, despite ferocious repression or harassment, have often shown considerable restraint in their reactions, notwithstanding the widely-publicized cases of those who choose the path of violence. A key question is how far increasing repression will finally weaken this group or, possibly, contribute to its success. *Sanguis martyrurum semen christianorum* ('the blood of the martyrs is the seed of new Christians'): if Tertullian's famous statement applies to members of Hizb ut-Tahrir in Central Asia, they might indeed have a bright future ahead of them. Although one wonders if their uncompromising stance might also make them miss key opportunities.

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<sup>71</sup> Alisher Khamidov, 'Hizb-ut-Tahrir Faces Internal Split in Central Asia'. In *Eurasia Insight*, 21 October 2003 from <http://www.eurasianet.org>.