



## **The Mode of Operation of Hizb ut Tahrir in an Open Society**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Hizb ut Tahrir is different to other Islamist groups active in Europe and the US. It has an appeal, particularly to the intellectual, in a manner that transcends the stark appeal of the global jihad movement and its affiliates, or other Islamist or revivalist movements.

\* The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT).

## THE MODE OF OPERATION OF HIZB UT TAHRIR IN AN OPEN SOCIETY

Hizb ut Tahrir is different to other Islamist groups active in Europe and the US. It has an appeal, particularly to the intellectual, in a manner that transcends the stark appeal of the global jihad movement and its affiliates, or other Islamist or revivalist movements.

In a BBC TV Newsnight item on Hizb ut Tahrir in August 2003, a former senior member, Yamin Zakaria, stated:

They had a very profound analysis of why the Islamic world is in such an abysmal state, how it declined and most importantly how we can elevate ourselves from this position, and break free. The group was not allied to any political regime, it was not operating on the basis of personal or financial motivation, it didn't have a sectarian approach. So it had a very open approach. As long as you are a Muslim and are committed to its beliefs, and its causes, you are welcome to join the party. [1]

Hizb ut Tahrir involves itself less in the generalised Islamist campaigns of other groups. Its overriding belief in the resurrection of the caliphate means that all other struggles and campaigns are generally subordinated. For this it is continuously criticised by other groups.

Its members do not engage in the political processes of the countries in which they live, and this has likewise led to public and private criticism of them, at least in the UK, by other Islamist groups who see it as part of their mission to press Islamist demands. In recent years groups such as the Muslim Public Affairs Campaign (MPAC), the Muslim Brotherhood - linked Muslim Association of Britain and the Islamic Party of Britain have voiced such criticism.[2]

The influences of the late Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin el-Husseini, and the post war leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood on the Hizb ut Tahrir founders ensures its worldview is Manichean and premised partly on conspiracy theory. All world events are seen through a prism in which the 'unbelievers' are out to destroy Islam. Like them it holds that there is a line of continuity between historical and contemporary events with no allowance for the vagaries of history or circumstance.

### **Ideology**

*What does Hizb ut Tahrir actually work towards and for?*

Its leaders and members continually stress that Hizb ut Tahrir is a 'political party whose politics is Islam' and that it seeks to create a dialogue with the West on capitalism and its ills, and to present Islam as an ideological alternative. The aim of the party however is to work only through the Islamic world in order to bring it back to the Islamic way of life that flourished under the Caliphate. It's not democratic: the resurrected Caliphate would be led by a non hereditary

absolute leader whose appointment would be based his knowledge of Islam and his leadership powers.

It is also evangelical and seeks converts, and some of its prominent leaders in Europe have been converts, such as the Canadian Jamal Harwood.

Hizb ut Tahrir continuously states that it disavows violence; that it considers the armed struggle to be forbidden by the Shariah, but it uses the language of violent jihad.

Its leaders admit to contacts with the Taliban but deny any contact with Al Qaeda, and indeed have publicly rejected Al Qaeda's use of force.[3]

There is clearly a lack of consistency: Hizb ut Tahrir believes that when it has achieved critical mass in any theatre where it is operating it will have to overthrow the state by means of a coup. Generally states don't roll over and submit, so violence figures somewhere in its strategy, but is generally left unexplored.

Hizb ut Tahrir is opportunistic and believes in vanguardism: on a range of issues it has been the first to promote concern and has taken the lead in campaigning. But it has then, more frequently than not, dropped out of the campaign and left the issues to others. In other words it has raised Muslim concerns; has raised public consciousness and created a potential recruitment pool.

It subordinates and ignores general Islamist concerns unless they represent a direct challenge to Hizb ut Tahrir or aids its opportunism.

### **Modus Operandi**

Hizb ut Tahrir leaders state the model for its mode of operation in the West is that of the Prophet Mohammad's seizure of Mecca. There he sought to influence a small proportion of the citizens so that when he launched his assault he had a cadre of helpers.

Hizb ut Tahrir believes that it has to build cadres while engaging society in what it calls intellectual and political debate. By a collective interaction with society it aims to create awareness of Hizb ut Tahrir ideology, moving on to a consolidation of progress by soliciting support of strategically powerful groups in society (with the help of those it has penetrated). Only then is it ready to implement Islam via the resurrection of the Caliphate.

In Britain, Hizb ut Tahrir appears to have gone through three distinct phases in its evolution. It came to public notice with its call to hijack aeroplanes containing Israelis and Jews and then embarked on a series of public confrontations, under the founding leadership of the Syrian expatriate and former Syrian Brotherhood member, Omar Bakri Fostock, known as Omar Bakri Mohammed, and another Syrian expatriate Farid Kassim. These included well publicised large scale conferences at Wembley Conference Centre and Trafalgar Square. It has sought to coerce moderate Muslim students into joining and has intimidated Sikh, Hindu and Jewish students. Ultimately this brought it publicity and considerable notoriety, and eventually led to its banning

by the National Union of Students and by those universities where it was active. The Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals (now Universities UK), the umbrella body for universities in Britain, was eventually persuaded to issue a guidance booklet to universities in which it condemned religious extremism and coercion.[4]

The publicity and notoriety, were enhanced by the screening of Jon Ronson's TV documentary 'The Tottenham Ayatollah' which showed Mohammed to be a buffoon, and one who was held in low esteem by other Islamist leaders as a consequence of his bragging, and because he had invited a TV camera crew to a clandestine meeting of Islamist leaders in Britain.[5] Some of them were later to emerge as jihadi recruiters. All this led in the end to the dismissal of Mohammed who left to found Al Muhajiroun, with the Saudi expatriate Mohammed al Massari. This followed the visit to London of a special envoy sent by the Hizb ut Tahrir leadership in Jordan. Muhammed took with him the majority of the members.

He was replaced by Fuad Husayn in February 1996, and Hizb ut Tahrir thereafter embarked on a period of semi-clandestine recruitment and re-growth, not emerging back into the limelight until the campaign against the government of Uzbekistan and the campaign for Farhad Uzmanov, a Hizb ut Tahrir activist allegedly murdered by the Uzbek regime, during 2002. In early 2003 it began its campaign against war against Iraq. At this the focus of the Hizb ut Tahrir protestors was not on supporting Iraq, or against the war in general (which was the line of the Stop the War Coalition) but on criticism of the Arab states for assisting the US.[6]

The third period has been that under the leadership of Dr Imran Waheed, a Birmingham-based psychiatrist, Dr Abdul Wahid, and others. Hizb ut Tahrir now operates at two levels: clandestinely, recruiting mostly among students, and to a small extent on the street (but not as much as previously); and via its communications modes, such as its web – based journal Khilafah and its communiqués. It has also, but only during the past eighteen months or so, returned to street activity, via pickets and demonstrations.

### **Command and Control**

Much like the clandestine Marxist Leninist groups on which it is partly modelled Hizb ut Tahrir exercises strict centralised command and control, which is manifest through its system of recruitment and communications.

Hizb ut Tahrir operates in the manner of a cult. Now that it is barred from many mosques its main vehicle for recruitment is via Islamic or Study Circles. These meet at members' homes or community centres and generally involve five or so aspirant members meeting regularly under the supervision of an experienced member. An indoctrination period usually lasts for up to two years, at which point the member is accepted into the organisation.

Although its members are secretive, Hizb ut Tahrir leaders deny this. Senior members' and correspondents' email addresses are listed in Khilafah, and Waheed and other leaders actively seek media interviews.

In the Newsnight item, a student active in the Islamic society at Kingston University talked about a Hizb ut Tahrir activist, Rizwan Khaliq, who was not a student at the university. Khaliq nevertheless visited the campus almost daily to recruit students. The interviewer asked the former head of the Islamic society what their relationship was, and he answered that it is one of tolerance: neither interfered with each other. When asked why he did not denounce Khaliq to the university authorities, knowing that Hizb ut Tahrir is banned, he responded that they would not inform on a fellow Muslim to the Kafir.

The university authorities issued a statement that they had no knowledge of Khaliq's activities.[7]

There is evidence of Khaliq's attempting to recruit in other universities clandestinely, and where moderate Muslim students see no need to speak out or are either unwilling or frightened of informing.

Where it does venture out into the open, for example to book rooms or to hold meetings Hizb ut Tahrir frequently uses false names, among them: The Islamic Society, the Islamic Front, the International Islamic Front, the Islamic Forum Against Communism, Al Khilafah Publications, the Young Liberating Party, Asian Youth (Waltham Forest), the 1924 Committee, the Muslim Media Forum (University College London), Muslim Current Affairs Society (Leeds University), the New World Society (Nottingham and Sheffield universities).

Hizb ut Tahrir uses the Internet for promotion of its ideology, and email and face-to-face meetings for command and control.

Communiqu?s and press releases published by the group are all published in the same format and with the same type of wording. The Danish police investigation into the affiliate noted that the Danish website wasn't only being hosted from London but that it was being run from London and that it was registered to the Hizb ut Tahrir mailing address in London, which is that of the British affiliate. The address is that of a commercial post restante, and in fact is the second post restante they have used, having changed to the current one a year or so ago.

All the communiqu?s are published from London. Thus for example press releases published in June and July 2003 by the Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sudanese and British affiliates were all in the same format, style and layout. The first three dealt with the suppression of Hizb ut Tahrir affiliates in those countries.[8]

Communiqu?s published last June by the Turkish affiliate and on behalf of the Russian affiliate following arrests of Hizb ut Tahrir members in these countries are again in the same format and style.[9]

In November 2002 the German authorities, who had long had Hizb ut Tahrir members under surveillance, raided twenty-five buildings across the country but made no arrests. Interestingly, the Interior Minister Otto Schily, stated that they had not been able to find recognizable

organisational structures. He stated that: ‘We have to assume that essentially they have their organisational base abroad.’[1]0

The UK is undoubtedly where the command and control centre is, even if the international leadership is elsewhere.

## **Spread**

Initially, Hizb ut Tahrir sought to recruit only among students. Its leaflets were first distributed in the UK, and the rest of Europe to the best of our knowledge, at Imperial College London University. That may have been a deliberate strategic target for the group, or it may just have been a reflection of where its membership was located. Imperial College is one of the foremost institutes for scientific learning in Britain, on a par for example with Cambridge. It then spread to Queen Mary College and thereafter to Birmingham, both located in areas with large Muslim populations. Thereafter it embarked on a campaign of recruiting students elsewhere and Muslim youth on the streets and its members appeared to spend much of their time leafleting.

In an interesting posting to an Islamist - discussion group last September and reproduced by MPACUK, an anonymous correspondent writes on ‘Why I left Hizb ut Tahrir.’ He stated: ‘All I seemed to be doing was pamphleteering and daubing walls with posters and memorising the odd ayat of the Quran to pull out on unsuspecting Muslims to prove my point.’

In a note of cynicism he concluded that:

If you don’t want the establishment of the Islamic state then the best way is to join up with one of these two groups. .... In closing I am thankful to Hizb ut Tahrir for at least awakening me to my deen even though they did very little to nurture it. I have had a few friends “burn out ” from Hizb ut Tahrir and go back completely to their jahiliyya state and this can be blamed on no one else but Hizb ut Tahrir who will be questioned on That Day.[11]

Hizb ut Tahrir came to public notice again in April 1988 when it’s activists inserted a leaflet inside copies of the Arabic language journal Al Fajr which at that time was distributed freely outside the Central London Mosque. The leaflet, in English, was entitled ‘The Islamic Rule on Hijacking Aeroplanes’ and was written by the then leader Abdul Qadeem Zallum. In it he claimed that the hijacking of planes was forbidden in Islamic law unless the plane contained Israelis or Jews, in which case there was an obligation to hijack the plane and kill the Jews.[12]

Other leaflets followed and were given out on the streets or on university campuses. They included one entitled ‘the only place is the battlefield between the Muslims and the Jews’ and another entitled ‘Peace with Israel – a crime against Islam.’

It has been Hizb ut Tahrir’s publicly stated policies on Hindus, Sikhs and particularly Jews that as much as anything else has brought them criticism and into conflict with law enforcement.

In January 1994 two Hizb ut Tahrir members were arrested for distributing the ‘Peace with Israel – A Crime against Islam’ leaflet. The leaflet advertised a meeting to be held at University College London and was referred to the Attorney General on the grounds that it incited hatred and was illegal. The Attorney General, whose consent is required for prosecutions under the law against incitement, declined to prosecute but the university authorities cancelled the meeting. It took place however at another college of London University, the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) where the Hizb ut Tahrir speaker stated:

‘Let’s be open about this – the Quran does not mention Zionists, it mentions Jews. They are our enemy and insha’allah (with the help of Allah) we will finish them’.

In January 2001 the German authorities also banned Hizb ut Tahrir on the basis that it was ‘active in universities with anti-Semitic slogans and was inciting hatred against Jews and had called for the destruction of the state of Israel’ under legislation that allows for the proscription of foreign-based extremist groups.

Interestingly, Schily also stated that Hizb ut Tahrir in Germany had sought contact with the far right and that leading neo-Nazis had attended a Hizb ut Tahrir meeting held by the group at the Technical University in Berlin in October 2002.<sup>13</sup> There are other examples of meetings between Hizb ut Tahrir and the far right, but this is not the norm.

It was also noted that the German leader Shaker Asssem had lectured at the Islamic study group founded by Mohamed Atta at the Technical University in Hamburg during the summer of 2001.<sup>[14]</sup>

In November 2002 members’ homes were again raided, causing the group to issue a denial that it was seeking violence, but noting that the banning would not stop its activities.

In 2002 Danish Hizb ut Tahrir produced a ‘hit list’ of fifteen to twenty leading members of Denmark’s Jewish community. In November 2002 Fadi Abdel Latif, the leader of the Danish branch was convicted of incitement to racial hatred and sentenced to sixty days in prison after the group circulated a leaflet urging people to ‘Kill them, kill the Jews wherever you find them’. The group was subsequently banned.<sup>[15]</sup>

The Dutch government is also now said to be considering a ban.<sup>[16]</sup>

Last November the German police arrested a group of North Africans linked to European – based terror cells. One of those arrested, Abderazek Mahdjoub (aka Mahjub Abderrazak), was picked up in Hamburg and is allegedly linked to the Ansar al Islam network, reportedly told his interrogators that there had been a meeting of Hizb ut Tahrir European leaders in Poland. There they had taken the decision to completely change and to build a new organisation that concerns itself ‘with the national territory and with the international territory but we need highly trained people at every level’

It is alleged that he stated that Hizb ut Tahrir has ‘Albanians, Swiss, British...It is enough that they be of a high cultural level. In Germany we have interpreters and interpreters that translate books ; we have also in communications, also in Austria; the important thing is that their faith in Islam be sincere.’

When questioned about the situation in Germany, Mahdjoub replied ‘I cannot complain. There are 10 of us; we are taking an interest in Belgium, Spain, The Netherlands, Turkey and Egypt, Italy and France, but the nerve centre is still London.....Shaykh Adlen has given a great deal of money; as I told you this plan has no need of any further comments or words.’[17]

Unlike the violent jihadist groups Hizb ut Tahrir does not now recruit on the streets or in the prisons. It is worth noting that an attempt to recruit among Birmingham street gangs involved in the local drugs scene and prostitution failed due, it was thought, to the recruits inability to properly comprehend and promote the intellectual ideology.<sup>18</sup> A way to assess which way an Islamist group may be moving is to look at its recruitment policies. Is it like Al Qaeda recruiting the disenchanted from the streets or in the prisons? Hizb ut Tahrir went some way down that road but has now reverted to recruiting in the universities.

Look at the backgrounds of its leaders and known members

Hizb ut Tahrir is not a populist movement like the Muslim Brotherhood or other Islamist movements. It is elitist and its clear strategy since the accession of Waheed to the leadership has been to recruit among elites. In fact its message can only appeal to elites, and that is why it tended to fail when it tried to recruit on the streets.

A high proportion of its declared membership are medical doctors or other professionals. The line up of speakers at a recent public event, the sixth national conference held in Birmingham in August 2003, under the banner of ‘British or Muslim?’ included:

- \* Dr Abdul Salaam, a married dentist in general practice from Chicago and former follower of Elijah Mohammed and Malcolm X, who left their successor Louis Farrakhan’s Nation of Islam fifteen years ago.
- \* Waleed Gubbara a sales and marketing director married with two children.
- \* Taji Mustafa an IT engineer who is married with three children and who was a co-founder of a major independent Islamic day school.
- \* Kamal Abu Zahra an Arabic translator with graduate and post graduate degrees who is married with three children.
- \* Shaban ul-Haqq, an IT project manager with graduate and post graduate degrees in computing.[19]

By advertising the professional and family backgrounds of the speakers it is clear that they are aiming to attract similar people: mature professionals with families.

The meeting held at the prestigious National Indoor Arena in Birmingham would have been expensive to book and likewise suggests that they are focussed on a different class of potential recruits and members than previously. The local press reports that the meeting attracted 7000 participants and that Imran Waheed and the main speaker Abdul Salaam used the opportunity to ‘dissuade Muslims from taking up arms against Israel arguing that that they do not advocate the ‘indiscriminate killing of Jews’, but rather the seizure of power through peaceful means. However a senior member of the group Sajjad Khan also stated that ‘there needs to be an international Islamic army, from Muslim states, across the world, to take back the state of Israel and even go into Iraq to wrest control of the region from the US.’[20]

To appeal to established people Hizb ut Tahrir now also promotes a more progressive line on family issues than other Islamists and one which is designed to appeal to educated elites. They are, for instance, against arranged and intra-family marriages.

Their literature differs markedly from that produced during the time of Omar Bakri Mohammed. It is high quality and sometimes expensively produced literature, published in full colour. The regular web-based journal Khilafah is well designed with high resolution scanned images. This is intended to be attractive to the class of prospective converts they seek.

However, the move towards more web-based printing also avoids involvement with the external world, and potential exposure.

### **Assessment**

That Hizb ut Tahrir is subversive is obvious: the strategy and activities are aimed at influencing and subverting society and leading elements within it.

In the UK, at least, it appears to have aimed for the professional classes although these are the only members who are declared. It is not yet known what other areas of society they may have infiltrated, but as their message is so different and indeed nuanced from other Islamist groups, it is unlikely that they will have made much progress.

Despite their use of jihadi terminology and the fact that they play a part in radicalising Muslim youth there is no evidence that Hizb ut Tahrir is involved in or encourages terrorism in Western Europe, or that it is moving towards terrorism. There have been no reports that members have joined or become involved in Al Qaeda or the global jihad movement. Hizb ut Tahrir members are not thought to have joined the Taliban, nor is it believed that any are being held at Camp Xray.

Likewise, Hizb ut Tahrir is not mentioned in connection with al Tawhid or Ansar al Islam, nor any of the other wahabi or salafi terror groups.

However, members did go to Bosnia during the mid 1990's and indeed Ahmed Sheikh Omar is thought to have been a Hizb ut Tahrir member when he went to Bosnia via the Convoy of Mercy. But any terrorist recruitment appears to have been done there, or in Afghanistan rather than in the UK.

In Germany it was initially banned because it is antisemitic and because it represented a subversive threat to democracy, and the German constitution and laws enacted since 9/11 allow for the proscription of those that threaten the integrity of the state.

It was banned in Denmark because it published a document which threatened the country's Jewish leadership, and the same appears to be the case in Holland.

In Britain the UK law does not allow for the possibility of banning subversive organisations: only those that aid or abet terrorism, so a ban is unlikely.

While Hizb ut Tahrir's views are so extreme it is unlikely that it will ever achieve mass popularity, and they will continue to be criticised by other Muslim groups, even those that are Islamist.

In a totalitarian society, where there is no political opposition, Hizb ut Tahrir will seek to occupy the vacuum thus left. It will thereby be seen as both subversive and possibly terrorist. However it seems unlikely, on the evidence, that it would engage in terrorism, and there is no credible evidence that this has been the case in Uzbekistan or Egypt.

In reality Hizb ut Tahrir represents a long-term threat of subversion. It is a gradualist ideology and although it has generally failed to confront the reality of its ultimate aim, that of the violent overthrow of the established order, its elitist recruitment policies are unlikely to allow it to achieve its mission.

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