

**From London to Andijan:**  
**The rising global influence of Hizb-ut-Tahrir among Muslim Youth**

By Sarah Swick

Minaret of Freedom Institute

**Abstract**

Hizb-ut-Tahrir, the Islamic Party of Liberation, is rapidly growing in notoriety and popularity among Muslim youth in the Muslim world and in the West. Recent headlines have captured the violent persecution of the Party in Andijan and elsewhere in Central Asia, while in Europe, the Party is facing media slander and government harassment. Around the World, the group's intense message, recruitment, and activism attract young Muslims to the Party.

This paper will begin by exploring the ideology and beliefs of Hizb-ut-Tahrir, including the group's methodology for change and its opposition to capitalism and the West. The paper will, then, examine accusations of anti-Semitism and violence made against the Party. Next, the paper will explore Hizb-ut-Tahrir's global presence and reasons for its popularity in areas such as Central Asia and its relatively weak presence in America. An in-depth exploration of the Party's activities and recruitment in Britain will then follow, specifically highlighting the relationship between Hizb-ut-Tahrir and young British Muslims. Subsequently, the attractive elements of the Party will be examined as well as its positive and negative effect on the British Muslim community. After presenting the dangers the Party poses, the paper will propose ways in which mainstream Muslim organizations can engage with Muslim youths so that they do not turn to radical groups. Finally, there will be a discussion of what Western and Muslim countries can do in order to curb the spread of radical trends such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir.

Social scientists and mainstream Muslim activists should not continue to ignore Hizb-ut-Tahrir and its appeal to Muslim youth. An understanding of their philosophy, of its followers, and of its appeal are necessary in order to judge whether the radical movement needs to be disarmed and, if so, how to effectively disarm it.

**Introduction to the Ideology of Hizb-ut-Tahrir**

Hizb-ut-Tahrir is a self-proclaimed nonviolent Islamic political party, working for the

ultimate establishment of a global Islamic State, or *Khalifah*. There are many misconceptions and false accusations against the Party which exaggerate the threat the Party poses. Yet the spread of the Party's strict ideology and isolationist methodology threatens the interests of the mainstream Muslim community and their relations with the wider society. Although not an extremist theological party, Hizb-ut-Tahrir presents an overall danger to Muslims, especially in the United Kingdom where Muslims are fighting to keep their youths away from extremist violence.

The Party blames the downfall of the last Caliphate in 1924 and the rise of capitalism for the weak state of Muslims today. Founded in 1953 by Taqiuddin an-Nabhani, a Palestinian judge, the Party's aim is to defeat Western ideology and culture, mainly represented by capitalism by re-establishing a true Islamic State. Moreover, the Party insists that the strict rule of a Caliph is essential to a truly Islamic State. In order to obtain this Islamic State, Hizb-ut-Tahrir presents a three-stage process, which they claim follows the Sunnah, or method of the Prophet (peace be upon him):

**The First Stage:** The stage of culturing to produce people who believe in the idea and the method of the Party, so that they form the Party group.

**The Second Stage:** The stage of interaction with the Ummah, to let the Ummah embrace and carry Islam, so that the Ummah takes it up as its issue and thus works to establish it in the affairs of life.

**The Third Stage:** The stage of establishing government, implementing Islam generally and comprehensively, and carrying it as a message to the world. <sup>1</sup>

As part of its campaign against the West and capitalism, the Party attacks the principles of democracy and human rights as being *un-Islamic* while also taking aim against Western governments and their Muslim allies.

HT, as Hizb-ut-Tahrir is commonly referred to, vehemently opposes democracy claiming that it is inconsistent with Islamic principles of government and is a tool used by the West to further conquer Muslim lands. HT refuses to participate in any political system that is not completely and totally *Islamic* according to their interpretations, which includes boycotting national and local elections, as well as student government associations. In opposing democracy, the Party claims, "For Muslims to adopt democracy means to disbelieve in all - may Allah forbid - the decisive and conclusive evidences, among which are many Qur'anic verses which oblige

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<sup>1</sup> Hizb-ut-Tahrir, "The Method of Hizb ut-Tahrir," at [www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org/english/english.html](http://www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org/english/english.html).

them to follow the law of Allah and to reject any other law. Moreover, these verses consider any one of them who does not follow or implement the law of Allah as either a *Kaafir*, a *Zalim*, or a *Fasiq*.”<sup>2</sup> However, HT, itself, is not void of all democratic principles. The UK branch of the Party holds elections, which are open to all UK members of HT, both male and female, every two years, to determine its Executive Committee.

The Party also contradicts itself, in its staunch opposition to the idea of human rights and the existence of international institutions such as the United Nations. HT claims that both, human rights and the United Nations, are the results of capitalism and secularism and are therefore incompatible with Islam. However, HT has recently contradicted its opposition to human rights in the debate over its proposed banning in the UK. Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s UK website<sup>3</sup> has recently posted articles from various human rights organizations which oppose the ban claiming that it would violate the group’s right to political expression and assembly, as well as religious freedoms, specific provisions which HT had previously criticized as being incompatible with Islam.

Hizb-ut-Tahrir is also seen to be intolerant and anti-Semitic in their rhetoric. The Party claims that interfaith dialogue is “a foreign, evil, and Western idea that has no basis in Islam.”<sup>4</sup> And in an article that was previously posted on their website, HT said, “The Jews are a people of slander. They are a treacherous people who violate oaths and covenants. They lie and change words from their right places. They take the rights of people unjustly, and kill the Prophets and the innocent. They are the most severe in their hatred for those who believe...This is how they are now, and this is how they will continue to be.”<sup>5</sup> In addition, a Hizb-ut-Tahrir speaker was quoted during a speech at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) saying, “Let’s be open about this – the Qur’an does not mention Zionists, it mentions Jews. They are our enemy and insha’allah (with the help of Allah) we will finish them.”<sup>6</sup> And finally, in 2002 the Party was banned in Denmark for reportedly creating “a ‘hit list’ of fifteen to twenty leading members of

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<sup>2</sup> Hizb-ut-Tahrir, “The American Campaign to Suppress Islam.” at [hizb-ut-tahrir.org/english/books/pdfs/american\\_campaign.pdf](http://hizb-ut-tahrir.org/english/books/pdfs/american_campaign.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> [www.hizb.org.uk](http://www.hizb.org.uk)

<sup>4</sup> Hizb-ut-Tahrir, “Dangerous Concepts,” at [http://hizb-ut-tahrir.org/english/books/pdfs/dangerous\\_concepts.pdf](http://hizb-ut-tahrir.org/english/books/pdfs/dangerous_concepts.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Hizb-ut-Tahrir, “And Kill Them Wherever you find them,” previously at [www.islamic-state.org/leaflets/020331\\_AndKillThemWhereverYouFindThem.html](http://www.islamic-state.org/leaflets/020331_AndKillThemWhereverYouFindThem.html).

<sup>6</sup> Michael Whine, “The Mode of Operation of Hizb ut Tahrir in an Open Society,” February 20, 2004, at [www.ict.org.il/articles/articleid=515](http://www.ict.org.il/articles/articleid=515).

Denmark's Jewish community."<sup>7</sup> Yet, HT denies accusations of anti-Semitism and insists that in their vision of the future Islamic State, the Party will allow People of the Book to practice their religions under the Khalifah.

Moreover, the Party is firmly anti-Western, and specifically anti-American. HT opposes American military action in Afghanistan and Iraq and they question the American explanation of the attacks of September 11, 2001 and other world events. And despite its vehement claims that it is nonviolent, it has released calls for Muslims to defend with arms their brother and sisters in Iraq and Afghanistan, including in one communiqué which stated: "O, Armies of the Islamic Ummah: The time has come for you to defend the domains of the Muslims... it is obligatory on you to work to liberate the Ummah from them and to support your Muslim brothers in Afghanistan and elsewhere by standing on their side in confronting America, Britain and their allies in their brutal war against Islam and the Muslims."<sup>8</sup> The Party also praises suicide bombings in Israel, saying, "Today, the Mujahideen in Palestine provide us with the best of examples: The youth are competing in the martyrdom operations."<sup>9</sup> However, it should be noted that while HT has praised certain acts of violence, the Party has not called on individuals to carry out violent or terrorist attacks, insisting that only a Caliph has the ability to call for jihad. Yet, despite the absence of a ruling Caliph, HT maintains that Muslims have a duty and right to defend occupied lands, including Palestine, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

Others, such as Ariel Cohen of the Heritage Foundation, claim that Hizb-ut-Tahrir presents an "emerging threat" to America and accuse the Party of participating in violence across the Middle East and Central Asia. Cohen claims "members of Hizb participated in coups against pro-Western regimes in the Middle East, such as the failed 1968 officers' coup against King Hussein II of Jordan."<sup>10</sup> HT members have also been accused of participating in violence in Egypt, including an "HT sympathizer [who] is thought to have been a member of the group which assassinated President Anwar Sadat of Egypt in 1981" and another member is accused of leading a "terrorist operation against the military academy in Cairo" in 1974.<sup>11</sup> More recently,

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Hizb-ut-Tahrir, "America and Britain Declare War Against Islam and the Muslim," communiqué, October 14, 2001, at [www.khalifah.com/home/category.php?DocumentID=2428&TagID=3](http://www.khalifah.com/home/category.php?DocumentID=2428&TagID=3).

<sup>9</sup> Hizb-ut-Tahrir, "And Kill Them Wherever you find them"

<sup>10</sup> Ariel Cohen, "Hizb-ut-Tahrir: An Emerging Threat to U.S. Interests in Central Asia," Heritage Foundation, May 30, 2003, p. 6, at [www.heritage.org/Research/RussiaandEurasia/loader.cfm?url=/commonspot/security/getfile.cfm&PageID=42978](http://www.heritage.org/Research/RussiaandEurasia/loader.cfm?url=/commonspot/security/getfile.cfm&PageID=42978)

<sup>11</sup> Mateen Siddiqui, "The Doctrine of Hizb ut-Tahrir," in The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir: Deciphering and Combating Radical Islamist Ideology, ed. Zeyno Baran, The Nixon Center, September 2004, p22, at

the Party has been “blamed for a series of bomb attacks in the Uzbekistan capital, Tashkent” in 1999.<sup>12</sup> The Russian government also accuses the Party of having links with Chechen fighters and has banned and imprisoned many of the Party’s members.<sup>13</sup> However, Hizb-ut-Tahrir denies any such involvement and insists that any members who commit an act of violence do so on their own accord and do not represent the Party. In fact, even the United States Department of State admits, “the US Government has no evidence that Hizb-ut-Tahrir has committed any terrorist acts.”<sup>14</sup> Moreover, human rights groups such as Amnesty International have raised the issue of unfair arrests, trials, and imprisonment of Hizb-ut-Tahrir members, some of whom have been labeled as ‘possible prisoners of conscience’.<sup>15</sup> Overall, the Party is well aware of the line between freedom of expression and incitement of violence and, at least publicly, the Party has not crossed that line and there is absolutely no proof that Hizb-ut-Tahrir supports attacks against civilians in North America and Europe.<sup>16</sup>

And while some may call Hizb-ut-Tahrir radical or even extreme, theologically HT remains in-line with conservative Islamic interpretations and remains distant from more extreme interpretations represented by the Salafis and Wahhabis. Thus, while on the surface, HT’s anti-Western rhetoric would seem to place the Party in alliance with Al Qaeda, each rejects the other “as profoundly wrong on fundamental theological questions, notably the acceptance of certain hadith.”<sup>17</sup> In addition, HT’s “independent approach means that much of Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s teaching on Islamic matters is considered heterodox by leading scholars in the major schools of thought.”<sup>18</sup> The Party is firm in its rejection of seeking blessings from or relying on anything or anyone besides Allah. They oppose marking graves and deny “the punishment of the grave” and the Prophet’s (peace be upon him) ability to intercede on the Day of Judgment. The Party also

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<http://www.nixoncenter.org/Program%20Briefs/PB%202004/confrephiztahrir.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> “Hizb ut Tahrir al Islami (Islamic Party of Liberation) at [www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/hizb-ut-tahrir.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/hizb-ut-tahrir.htm).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> U.S. State Department, “Country Reports on Terrorism,” April 27, 2005, at <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/45388.htm>

<sup>15</sup> Amnesty International, “2002 Country Report: Uzbekistan .” at [web.amnesty.org/web/ar2002.nsf/eur/uzbekistan!Open](http://web.amnesty.org/web/ar2002.nsf/eur/uzbekistan!Open).

<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that the distinction between political violence and terrorism is not clear. Political violence is typically defined as terrorism when carried out against one’s own interests and is thus subjective in use. The author is not convinced that definitive and impartial evidence exists proving HT’s role in terrorist activities; however she admits the existence of potential political uprising from HT within the Muslim World.

<sup>17</sup> International Crises Group, “Radical Islam in Central Asia: Responding to Hizb ut-Tahrir,” June 30, p. 31, 2003, at [http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/report\\_archive/A401032\\_30062003.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/report_archive/A401032_30062003.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p 4.

rejects the Prophet's (peace be upon him) knowledge of the unseen.<sup>19</sup> The Party stresses that blind faith is not enough, and therefore every believing Muslim should be able to scientifically prove the existence of God.<sup>20</sup> In terms of women's role in Islam, the Party insists that women should play an active role in society and it supports a woman's right to work outside the home and participate in social and political activities. Yet, the primary focus of the Party is not theological, thus they do not pose a religious threat to the wider society but rather a political threat, especially in the Muslim world and social threat to Muslim communities in the West.

### **Hizb-ut-Tahrir and its International Reach**

The confirmed numbers of HT members and supporters around the world are unknown. For reasons of security, Hizb-ut-Tahrir is reluctant to release exact membership details while governments are also reluctant to estimate numbers for political and propaganda reasons. However, Ariel Cohen estimates that the Party has approximately "5,000-10,000 hardcore members and many more supporters in former Soviet Central Asia" and over 10,000 active members in Pakistan, Syria, Turkey, and Indonesia.<sup>21</sup>

In the Muslim world, the Party's tough rhetoric against American imperialism and its stand against oppressive regimes, particularly their vocal resistances against extensive government corruption in the region have earned Hizb-ut-Tahrir respect from the average Muslim. In Central Asia, following the fall of the Soviet Union, HT has gained a following by engaging in a movement to reintroduce Islam to the region. Due to the lack of previous religious influence under communism, Central Asian Muslims are eager to take advantage of their new religious freedoms and learn about their faith. Therefore, HT has printed and distributed books and leaflets in local languages, which educate the masses about Islam and HT's ideology. While educating the masses is a priority of HT, the Party's members around the World primarily represent the professional classes of society. However, in Central Asia, due to economic circumstances and high unemployment, it is most likely that Party members are young, unemployed, and uneducated while the local leadership come from the "educated lower middle class."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Mateen Siddiqui, "The Doctrine of Hizb ut-Tahrir," p15-18.

<sup>20</sup> As a first step towards membership in HT, a candidate member must memorize the Party's proof of the existence of God, as they feel that anything less than complete certainty that comes with scientific proof will lead to failure.

<sup>21</sup> Ariel Cohen, "Hizb ut-Tahrir: An Emerging Threat to U.S. Interests in Central Asia," p.2.

<sup>22</sup> International Crises Group, "Radical Islam in Central Asia: Responding to Hizb ut-Tahrir, p.19.

In other parts of the world, Hizb-ut-Tahrir, “typically focus[es] their efforts in urban areas, appealing to journalists, teachers, lawyers, religious scholars and other persons of influence.”<sup>23</sup> Muslims around the world are attracted to Hizb-ut-Tahrir for its centralized ideological base while responding locally to the needs of the population. The Party also focuses its recruitment efforts on university campuses. In Indonesia, the Party spent fifteen years as an “underground movement on college campuses in Java,” and, today, it remains a campus-based movement.<sup>24</sup> This is also the case across the European continent, where HT is known to have a following primarily among second-generation immigrant Muslims attending university.

Compared to its counterparts in the Muslim world and in Europe, Hizb-ut-Tahrir is relatively quiet in America, but that is not to say that HT members and sympathizers do not reside in the United States. It is likely that HT is only in its first stage of forming a “Party group,” while in Europe it seems that HT is in its second stage of spreading their ideology to the Muslim community. Another reason for the relative inactivity of HT in America could be the lack of overall sympathy for HT’s message. American Muslims are wealthier, more educated, and better integrated compared to European Muslims as a whole. Therefore harsh anti-American rhetoric will have trouble penetrating American Muslim youth. Yet, as America continues to fight wars in Muslim lands and unjustly incarcerate Muslims at home, we may see an increase in interest in such groups as Hizb-ut-Tahrir from young American Muslims.

Currently, the leader of Hizb-ut-Tahrir in America is reported to live in Southern California<sup>25</sup>, where the Party is thought to have had some success in recruiting young Muslims by “exploiting interests in the Internet, computer games, and music.”<sup>26</sup> Madeleine Gruen in her article “Demographics and Methods of Recruitment,” reported that Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s primary recruitment tool was using message boards, particularly on the website of the Muslim rap group, “Soldiers of Allah.”<sup>27</sup> Gruen stated, “Initially, visitors to the site would most likely not realize the band’s affiliation with HT. It was only after visitors were “hooked” into the band’s fan community that they would begin to see the name Hizb ut-Tahrir.”<sup>28</sup> The rap group is no longer active and their website is no longer running, suggesting that HT has not yet succeeded in its

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<sup>23</sup> Mateen Siddiqui, “The Doctrine of Hizb ut-Tahrir,” p.11.

<sup>24</sup> International Crises Group, “Radical Islam in Central Asia: Responding to Hizb ut-Tahrir, p.12.

<sup>25</sup> See [www.mercurynews.com/mld/mercurynews/news/local/states/california/northern\\_california/12461303](http://www.mercurynews.com/mld/mercurynews/news/local/states/california/northern_california/12461303.htm) htm

<sup>26</sup> Madeleine Gruen, “Demographics and Methods of Recruitment,” in The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir: Deciphering and Combating Radical Islamist Ideology, ed. Zeyno Baran, The Nixon Center, September 2004, p116, at <http://www.nixoncenter.org/Program%20Briefs/PB%202004/confrephiztahrir.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p. 118.

efforts to recruit American Muslim youths.

### **Hizb-ut-Tahrir and Young British Muslims**

In contrast, Hizb-ut-Tahrir has had much more success in recruiting Muslim youths in Europe, particularly in the United Kingdom. The long and dedicated process of becoming a member of Hizb-ut-Tahrir is conducive to the student lifestyle. Before being accepted as a full-fledged member, candidate Members meet weekly in study circles during a two-year period in order to learn and memorize party literature.

Despite being banned by the National Union of Students, which accuses the Party of promoting hatred, Hizb-ut-Tahrir has a strong following in universities around the United Kingdom. The Party's visible activities include leafleting outside mosques and on university campuses, especially following Friday Jummah services. The Party organizes debate style events on current affairs—events that are usually full to capacity. The titles and leaflets for these events are usually extremely provocative and intended to stir interest. The resulting solution of these debates is the same each time: only the re-establishment of the Khalifah will solve the question or problem proposed.

Many young Muslims at such events admire the courage of HT to stand against Western imperialism and stand up for justice in the Muslim world. In fact, the basic idea of an Islamic State based on pure Islamic principles of justice and faith appeals to most believing Muslims. When asked what made the Party attractive to young people, some young British Muslims who are not currently members of HT lauded HT for being “politically aware and not gullible.”<sup>29</sup> In contrast, other large Muslim organizations and mosques, which are run by the older, immigrant community are seen as being out of touch with young British Muslims, and seem to roll over in deference to Western governments. Therefore, HT is seen as an alternative movement that empowers young Muslims by promoting, as one young British Muslim said, “the idea that Muslims will only progress if they take their fate in their own hands and become Masters of their own fate, as opposed to pursuing mendicancy politics and attaining strength through external support.”<sup>30</sup>

Other admirable qualities of HT cited by young British Muslims are the Party's high

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<sup>29</sup> Quotes and opinions expressed are part of a series of interviews with several young British Muslims attending university who wished to remain anonymous.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.



commitment to their work and organized, professional approach. Their flyers and books are always professionally printed and their events are well planned and run smoothly. Their marches have uniform posters and banners with simple catch phrases, such as “Secularism has failed the world.” A march in London organized by HT to protest the French ban of the hijab was significantly larger and better organized than the mainstream Muslim organization’s protest. And in parts of the world where political protests are not part of social tradition, Hizb-ut-Tahrir regularly draws crowds of more than a thousand people.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, Hizb-ut-Tahrir uses English in all of their texts and in their meetings.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, there is no need for an HT member to speak or know Arabic, making the Party easily accessible to young Muslims. Young British Muslims who are looking for a sense of belonging find these traits attractive and thus some prefer HT to other organizations.

There are 1.6 million Muslims living in the United Kingdom, approximately 3% of the population, with some areas around London approaching the 40% mark.<sup>33</sup> To understand the wider context in which young Muslims are turning to HT and other “non-mainstream” organizations, it is essential to understand the environment, society, and homes in which these youths are being raised. Sixty percent of Muslims living in the inner cities are living in what are called “estates”:<sup>34</sup> large run-down neighborhoods funded by government subsidies similar to “the projects” in the United States. These “estates” are markedly isolated from mainstream British society, an isolation which has led to strong cultural, religious and nationalistic ties among residents of similar backgrounds, such as the tight-knit Bengali community living in the estates of East London. However, national and cultural identities mean less to the new Muslim generation who were born and raised in Britain, speaking English and attending British schools. Fifty-two percent of Muslims in Britain are under the age of twenty-five and of those who are under sixteen years of age, ninety percent were born in the United Kingdom compared to the ninety percent of Muslims over thirty five years of age who were born outside the UK.<sup>35</sup> So, while the older generation has established their identity and communities based on cultural and nationalistic

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<sup>31</sup> Examples include protests in Turkey, Kazakhstan, Bangladesh, and Jordan, as cited on the Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain’s website at [www.hizb.org.uk](http://www.hizb.org.uk).

<sup>32</sup> HT has also translated texts into different immigrant languages such as Urdu or Bangla, and the group occasionally holds meetings in those languages in order to attract the older population.

<sup>33</sup> National Statistics Online, “2001 Census: Religion in Britain,” at [www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=293](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=293).

<sup>34</sup> Mohammad Siddique Seddon, “Muslim Communities in Britain: A Historiography in British Muslims between Assimilation and Segregation (United Kingdom: The Islamic Foundation, 2004.)

<sup>35</sup> Dilwar Hussain, “British Muslim Identity” in British Muslims between Assimilation and Segregation,

heritage, the young Muslim generation is left widely confused about where they belong. Yet a common factor among the youth is Islam. Therefore, young British Muslims are becoming active in seeking knowledge about their faith and establishing identity based on religion. However, older immigrant Muslims who frequently do not include young Muslims in leadership roles and who, due to language and culture barriers, largely misunderstand or ignore the concerns of the Muslim youth typically run the mosques and other organizations. Hizb-ut-Tahrir has recognized this problem and provides the sense of belonging, identity, and purpose, which young British Muslims crave. In addition, since young British Muslims “did not themselves flee tyrannical regimes in the Muslim world as many of their parents did, they are often more critical of democracy and the inequalities of capitalism and correspondingly attracted to Hizb ut Tahrir’s message of a just Islamic order.”<sup>36</sup>

In order to entice young British Muslims into the Party, Hizb-ut-Tahrir has a number of recruitment techniques, including handing out pamphlets around Mosques and university prayer rooms, which usually lead to a pre-scripted conversation with an individual. HT members may also befriend new University students, both British Muslims and those who have come from Muslim countries, who may be unaware of their new friend’s affiliations. The veteran member of the Party may take a few of these new students or potential recruits out to dinner and eventually engage them in ideological discussions. If the new student does not show interest in the Party’s ideology, the phone calls abruptly end and contact is virtually severed.

As a way of introducing itself to Muslims on campus, the Party has established university societies under pseudonyms, such as the Muslim Media Forum. At the beginning of the school year, the Party’s society sets up a stall at the University Freshers’ Fair<sup>37</sup>, and at universities with large Muslim populations, the HT society presents itself as a political alternative to the Islamic Society.

At the London School of Economics, where there are fewer Muslims and where the Party has little support, a part-time student and a member of Hizb-ut-Tahrir established a society called The Comparative Ideologies Society in 2003. At first, the society presented itself as a diverse group that as its title suggests, explores differing ideologies. Their profile on the LSE Student Union website describes their objective as engaging in “meaningful debate and discussion at the

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p.113.

<sup>36</sup> International Crises Group, “Radical Islam in Central Asia: Responding to Hizb ut-Tahrir,” p. 11.

<sup>37</sup> An event held at the beginning of the school year where student societies set up tables in order to attract new members.

LSE between high profile thinkers of differing ideological perspectives.”<sup>38</sup> Their profile gives no hint of the society’s affiliation with Hizb-ut-Tahrir or Muslims in general. Therefore, many of the society’s initial members were unsuspecting non-Muslims, giving the society the minimum number of members to receive university support. The society has hosted several debates with provocative titles, such as: “Have we lost faith in Global Democracy?” “Can the US ever win the Battle for Hearts and Minds?” and “Has the Middle East rejected liberal democracy?”<sup>39</sup> The events have been well attended, especially by HT supporters. The events were also well organized with professionally printed HT leaflets and materials being distributed. And while the debates did fulfill the society’s mission of providing meaningful debate, there was a clear agenda on the part of the organizers. At the end of each debate, the final solution to the problem reflects Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s main theme: the re-establishment of the *Khalifah* is the only way to solve the ills of this world. In not disclosing the society’s affiliation with Hizb-ut-Tahrir, the society and HT are deceiving the University and its students.

Moreover, some fear that deception such as this will reflect poorly upon the larger Muslim community and make legitimate Islamic Society work on campus difficult. Mainstream Muslims also fear that it will send a message to young Muslims that deception is permitted in Islam. However, it should be noted that this deception is not inherent to HT’s ideology, but rather it is their means of dealing with the ban of HT’s activities in British universities.

Other complaints about HT expressed by young Muslims not associated with the Party include the party’s mentality, their exclusive approach, their refusal to cooperate with other organizations, and a loss of the Islamic spirit. Their exclusive approach is represented by their claim that they are the one ‘saved sect’ exploiting a hadith “that in the Last Days there will be 73 sects of Muslim, 72 of which will be sent to Hell, with one being “the saved sect.”<sup>40</sup> Another serious complaint against the Party is its lack of spirituality and over emphasis on power and politics. Another young Muslim highlighted some poor manners on the part of certain Party members, such as shouting through a bullhorn on a university campus during class hours in order to promote an event. Others site hypocrisy on the part of the Party, which has been known to criticize other Muslims for using what they claim are ‘un-Islamic’ forms of protests and then later using those same forms of expression. One young Muslim male complained, “Particular

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<sup>38</sup> [www.lsesu.com/main/societies/list/Educational/ComparativeIdeologies](http://www.lsesu.com/main/societies/list/Educational/ComparativeIdeologies)

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Mateen Siddiqui, “The Doctrine of Hizb ut-Tahrir,” p. 25.

examples [of HT hypocrisy] are anti-war demonstrations and also voting on motions at NUS [National Union of Students] when they were affected. Ironically, they called upon the assistance of other Muslims, even though all they'd done previously was cause them grief."<sup>41</sup> Most recently this can be seen in their call for unity among Muslim organizations to oppose the proposed ban of the Party in the United Kingdom. Previously, the Party refused to work or collaborate with other Muslim organizations, yet now the Party is asking for support from those same organizations.

Despite complaints of hypocrisy, bad manners, and exclusivity, HT does contribute in positive ways to the British Muslim community. The group is organized and professional and they strive to include the younger generation in leadership roles and to listen to the complaints and issues of the youth. Recently, HT has held events discussing long ignored and misunderstood social issues such as drug use and gang violence among Muslim youth. HT also empowers young female Muslims by encouraging them to voice their opinions and including women in visible leadership positions. And despite accusations of violence, the Party in the United Kingdom provides a nonviolent means for young Muslims to vent their frustrations about domestic and international injustices. In Denmark, some have credited the Party with helping lower the crime rate among Muslim immigrant youths by helping the youth to get back on the 'Straight Path.'<sup>42</sup> The Party is also credited with going beyond divides in Madhabs and culture. In a community in which different interpretations and nationalities have created separate mosques and organizations, Hizb-ut-Tahrir does not discriminate among schools of thought or nationalities. In fact, in the British Muslim community which tends to be culturally conservative, Hizb-ut-Tahrir stresses Islam over culture, and questions areas in which cultural practices are usually confused for Islamic law. This is especially attractive to the young Muslim generation who find some cultural practices restrictive and Islamic principles liberating.

Yet, Hizb-ut-Tahrir does present dangers to the Muslim community as a whole. The Party promotes an image of a utopian unified Muslim Ummah: however their over-emphasis on political Islam and strict adherence to HT ideology leaves little room for political dissent. While as a whole the Party promotes an intellectual Islamic movement, on the grassroots level; however, members seem to simply recite Party literature word for word without pondering or

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with a young British Muslim.

<sup>42</sup> Mateen Siddiqui, "The Doctrine of Hizb ut-Tahrir," p. 7.

reflecting for themselves.<sup>43</sup> This type of brainwashing is dangerous in the British community as fears of radicalism spread. It is also reasonable to fear splinter groups, such as al-Muhajiroun, who may tire of the non-violent methods of HT but who may still use the Party's aggressive rhetoric in support violence. A young person frustrated with handing out pamphlets and attending talks could conceivably take HT's rhetoric to a violent level. However, a widespread switch to violence is unlikely due to the intense indoctrination and loyalty of its members. Nonetheless, HT's opposition to interfaith dialogue and Muslim political participation advocates further isolation of the Muslim population and prevents political empowerment of Muslims living in the West. Furthermore, the Party's aggressive rhetoric and lack of diplomatic tact also further injures the image of Islam in the West which will only increase Western Islamophobia and will make it more difficult for mainstream Muslims to carry out dawah and lobby for Muslim causes.

### **Suggested Responses to Curb Hizb-ut-Tahrir's Influence**

Since HT refuses to engage or work with other Muslim organizations and with 'un-Islamic' governments, there is little being done in terms of dialogue and compromise with the Party. However, there are lessons to be learned from Hizb-ut-Tahrir and ways in which to curb their popularity among Muslim youth.

In order to lower youth attraction and involvement with HT and other radical groups, Muslim organizations and mosques should increase youth leadership roles and allow young people's voices to be heard, including those of young women. In communities where the words of an elder are rarely challenged, mosques must encourage productive dissent and listen to the needs and demands of young people. This includes creating youth-led programs and circles on issues of concern to second and third generation immigrants. Mosques and Muslims organizations need to encourage interfaith dialogue and step away from nationalistic and cultural bias and promote a more spiritual Islam. Imams and community leaders should speak English and understand the society in which they now reside so that they are able communicate with the youth. Parents also need to do their part by creating a base for tolerant Islam in their children

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<sup>43</sup> In February 2005, when the author of this article complained and explained her view to an HT member who was passing out flyers with a burning American flag which she found offensive, she asked him whether he could understand why she was offended, the member replied that he was simply told to come to this university (at which he was not a student) and pass out these flyers, and that to answer that question he would have to go ask his superiors.

from the beginning and by taking personal responsibility for their children's religious education. Parents should also encourage their children to have wholesome non-Muslim friends, which could prevent their children from isolating themselves from non-Muslims.

Governments, both Muslim and Western, can also play a role in minimizing isolationist tendency among the next generation of Muslims. Western governments should increase Muslim participation and representation in the government and in society. They need to create a policy that integrates Muslims into society, not one that isolates or assimilates them. This policy should be created in cooperation with various groups representing the diversity of the Muslim community. In addition, governments should work to end discrimination and increase economic opportunities for minorities in order to prevent a feeling of contempt among Muslims towards the wider society and the State. Furthermore, governments, whose responsibility is to represent the interests of the citizens, must remember that they have the same responsibilities for the protection of the interests of their minorities as any other citizen. Therefore, the governments should re-examine domestic and foreign policy which leads to the isolation and unhappiness of many of its citizens.

In the Muslim world, especially in Central Asia and the Middle East, in order to see a decline in Hizb-ut-Tahrir's popularity, there is a need for more civil liberties and transparent governance. Governments in Muslims countries should also include some true Islamic representation in order to decrease the appeal of groups like Hizb-ut-Tahrir. This strategy has been successful in Turkey, as well as the Turkish governments program to fund moderate religious teachings.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, governments and Muslim organizations should train Imams in susceptible regions about combating HT's ideology and providing literature in local languages that presents an alternative to HT's views.

Recently the British government has taken a dramatic step of seeking to protect British interests by proposing a ban on Hizb-ut-Tahrir. The British government would not be the first government to ban the Party. In countries across the Muslim world, HT is banned as well as in several European countries, such as Germany and Denmark where the group has violated the countries' strict anti-Semitism laws. The obvious effect would be that Hizb-ut-Tahrir would be forced underground and perhaps it would curb some of their activities. However, as the university ban on HT has not prevented HT from being effective, a national ban would most likely do little

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<sup>44</sup> Rusen Cakir, "The Rise and Fall of Turkish Hizb ut-Tahrir" in The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir:

to prevent Hizb-ut-Tahrir from continuing its work. As one young Muslim said, “to ban them seems wholly unproductive. [It would add] more fuel to their fire.”<sup>45</sup> However, the larger and more important issue for Muslim and British citizens revolves around civil liberties. Hizb-ut-Tahrir has not been accused or convicted of breaking any British laws. They provide a legitimate alternative political viewpoint; therefore any ban on the group would threaten rights of Muslims and non-Muslims.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the proposed ban of Hizb-ut-Tahrir in the United Kingdom has pushed the Party’s ideology to the forefront of Western media and has garnered the Party support from mainstream Muslims who fear that their own organization could be the next to be banned. However, in the discussion over the ban, Hizb-ut-Tahrir in Britain has been forced to publicly water down its rhetoric and has taken many of its controversial articles off their website, suggesting the group in Britain could be coming closer to mainstream Muslim rhetoric.

In Central Asia, as the world recently saw in the Uzbek government’s crackdown in Andijan, the Party continues to be persecuted for their beliefs. It is likely that as governments in the Muslim world continue to ignore civil liberties and persecute their own citizens, Hizb-ut-Tahrir will continue to grow as a political and religious force.

As America continues military action in Muslim countries and supports the illegal occupation of Israel, Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s aggressive anti-American rhetoric will likely receive some sympathy among American Muslim youths. However, the economic and educational opportunities provided to Muslim youth in America will likely keep them away from any formal ties or commitment to the Party. The American Muslim community is also less concentrated and better integrated than other Western Muslims; therefore it is unlikely that HT will harness widespread support among younger Muslim living in America.

Globally, Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s influence has risen over the past decade. Today, however, the Party finds itself at a turning point. Events in Central Asia and the proposed ban in Britain have brought the Party to the forefront. It will be the youth of the Muslim Ummah who will lead the Party into the future or allow the Party to dwindle back to its humble beginnings. The threat of Hizb-ut-Tahrir should not be exaggerated: it is not a terrorist organization. Nevertheless, the

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with a young British Muslim.

threat should also not be underestimated: the Party's rhetoric is aggressive and its ideology will lead to further isolation and radicalization of Muslims in the West. Consequently, the condition of Muslim Youth around the world requires continued attention and the rise of Hizb-ut-Tahrir requires continued vigilance.

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