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Fighting Kufr and the American Raj: Hizb-ut-Tahrir in Pakistan

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Fighting Kufr and the American Raj: Hizb-ut-Tahrir in Pakistan

Dr. Simon Ross Valentine

Introduction

Hizb-ut-Tahrir [HT], despite being a banned organization in Pakistan, is highly active in that country promoting social and political change, and the introduction of an Islamic state with Shariah law. For many analysts HT poses a serious threat to the security of Pakistan. It has been claimed by one recent report that HT “prescribes violence, which includes suicide bombings as well as hi-jacking and bombing planes”. The same report criticises HT’s “policy of military coups in Muslim-majority countries”. HT, however, officially claims to be a non-violent organisation arguing that the criticisms raised against it are nothing more than “a mix of untruths, material from extreme weblogs, neo-con US think-tanks and selective quotes from our material to support the anti-Islamic agenda”. HT further claims that it “works openly and has never hidden its work or objectives”. The aim of this paper is to briefly examine the ideology and beliefs held by HT, particularly its teaching on Khilafah; its attitude towards the west, especially America, and its criticism of the Pakistan government and army. Having briefly considered HT’s activities in Pakistan, and the activities of British HT members in Pakistan, the article will conclude with an assessment of the threat HT poses to Pakistan national security.

What is Hizb-ut-Tahrir?

HT, or the “the Party of Liberation”, is a Sunni political group aiming at the re-establishment of the Khilafah [a successor to the prophet Muhammad and ruler of the Muslim world], the imposition of Shariah law and the liberating of "the Muslim lands usurped by the Kuffar [non-Muslims] from the Muslims". HT was founded in 1952 by Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani, a Palestinian teacher and judge, with the main aim of replacing the “colonialist regime” in Jordan with an Islamic one. In his books,

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5 Statement regarding the Centre for Social Cohesion’s report, op.cit.


particularly System of Islam; The Islamic State, Mafaheem, (Concepts) and In The Way to Revival, al-Nabhan argued that Muslims are weak because they are divided and lack strong leadership. Believing that the ultimate panacea for Islam’s decline lay in the notion of Khilafah, al-Nabhan called for the re-establishment of the Khalifah to rule over and guide the international ummah. To achieve this end he maintained there must first be a core group of believers which, using the typology of Muhammad in Medina, would criticize the host society, especially its social and political structure, thus preparing the way for an alternative Muslim regime. Well organized cells, or halaqah, would be formed, consisting of shahabs, individual members who would be trained to adopt shakhsiyyah, [an Islamic personality or mind-set]. These cells, aided by musrah, [material assistance from political sources], would eventually bring about social change, probably by a military coup. Motivated by al-Nabhan’s ideas HT, In 1968/9, was allegedly involved in two failed coup attempts in Syria and Jordan, and a further coup in Egypt In 1974. Following the death of al-Nabhan in Beirut in 1977 HT spread to numerous other countries, firstly under the leadership of Abdal-Qadim Zallum, leader of HT till 2003, and then under Ata Khalil Abu-Rashta, the present international leader. It is estimated that HT has hundreds of thousands of members worldwide. Although HT is a legally recognized group in the UK and the USA and several Muslim states including the UAE, Lebanon, Yemen, Indonesia and Malaysia, it is banned in Egypt, Libya and Pakistan. HT was proscribed in Pakistan in 2004, following an alleged plot to assassinate former president, Pervez Musharraf, by HT members. More recently, on 22 October 2009 HT was banned in Bangladesh for allegedly "trying to de-stabilise the country". The Home Secretary of Bangladesh, Abdus Sobhan Sikdar, said the government “feared HT posed a serious threat to peaceful life”.

According to conservative estimates HT has hundreds of thousands of members worldwide. However other accounts suggest an affiliation of about one million members in forty different countries. Due to the fact that it is a proscribed organisation the membership of HT in Pakistan is a matter of conjecture. Attendance at HT rallies and demonstrations would seem to indicate a significant number of supporters. According to Imran Yousafzai, the deputy spokesman of HT in Pakistan, HT is gaining influence despite the government ban. “The majority of Pakistanis”, argues Yousafzai, “want a form of religious law, as survey after survey shows, and that is despite the brutal form to which the militants introduced Sharia in Swat”. Contacts known to the author, ex-military personnel and those presently serving in the Pakistan Army, express concern at the level of sympathy [especially animosity against

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8 Taji-Farouki, A fundamental Quest, op.cit., pp. 37ff.
9 Taji-Farouki, ibid., pp. 27-34.
Zardari for his pro-US policy] HT has with high ranking officers.\textsuperscript{15} It is rumoured that HT has sympathisers in the ISI. Tayyib Muqeem, a British HT member working in Pakistan claims that “one of Hizb ut-Tahrir’s strategies in Pakistan is to influence military officers”.\textsuperscript{16} Shahzad Sheikh, HT’s official spokesman in Karachi, openly admits how members are actively persuading the army to instigate a “bloodless coup” against the present government.\textsuperscript{17} In 2003 four army officers were arrested in Pakistan on suspicion of being linked to extremist groups. A HT insider at the time claims they were recruited by the organisation’s “Pakistan team” while training at Sandhurst.\textsuperscript{18} In the light of recent events in Pakistan it would appear that HT mainly appeals to the educated middle classes. The HT activists arrested in October 2009 in Islamabad included Rizwan Aleem, a nuclear scientist; Abid Mehmood, a USAID official and Aman Hamza, an environmental scientist. Nearly all the 32 arrested activists on that occasion belonged to educated families.\textsuperscript{19}

\textbf{HT’s beliefs: The Khilafah}

Despite the fact that there is no evidence in \textit{ahadith} or the Quran that explicitly or implicitly states how the Islamic State should be re-established HT advocates a well structured scheme to establish the \textit{Khilafah}, a state it regards as the divinely appointed system for social justice. In well advertised but illegal Seminars held during Ramadan, 2009, in major cities throughout Pakistan, HT stressed the importance of \textit{Khilafah} and obedience to it as a strict religious duty for all Muslims.\textsuperscript{20} “Islam has made it \textit{Fard} [obligatory] upon the Muslims”, declared HT, “that there must be a \textit{bayah} [oath of allegiance] to the \textit{Kalilafah} [sic]”. Citing a \textit{hadith} contained in \textit{Muslim}\textsuperscript{21} HT states that “whosoever dies without the \textit{bay’ah} [to \textit{khilafah}] on his neck dies the death of \textit{Jahilliyah}.”\textsuperscript{22} Although there are fundamental differences between the political, social and cultural context faced by Muhammad in Medina and the establishing of an Islamic state for Muslims today, HT asserts: “the Muslims of Pakistan call for full support for the work of Hizb ut Tahrir in its work to establish the \textit{Khilafah}”.\textsuperscript{23} Fearing an American takeover of Pakistan HT vehemently proclaims: “Know that the one and only solution to this growing American presence is the establishment of the \textit{Khilafah}.”\textsuperscript{24} In an “open letter to the \textit{ulema} of Pakistan” in December 2009 HT reminded the scholars within Pakistani society: “it is your duty is to join hands with the sincere callers to Islam and establish a second rightly guided \textit{Khilafah} state, of whose establishment \textit{RasulAllah} [prophet Muhammad] gave good tiding, which is now well within sight, closer than the blink of an eye, through which

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{15} For reasons of confidentiality such contacts remain anonymous.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{16} Nicola Smith, ‘British Islamists Plot against Pakistan’, Sunday Times, 4 July 2009, see also timesonline.co.uk, \texttt{http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article6638483.ece}, accessed 7/7/09.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{17} N. Smith, ‘British Islamists Plot against Pakistan’, Sunday Times, op.cit.}


\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{21} One of the six authoritative collections of \textit{hadith}, or traditions, of the prophet Muhammad.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Jahilliyah}, the ignorance, or idolatory that prevailed in pre-Islamic Arabia.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{23} Ramadhan Seminars’ Declaration, 9 September 2009, op.cit.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{24} “This War of Fitna is America’s handiwork”, One Khilafah, Hizb-ut-Tahrir Wilayah Pakistan, op.cit.
the Laws of Allah will be implemented, frontiers and souls will be protected and the scheming of the kuffar will blow up in their faces”.

**Attitude towards America:**

HT regards the US, referred to by the *Hizb* as the “American Raj” as “an open, hostile, kafir enemy of Muslims”. It sees America as a colonialist invader “expanding its hegemony of Pakistan to levels never seen before in the history of Pakistan, as if it is proceeding towards its own ‘Raj’, an occupation in all but name”. According to HT “part of this plan is America’s ‘Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act of 2009’, also known as the Kerry Lugar Bill, which is an excuse for an extensive network of American organizations to spend America’s money directly to further American objectives in the region”. It is argued that “this network itself is an excuse for even more American military and intelligence in Pakistan, just as the British Empire brought in an army of occupation to secure its East India Company thereby ending the supremacy of the Muslims and Islam over the Indian Subcontinent, through their Raj.”

In an open letter to the “respected and honoured ulema of the Muslims of Pakistan” HT condemned the atrocities “still happening to the Muslims in Pakistan; heinous crimes, violation of the sanctity of Muslim blood in Peshawar, Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Lahore and Multan, killing of women and children, the elderly and young people without discrimination, killing in the markets, universities and mosques and relentless bombings by the drones of the kafir Americans against the Muslims in Waziristan”. Arguing that “these heinous crimes are alien to the values and morals of the Muslims in Pakistan” and asserting that “their Taqwa [righteousness] prevents them from committing such heinous crimes, and their noble history attests to this”, HT accuses the US of carrying out the alleged suicide bomb attacks. HT claims “it is the kafir Americans, the murderers of Muslims in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Somalia and other Muslim countries, with their American mercenary killer companies, Xe Services LLC (formerly known as Blackwater) and others - that are perpetrators of these heinous crimes”. According to HT it is common knowledge at grass-roots level [in Pakistan] that the US “organize and plan these crimes and are standing behind them”.

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30 “This War of Fitna is America’s handiwork, One Khilafah, Op.cit.


Rejection of the Pakistani government:
Although several ahadith clearly show that it is wrong for one Muslim to say his brother is an unbeliever HT regards the Pakistan government, like all secular Muslim states, as takﬁri, or apostate. HT regards the US as “colonialists” and the Pakistan government as America’s “agent rulers”. The Pakistan government is condemned, inter alia, for its “unreserved help and support” for the American regime. HT criticizes the “treachery of Zardari and the other American agents in government” and asserts that it is necessary to remove “the corrupt and traitorous ruler of Pakistan, Asif Ali Zardari who has done everything he can to facilitate US plans in Pakistan”. Amongst other things HT, in the context of arrests made of party members in Pakistan, accuses America and the Zardari regime of “censoring the thoughts of Hizb ut-Tahrir and engage an unsuccessful campaign to prevent them from reaching the people”. “Let these treacherous rulers and their masters know”, declares HT, “that they can work day and night but they cannot prevent the return of the Khilafah”.

Concerning US drone attacks, and the military operation Rah-i-Nijat (Path to Deliverance) commenced by the Pakistan military on 19 October against the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan in Waziristan, HT affirms how it “condemns the killing of innocent people in these militant attacks and condemns the army’s killing of its own people and will continue to do so, as both are prohibited by Islam”. The Pakistani army chief, General Ashfaq Kiyani, is regarded as a “traitor” because of the military operations against the Taliban in S’wat and elsewhere along the Afghan border. Rah-i-Nijat is, according to HT, “not about the security of Pakistan. It is about saving America’s face in their failing war of occupation in Afghanistan”. “The American aim”, declares HT, “through their drone attacks and push for war in Waziristan – fully supported by the Zardari regime, - is to cripple Pakistan and make it into another American base as it has done with Iraq and Afghanistan”.

HT and other groups in Pakistan:
HT has limited contact with other militant, and political groups, in Pakistan. Although agreeing with the Jama’at-i-Islami [JI] in its condemnation of the Ahmadiyyah Jama’at as murtd [apostate] and zindique [heretical], and in its criticisms of US influence in Pakistan, HT, unlike JI which participates in the democratic process, rejects democracy and the electoral system as jahili seeing it as a direct affront to the

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36 “Hizbut Tahrir holds demos throughout the country against Waziristan operation”, Yahyasheikho786's Blog, ibid.
38 “Save Pakistan from America and Terror”, Pakistan Daily, op.cit.
40 “Save Pakistan from America and Terror”, ibid.
41 “Save Pakistan from America and Terror”, ibid.
hakimiyyah [sovereignty] of Allah. HT, basing its views on the vanguardist methodology of Nabhani, reject the gradualist approach of Mawdudi and the JI, an approach which argues for the gradual change of society by educational, legal and moral reform rather than direct action by an elite group. Imran Yousafzai although agreeing with JI for staging a protest against the military operation in S’wiat, accused its leadership of “compromising its position” by signing an all-party declaration that supported operations against militants. Other, more extreme groups such as the Jamiat Ittehad Ulama [JIU], criticize HT’s stance against violence as weak, accusing HT of being too moderate. For these reasons HT is also shunned by the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan, and other militant groups, although HT “is one of the few political movements in Pakistan that expressed open opposition to attacks on the Taliban.

HT’s call for action:
Believing that the present military troubles in Pakistan, what HT calls “the War of Fitna, is America’s handiwork”, HT calls for a “a vibrant, powerful wave for real change”. Its website appeals to the Pakistani people: “use your ingenuity to use all the means and styles that Allah has availed for you to carry the call loud and clear, whether it is by discussions, bayyans, dars, SMS, e-mail, radio or even television broadcast”. HT asks the people of Pakistan to give “nusrah [material support]” to Hizb-ut-Tahrir for the establishment of the Khilafah”.

Adopting a typological exegesis of the Quran, and seeing the age of the ansars and their struggle to impose Islamic rule in Medina as a paradigm or type for contemporary Muslims in their struggle against modern day jahiliyya, HT declares: “The Muslim armed forces must follow the example of their predecessors and noble brothers in Islam, the Ansar, who gave the Pledge of Material Support (nusrah) for the establishment of the Islamic rule”. Accordingly, HT calls “Pakistan’s Armed Forces to grant the Nusrah to Hizb-ut-Tahrir for the immediate restoration of the Khilafah state, as the platform for the re-unification of the entire Muslims world and a just new leadership for all of humankind”.

43 “This War of Fitna is America’s handiwork”, op.cit.
44 “This War of Fitna is America’s handiwork”, op.cit.
45 “This War of Fitna is America’s handiwork”, ibid.
47 “The War of Fitna”, ibid.
49 Seminars held during Ramadhan, 2009, op.cit.
50 Seminars, ibid.
51 “Open Letter to the Ulema of Pakistan from the Hizb-ut-Tahrir Wilayah Pakistan”, op.cit.
In its open letter to the “respected and honoured ulema of the Muslims of Pakistan” of 14 December 2009 HT argued that “the greatest of Jihad is the word of truth spoken before the unjust ruler”. Believing the Zardari regime to be the “unjust ruler” who allies itself with non-believers, HT directs the people of Pakistan to “eject the kuffar and their agents who conspired with them”.\(^{52}\) It calls for the ulema in Pakistan to issue “a Fatwa to expel the kafir Americans from these pure Muslim lands and to uproot the traitors who brought them, Zardari and his government”. In words resonating with violence HT exhorts the ulema:

“The Hukm Shar’i [divine ruling] upon you is to stand as one, raising your voices to demand the expulsion of American, not just from Pakistan, but all Muslim countries and mobilize the Muslims in general, and Pakistan’s armed forces in particular, to support their fellow Muslims in Afghanistan, so that the kuffar retreat, defeated and humiliated”.\(^{53}\)

The Pakistan authorities have clamped down heavily on activities organized by HT. On 17 October 2009 for example thirty members of HT were arrested by police in Islamabad including Imran Yusufzai, the groups Deputy Spokesman, for holding an illegal meeting.\(^{54}\) However, despite a government ban, HT is highly active within Pakistani society. Protests and marches are regularly organized. On Friday, 29th October 2004, under the banner “Liberate Iraq”, demonstrations, were organized by HT in Lahore, Karachi, Rawalpindi and Peshawar, calling for an end to America’s “occupation of Iraq and the re-establishment of the Islamic Khilafah”.\(^{55}\) On 31 May 2009 HT organized protests across the country, chanting slogans accusing the Pakistani army of fighting “America’s war”. In Rawalpindi, a crowd of 200 of the party’s supporters were dispersed by a police baton charge and tear gas. On 4 October 2009 HT held demonstrations in Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore and Peshawar, the demonstrators carrying large shoes inscribed with the slogan, “End American Raj, Close US embassy & bases”. Other banners carried the slogan “Af-Pak- Graveyard of America and Nato”, and “O Armed Forces! Rise up to destroy American military bases in Pakistan”.\(^{56}\) In November this year HT “signed and posted thousands of Hizb-ut-Tahrir Wilayah Pakistan’s ‘Red Letters’” to President Zardari, demanding an end of all American intelligence, military, bases and embassies in Pakistan.\(^{57}\)

**HT members in Britain and their link with Pakistan:**

Despite calls by Prime Minister Tony Blair in 2005, and more recently by Leader of the Opposition David Cameron, for the banning of the group, HT enjoys full legal status in the UK. As well as accusing it of violence, racism and sedition the Centre for Social Cohesion claims that HT is creating a number of “front organizations” to win

\(^{52}\) “Open Letter to the Ulema”, ibid.

\(^{53}\) “Open Letter”, ibid.


\(^{57}\) “This War of Fitna is America’s handiwork”, One Khilafah, Hizb-ut-Tahrir Wilayah Pakistan, op.cit.
public money and enlist support from mainstream politicians. HT has been accused of gaining government grants and funds to finance schools which promote its ideology. Recent media reports have suggested that British members of HT have been operating throughout Pakistan's institutional set up, especially the army in order to foment a bloodless coup. Members of the group have stated that HT has targeted the UK as a base from which to spread Islamic rule across the world. Using information supplied by Maajid Nawaz, a former high ranking HT member now a “reformed radical” working with the Quilliam Foundation, a government sponsored counter terrorism think-tank, it is claimed that HT was “set up in Pakistan in the early 1990s by Imtiaz Malik”, a British Muslim, and that in “1999 a call was sent to British HT members to move to Pakistan” which “prompted the movement of some of the UK's ‘top quality' activists to south Asia”. Nawaz claims that at least ten British activists were planted in each of Pakistan’s main cities. The media, citing information supplied by an “insider”, claim that in 2003, four army officers were arrested in Pakistan on suspicion of being linked to extremist groups, mainly HT. The “insider” claims they were recruited by the organization's "Pakistan team" whilst training at the Royal Military Academy in Sandhurst. According to Nawaz, “the organization wanted to establish itself in Pakistan because it had just become the first Muslim country to test nuclear weapons in May 1998, and HT wanted to facilitate the acquisition of nuclear technology for the khilafah it hoped to establish”. In July 2009 The Sunday Times referred to a dozen British HT activists based in Lahore and Karachi, or commuting between Britain and Pakistan. According to ex-HT member Ed Husain, "Britain remains vital to the Hizb, for it gives the group access to the global media and provides a fertile recruiting ground at mosques and universities.”

Conclusion

Although claiming to be a non-violent organization much of the rhetoric expressed by HT against the Pakistan government and other states it deems to be takfiri, is aggressive. For example HT openly calls upon Muslims in Pakistan and elsewhere to fight against America, “the cowardly crusaders”. Elsewhere HT defiantly declares that “the fierce struggle between the Muslims and the kufr, has been intense ever since the dawn of Islam …. It will continue in this way a bloody struggle as well as an intellectual struggle … until the hour comes and Allah inherits the earth”. The recent report Hizb ut-Tahrir: Ideology and Strategy, states that HT, in claiming to be non-

60 Nicola Smith, ‘British Islamists Plot against Pakistan’, Sunday Times, 4 July 2009, see also timesonline.co.uk, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article6638483.ece, op.cit.
63 N. Smith, ‘British Islamists Plot against Pakistan’, ibid.
65 N. Smith, ‘British Islamists Plot against Pakistan’, ibid.
violent, was purposefully “hiding its ideology and downplaying intolerance”.  

According to Oliver Roy, "the Hizb ut-Tahrir position against the launching of jihad is purely tactical. The organization believes that the time has not yet come for Jihad, but that it is a compulsory duty for any Muslim." Others have argued that "Hizb ut-Tahrir is not against violence as such. It is just against the use of violence now. But they still think jihad [holy war] is a positive concept." With the link between HT members in the UK and the party in Pakistan, and the situation where British born Muslims are directly involved in the party’s activities in Pakistan, it is important that HT Britain (HTB) and the HT in Pakistan are subject to appropriate state attention.

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