

Hizb ut-Tahrir

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) is a networked Islamist organization active in approximately 25 countries,¹ including the United States. It calls for the non-violent overthrow of Muslim regimes that are perceived as corrupt and influenced by Western governments and culture. HT intends to transform the Middle East and Central Asia into a pan-Islamic state (Khilafah) that will be governed according to political-Islamic law (Sha'ria).

According to the evidence available, HT poses a threat primarily to California. There is trace evidence of presence in New York, only as indicated by postings on online message boards,² but there is no organized presence there at this time. HT's minimal presence in the United States is concentrated in California.³

HT is a highly secretive movement, the only evident manifestations of which are the circulation of inflammatory leaflets, participation in political rallies, and a robust online propaganda campaign.

Membership ranges from between 10,000 to 100,000, though it is difficult to determine exact numbers due to the covert nature of the group's operations and their complex structure of command. HT is composed of small cells, each with 3-8 members.⁴ The leader of each cell maintains contact only with the leadership of the supervising cell.⁵

HT is outlawed throughout Central Asia, Pakistan, Germany, and Turkey for its extremist, anti-Semitic and seditious ideology. Recent allegations suggest indirect ties to al-Qaeda, however concrete evidence proving an alliance has not been presented.

In the West, the majority of HT members are the children of immigrants. The group tends to flourish in Muslim immigrant communities where there might not be a source of proper Islamic education. The group is adept at creating attractants designed to expose populations to group ideology without revealing group sponsorship. For example, in the UK, members have

established community centers within immigrant populations to help students and their families. Though HT's affiliation is not advertised group doctrines are introduced to the center's visitors.

Because HT concerns itself with political rather than spiritual issues, it does not enforce any regulation over the physical appearance of its adherents. In fact, unlike Wahabist groups with similar goals, such as Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, HT advocates the use of modern technology, promotes the enjoyment of music, and allows for the shaving of facial hair. In the West, male and female members and supporters appear modern in style and are most often assimilated into their host societies; attending universities and holding positions of responsibility in the workplace. Female members will likely wear the hijab.

Because of the strenuous nature of group doctrines and literature, full indoctrination into HT requires a degree of intelligence and a higher level of education. Hence, universities are the most common place for recruitment drives.⁶ In the United States, there is evidence that individual members of the group do attend prominent universities.⁷ Organized cells located in the Los Angeles area have taken the form of a technopop/rap groups whose lyrics convey a condensed version of group doctrines. Songs present the seditious aspects of group ideology without presenting the arguments for non-violence that appear in group literature. Lyrics recommend isolation from non-Islamic society and stress feelings of mistreatment by the US government. The potential for incitement of a lone-wolf operative is a concern.

With their intensive and comprehensive presence on the Internet, their persuasive literature, and their articulate and charismatic spokesmen, their influence will quickly spread through the United States.

DETAILED DOSSIER

Overview:

Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) was founded in 1952 by Palestinian Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani (1909-1979) as an offshoot of the militant Muslim Brotherhood.⁸ Al-Nabhani's desire was to resurrect the Sha'ria in a pan-Islamic state that would encompass the Middle East and include the state of Israel. He believed, as HT members still believe today, that Islam has been wrongly distilled to a

purely religious practice due to shifts in its practice over the centuries and negative influence from the West.⁹

HT seeks to collapse “colonialism” (i.e. – all governments influenced by the United States) “in all its intellectual, political, economic and military forms” by “exposing its plans, and revealing its conspiracies in order to deliver the Ummah from its control and to liberate it from any effect of its influence.” They are committed to, “a struggle against the rulers in the Arab and Muslim countries, by exposing them, taking them to task, acting to change them whenever they denied the rights of the Ummah or neglected to perform their duty towards her, or ignored any of her affairs, and whenever they disagreed with the rules of Islam, and acting also to remove their regimes so as to establish the Islamic rule in its place.”¹⁰

Countries of Operation:

HT operates in approximately 25 countries including Poland, Germany, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Australia, Bangladesh, United Kingdom, Indonesia, Turkey, Syria, Sudan, Tunisia, Palestine, Afghanistan, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, and the United States. In the West, it is most visible in the UK where most of its propaganda is generated.

Another vocal contingent of HT is located in Indonesia. The Indonesian faction claims that it represents the “official” headquarters of Hizb ut-Tahrir. There is ongoing conflict between the London and Indonesian factions over which represents the “true” Hizb ut-Tahrir.¹¹ However, within the English-speaking world, the London faction maintains authority and dominance.

Two-Tiered Operations:

HT’s main function is to grow its membership and spread its ideology through proselytizing. It is comprised of above-ground and clandestine operatives. Above-ground members are responsible for communications with the media, for the dissemination of group positions to the general public, and for appearances at rallies and conferences. Below-ground operatives are responsible for facilitating the spread of ideology through Muslim communities. In the West, most of the above-ground members are in London, where the group is headquartered.

Why HT has Caught the Attention of International Law Enforcement Agencies:

Hizb ut-Tahrir has attracted the attention of law enforcement and security agencies worldwide because its extremist views echo those of Al-Qaeda and other militant Islamist groups. It has been outlawed in Germany, Turkey, Central Asia, Pakistan, and Russia. Despite their identity as a non-violent political organization, they have gone on the record in support of the use of suicide missions as a means to evict Israel from the Middle East.¹² Any non-Muslim entity occupying land earmarked for inclusion in the Khilafah is vulnerable to the use of force to remove it. They have not gone on record advocating the use of force against Americans stationed in Iraq and Saudi Arabia, however their position on Israel suggests that they would endorse such action.

Foreign Governments ban Hizb ut-Tahrir:

In Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Russia, and several other East European and Central Asian countries, HT has been designated a terrorist organization. Central Asian law enforcement agencies have been particularly committed to eradicating the group. In Uzbekistan alone there are close to 8,000 members of HT in prison.¹³ According to Human Rights Watch, many of these prisoners have been tortured to death while in Uzbek custody.

HT has been banned in Turkey, and Germany for distributing literature that encourages violence against Jews. A ban against the group is being considered in Denmark for the same reason. A leaflet titled, "And Kill Them Wherever You Find Them, and Turn Them Out From Where They Have Turned You Out" states, "Jews are a people of slander. They are treacherous people who violate oaths and covenants. They lie and change words from their right places. They take the rights of the people unjustly, and kill the Prophets and the innocent. They are most severe in their hatred for those who believe. Allah has forbidden us from allying ourselves with them."¹⁴ The leaflet goes on to encourage martyrdom operations against them.

Despite governmental attempts to suppress HT, many members are unhindered. In January 2004, a professor at Peshawar University was arrested for setting up a stall on campus to display Hizb ut-Tahrir literature.¹⁵

Does Hizb ut-Tahrir harbor a violent underground faction?:

There is informal indication that group members were involved in the war against the Russians in Afghanistan,¹⁶ although it is unclear whether the soldiers fought under the Hizb ut-Tahrir banner.

Several media reports generated by Central Asian and Russian news agencies have claimed the group maintains arms caches,¹⁷ though no physical proof was provided.

A June 2003 report¹⁸ claimed that the Federal Security Service (FSB) apprehended two HT members, one from Tajikistan and the other from Kyrgyzstan, between whose vehicles they found 100 grams of plastic explosives, three hand grenades, 400 grams of TNT, two detonators with safety fuses, and a large collection of Party leaflets. An FSB spokesman said that their investigative information proved without doubt that the group was preparing fighters to send to Chechnya and readying for possible attacks in Moscow. HT's London spokesman, Dr. Imran Waheed, responded to the arrests by saying, "We do not undertake violent action. The Russian government has a long history of planting evidence on people." No further news on this incident has been reported.

There are cases in which members have chosen to leave HT in favor of membership in more radical groups that advocate the use of violence.¹⁹ It is not known whether defections to more militant groups were facilitated or managed by Hizb ut-Tahrir. However, it is easy to realize that once an individual has been indoctrinated they need only be persuaded one step further to be convinced that acting on their beliefs through violence is justifiable.

The German arm of HT was suspected of having ties to local white supremacist groups. These allegations arose after members of the anti-Semitic National Democratic Party attended a rally at the Technical University of Berlin that was sponsored by HT.²⁰ An alliance between the two groups has not been confirmed or denied.

Is HT in Possession of or Does it Seek to Acquire WMD?:

While it appears unlikely that the group is attempting to acquire and use chemical or biological weapons, many of their members have higher degrees that would suggest an ability to create such weapons. For example, of the several members identified on the www.1924.org site, one has a PhD from Oxford University in molecular biology, another has a degree in bioengineering, and another in physics.

Does HT have ties with Al-Qaeda?:

In Italy, intelligence officers intercepted a conversation between two members of Ansar al-Islam (AI),²¹ a group affiliated with Al Qaeda. The conversation suggests that members of AI in Poland

were in the process of infiltrating HT with the intention of co-opting its assets to serve AI's purposes. These assets include its intelligent, highly-educated members and its printing presses. Though it is unclear from the conversation, it may be that HT operates elementary and high schools, in which AI also had an interest. The conversation also suggests that once AI had successfully infiltrated HT in Poland that it would continue to take over the group in the rest of Europe. It is important to note that the identity of only one of the participants was revealed in the transcripts and that neither participant was a decision-maker; most likely, the conversation took place between operatives in middle-management positions in AI.

HT maintains ties with Al-Muhajiroun, which was founded by former members of HT who supported armed participation in the Jihad. Al-Qaeda operatives Zacharias Moussaoui and Richard Reid were passed along to Al-Qaeda by Al-Muhajiroun in London. HT and Al-Muhajiroun provide links to each others' web sites and participate in many of the same political rallies. It may be that HT maintains the same connections to AQ as Al-Muhajiroun, but there is no evidence to indicate that this is the case.

Recruitment Demographics and Tactics:

Since the 1990s, the membership of HT has grown immeasurably. The volatility of conditions in the Middle East compounded by the crack-down on the group in Central Asian countries by oppressive governments are contributing to the HT's resurgence in popularity.

HT seeks the support of Muslims from all social classes, educational backgrounds, and ages, however most of the groups' recruitment resources are devoted to targeting young people between the approximate ages of 14 and 22. Within that demographic they are most focused on recruiting university students. In its initial stages, governing the Khilafah will require educated individuals who are well-trained in the physical and social sciences. The message forum on the groups' Islamic-State.org web site features a post requesting CVs from members interested in developing the Khilafah.²²

In the Middle East and Central Asia, it appears that the group is less concerned with the age and education level of their recruits.²³ HT cares only to persuade as many people as possible to their way of thinking in an effort to overwhelm, and consequently overthrow regional governments. Their propaganda seeks to encourage a sense of isolation that is resolved only by acceptance into the community of Muslims who adhere to HT's corpus of doctrines. They label any Muslim who does not share their goals as "not serious."

Most of the group's spokesmen are in their late 20s to mid 30s, and are skilled writers and orators. The majority have higher degrees, mainly in the sciences: computer science, medical sciences, biology, molecular science, biochemical engineering. Other professions attributed to identified members include: dentist, engineer, electrician, Army major, Architect, chemistry professor, mechanic, and career army servicemen.²⁴

Group members speak all languages, however Arabic will be the official language of the Khilafah. Because the Koran was written in Arabic all members are encouraged to study it so that they can read the Koran in its original form.

Until a few years ago, when governments in Europe began to crack down on extremists, representatives from HT would be sent directly into the universities to recruit students. Today, their tactics are more insidious. Aside from leafleting, the group conducts most of their propaganda campaigns online. One site built with the intention of exposing Muslims to group ideology, Muslimstudent.org.uk, bore no mention of the group's sponsorship. The commonplace name of the site was such that it could be found easily by Muslim students in the United Kingdom who were in search of a peer group or student activities. The group operates numerous web sites and chat boards that are frequently accessed from universities.²⁵ Sites appear in multiple languages and also vary in design in order to attract demographically disparate recruits. Some have more sophisticated graphics, such as www.1924.org, while others emphasize group literature without any visual enhancement, such as hizb-ut-tahrir.org.

What has made HT more successful in building a following than other transnational radicalizing Islamist group with a similar mission is its ability to transcend cultural boundaries; to resonate with the youth populations of Middle Eastern, Central Asian, South East Asian, South Asian, Western European and North American. HT does not focus on religious practice and therefore can appeal to all denominations of Islam.

How Full Membership is Achieved:

According to group literature,²⁶ full membership to the group is open to Muslim men and women regardless of their nationality or ethnic background. The individual must present themselves to a cell responsible for recruitment and demonstrate their commitment to HT's world view. They must "mature in the Party culture" and "adopt the thoughts and opinions of the Party."

It does not appear as though HT sponsors “training camps” such as those we see with more militant groups. Instead, the group uses community centers, youth camps, and mosques to conduct face-to-face study circles with those going through the indoctrination process. The full training process takes two years.²⁷

Once indoctrinated and chosen for membership, men and women are organized into separate cells. Women’s cells are led by a woman or by a male relative. Members may be asked to relocate to start new cells.²⁸

Manifestations of HT in the US:

There is no official representation of HT in the United States, however, there is evidence of adherent cells that do not overtly identify themselves as members of the HT movement. These fledgling seeds of the movement have already successfully integrated themselves into Muslim youth culture.

Following the successful example white supremacist groups have set by increasing their membership using music as a means to indoctrinate and create a community of peers, HT promotes technopop bands; Soldiers of Allah (now known as Muslim Studio) and ANP (also known as An-Nasr Productions). ANP has performed at the University of California, Irvine campus,²⁹ and may have performed at other universities in the region. The type of music played by ANP and Muslim Studio is popular with college-aged students. The lyrics, which feature a simplified version of HT’s ideology are circulated on web sites and chat boards. Fan boards create a sense of community among young Muslims who may not have a community in the physical world. Many of the songs appeal to young people’s sense of anger and disaffection.

On its web site, ANP provides a link to an announcement for a retreat for young Muslims over the age of 14. The retreat, which was titled “Method for Change or Change of Method,” was held in California during the three days before Christmas in 2000.

Likely Ways in which HT Will Establish Its Presence in U.S. Cities:

- Because of heightened vigilance in U.S. cities, members are unlikely to identify themselves as HT. Instead, it is more likely that the group will spread its ideology through established community centers, mosques, through community centers designated for youth education, in the universities, and via the Internet.
- We will likely see more web sites built by college students in tribute to HT.
- Increased posts to chat boards designated for the discussion of Islamic-related topics.
- Possibility of youth retreats sponsored by HT members.
- Rock, Technopop, or Rap Group whose lyrics echo group doctrines.
- Establishment of community centers.
- The group is known to operate commercial print shops, which not only serve as a source of funding, but also enables them to print their literature without the scrutiny of outsiders.

Summary:

- Large proselytizing group whose influence is spreading
- Minimal presence in the USA at this time, though presence is expected to grow
- No proven alliance between HT and jihadi groups
- Group accused of possessing conventional weapons, but evidence may have been planted
- In the West, HT is most interested in recruiting young Muslims who are college educated.
- Group members are not identifiable by physical appearance.
- Most likely, group members will only be recognized by the literature they circulate.
- Extremist ideology stresses non-violence, however ideology is spread in the U.S. without emphases on this important aspect of group doctrines. Incitement of an individual to violent action is a concern.

Web Sites*:

www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org

www.hizb-ut-tahrir.info

www.hizbuttahrir.org

www.islamic-state.org

www.1924.org

www.khilafah.com

www.khilafah.org

www.khilafah.net

www.khilafah.com.pk

www.khilafat.org

www.al-aqsa.org

www.expliciet.nl

www.al-islam.or.id

www.muslimstudio.com

www.nasrproductions.i-p.com

www.mindspring.eu.com

www.islamic-truth.co.uk

Independent Sites:

www.angelfire.com/mi/shebaab/

http://hometown.aol.com/_121b_0Hz320cPxyRIMqhUsa5JWCv3QOi0RHx719J7Yh0kN606AWmFndA2Rg==

http://hometown.aol.com/_121b_13zNjEIKIAKxTuUPjGAf8Cj2PotREOq5

<http://www-personal.umich.edu/~luqman/>

* - The nature of HT's web campaign is such that sites appear and disappear frequently. The sites listed here were all operating as of 1/25/2004. HT likely operates many more sites than the ones listed here.

Notes:

1. In his essay, "Hizb ut-Tahrir: An Emerging Threat to U.S. Interests in Central Asia," Ariel Cohen claims that the group operates in 40 countries, however, he cites no source to support this figure. In the course of research for this document, I identified approximately 25 countries in which HT has an active presence.
2. Post on Soldiers of Allah discussion group by sith7ia@aol.com, Friday, January 24, 2003.
3. Soldiers of Allah and ANP located in Los Angeles metropolitan area. A Muslim football league located in Irvine, CA drew negative attention for sponsoring a team called "Soldiers of Allah." The team may have been influenced to call itself Soldiers of Allah by the local HT cell.
4. Pannier, Bruce, *How Big A Threat is Hizb ut-Tahrir?*, Posted to Religioscope.com on June 2, 2003.
Bissenova, Alima, *Is Hizb ut-Tahrir Going Public in its Struggle?*, accessed from <http://www.uzland.uz/2001/july/24.htm>
5. Cohen, Ariel, *Hizb ut-Tahrir: An Emerging Threat to U.S. Interests in Central Asia*, Accessed 6/16/2003 on www.heritage.org.
6. *The Reality of the Sect Hizb ut-Tahrir*, accessed 1/24/2004 from www.htexposed.com
7. Paean to the group built in 1997 by former University of Michigan student, Luqman Abdul-Sabour. Site is still on the University of Michigan server. Last accessed 1/24/2004. <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~luqman/>
8. Mattar, Philip, editor, *Encyclopedia of the Palestinians*, pg. 278, Facts on File, New York, New York, 2000
9. an-Nabhani, Taquiuddin, *Concepts of Hizb ut-Tahrir*, Khilafah Publications, London, UK
10. From the Hizb ut-Tahrir leaflet, "About Hizb ut-Tahrir," last accessed 1/24/2004 at www.hizb-ut-tahrir.info
11. Factions disputed each other's legitimacy through correspondence posted on the Soldiers of Allah discussion group between November 2002 and January 2003.
12. Dr. Imran Waheed interview on BBC TV's "Hardtalk," November 18, 2003.
13. Human Rights Watch, World Report 2003, Uzbekistan, accessed 1/23/2004 from www.hrw.org.
14. Leaflet accessed from www.hizb-ut-tahrir.info, March 31, 2002.
15. Hizb ut-Tahrir press release posted on Muslimstudio.com message board on 1/15/2004.
16. Message posted on Muslimstudio.com message board in October 2003.

17. September 24th, 2002 article in the Kyrgyz newspaper *Res Publika*
18. Skrobot, Andrei, *Extremism Behind a Security Fence*, The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press, 7/9/2003
19. Stern, Jessica, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill*, pg. 196, Harper Collins, New York, New York, 2003
20. Bernstein, Richard, *German Raids Net Data on Islamic Militants but No Suspects*, The New York Times, April 10, 2003
21. Published in *Il Nuovo*, 12/3/2003
22. Forum announcement posted 12/23/2003, accessed from www.islamic-state.org.
23. The Hizb ut-Tahrir leaflet titled "List of Those Arrested From Hizb ut-Tahrir" notes the ages and occupations of members arrested in Syria in 1999. Accessed 6/9/2002 from www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org
24. Ibid
25. The managers of Muslimstudio.com were persuaded not to add a chat room capability to the site by members who wrote that their university servers prohibited participation in chat rooms.
26. From the Hizb ut-Tahrir leaflet, "About Hizb ut-Tahrir," last accessed 1/24/2004 at www.hizb-ut-tahrir.info
27. Cohen, Ariel, *Hizb ut-Tahrir: An Emerging Threat to U.S. Interests in Central Asia*, Accessed 6/16/2003 on www.heritage.org.
28. Ibid
29. Short video of performance accessed on ANP's web site, www.nasrproductions.i-p.com, December 2003.