



Hizb ut Tahrir al Islami (Islamic Party of Liberation)

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1. INTRODUCTION

Hizb ut Tahrir al Islami (Islamic Party of Liberation) presents itself as “a political party whose ideology is Islam, so politics is its work and Islam is its ideology. It works within the Ummah [the community of believers, TTSRL] and together with her, so that she adopts Islam as her cause and is led to restore the Khilafah [Caliphate, TTSRL] and the ruling by what Allah (swt) revealed” (www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org, Accessed 10 April 2007). In their own eyes, Hizb ut Tahrir (for short) is a political group and not a priestly one (www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org, Accessed 10 April 2007). It is a trans-national party or movement that claims to try to achieve its political goals without the use of violence and has branches in about forty countries, including both Islamic and Western countries. In the Islamic world they are, for instance, active not only in the Middle East, but also in Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the former Soviet republics in Central Asia. In almost all of these countries, Hizb ut Tahrir is perceived as a threat to the state or even as a terrorist organisation. In the Western world, Hizb ut Tahrir has a presence in, among others, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany, Australia, the United States and Canada. To these countries, Hizb ut Tahrir presents a particularly difficult challenge since it holds radical Islamist views, but openly only advocates peaceful change. Nonetheless, in a number of EU member states, the party is regarded as one that secretly does support the idea of a violent jihad and/or has been involved in anti-Semitic incidents (AIVD, 2004:46). The authorities in some countries, such as the Germany for instance, have taken restrictive actions against Hizb ut Tahrir. In this study, we primarily focus on Hizb ut Tahrir branches in EU member states.

2. HIZB UT TAHRIR IN FOCUS

2.1 Historical Background

Hizb ut Tahrir was founded in Jerusalem in 1953 by the Palestinian Islamic scholar, political thinker and judge, Muhammed Taqiuddin al-Nabhani. After its establishment, the party began carrying the da'wah (the act of preaching Islam, which applies to Muslims and non-Muslims alike) to Arab countries. The party rapidly established branches in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Egypt, Tunisia and Turkey (GlobalSecurity.Org, Accessed 10 April 2007). However, due to the repressive political systems in the region and competition from other political ideas (Arab nationalism), as well as from other Islamist movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, its support group remained limited. Especially in Arab countries, the party was heavily prosecuted and many of its members jailed (GlobalSecurity.Org, Accessed 10 April 2007).

Outside the Arab world, Hizb ut Tahrir became rather successful in Central Asia and a number of Western countries. It managed to attract a large following in countries such as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Ironically, some of these regions were never considered part of the Caliphate. The expansion gained momentum in the early 1990s following the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the Western world, where it has more freedom of political movement, the organisation has managed to establish itself among immigrant Muslim communities, including both Arabs and non-Arabs. Within the EU, the party became active in the United Kingdom during the early 1980s. From there it spread to a number of other EU member states.

Today, Hizb ut Tahrir has spread its message to some forty countries around the world, of which almost half are countries where Muslims are a minority. The party's total number of members is unclear, but estimates hover around the one million mark and support is believed to be even higher. (New Statesman, 13 September 2004). Hizb ut Tahrir itself claims to have tens of thousands of members in Indonesia, Palestine and Uzbekistan. In Central Asia the party spoke of more than one hundred thousand members in 2002 (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 30 May 2002).

Within the European Union, Hizb ut Tahrir has established branches in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, with a particularly large following in the latter country. London is the headquarters of the party in the United Kingdom, but is also regarded as the most important centre of Hizb ut Tahrir worldwide. It is the location where it produces propaganda leaflets and books that are distributed globally. London has also been described as Hizb ut Tahrir's de facto headquarters, from where it raises funds, recruits, and supports its followers across the world (Rabasa, A., et al., 2004:347). Elsewhere in Britain, the party also has a strong presence, for instance in Birmingham, Bradford and Sheffield (ICG, 30 June 2003: 11). Other important centres of Hizb ut Tahrir within the EU include Hamburg and Bonn in Germany and Copenhagen in Denmark.

Thus far, the development of Hizb ut Tahrir in general can be regarded as one of constant growth of both membership, support and of their number of branches. However, in some places, its development is hampered or even brought to a halt by repressive measures, which holds particularly true for countries in the Middle East and in Central Asia. The party is most fiercely persecuted in Uzbekistan, where the authorities in Tashkent have jailed thousands of Hizb ut Tahrir members and their followers (see for instance the annual reports of Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch or the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices of the U.S. State Department). It is, however, unclear to what extent the repressive approach has managed to stop the growth of Hizb ut Tahrir in Uzbekistan.

Within the EU, the activities of the party are only restricted in Germany where it has been banned due to its anti-Semitic sentiments and because it represents a subversive threat to democracy and the German constitution. In Germany, as in Uzbekistan it remains unclear whether this ban has made any difference in the spread of Hizb ut Tahrir membership and support for its ideas.

2.2 Organization and Finance

2.2.1 Organizational structure

The organizational structure of Hizb ut Tahrir is rather complex. Until his death in 1977, the leadership was maintained in the hands of the founding father Muhammed Taqiuddin al-Nabhani, who was succeeded by Sheikh Abdul Qadim Zallum, another Palestinian cleric and former professor at Al-Azhar University. Zallum's leadership ended with his death in 2003. (Baran, Z., 2004:16-17). The two leaders were responsible for the general political course of the party. The identities of Hizb ut Tahrir's current leader and senior officers have not been mentioned in reliable open sources.

Concrete issues at the level of different national branches are in the hands of national leaders, where the scope and content of the activities within the branches greatly differ. A general distinction can be made between countries in which the party is permitted to operate freely, and countries in which Hizb ut Tahrir is prosecuted. In Uzbekistan, for instance, "The HT [Hizb ut Tahrir, TTSRL] is organized in a secretive and hierarchical pyramid structure made up of many five-person cells whose members, after they have completed training averaging about two months, form their own groups or 'halka' - also of five to six members" (ICG, 2002:7; U.S. Department of State, 2006). Other sources speak of three-person cells. (RFE/RL, 30 May 2002). In EU member states, the branches of Hizb ut Tahrir are organized like most political parties and have a hierarchical structure with a national leader, local groups and the possibility of membership for anyone who supports the party's ideas. In addition, the European branches of the party also consist of study groups, the above-mentioned 'halka's.'

2.2.2 Finance

Hizb ut Tahrir is a missionary and expansionist organization that needs substantial financial means in order to maintain its structure and to make international growth possible. These financial means derive mainly from private contributions and donations. Of particular importance are Hizb ut Tahrir branches

in Western countries and the Arab world, especially the Gulf region (see for instance, Rashid, A., 2002). The financial operations of Hizb ut Tahrir worldwide, are nonetheless, rather unclear. A great deal of uncertainty continues to surround the financial links between Hizb ut Tahrir branches in countries where the party may operate openly and those in which it is persecuted. One particular way to transfer financial resources between these type of countries is through alternative remittance systems. Such systems are illegal in most countries. Even more serious are the speculations that Iran, Saudi Arabia and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan have collaborated with Hizb ut Tahrir (See for instance Rashid, A., 2000). It should, however, be stressed that these allegations have not been proven to be true.

The financial activities of the party in EU member states also remain unclear. In fact "very little is known even within the intelligence community regarding the Movement's financial structure, including the sources and the control of funding" (Siddiqui, M., 2004:6). For a number of Western countries, however, some of the sources are much clearer. In countries such as the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Denmark, the party receives contributions and donations from members and sympathisers; a practice similar to that of political parties in general (Lieshout, van, K. and Bakker, E., 2007:14).

2.2.3 Links to terrorist organizations

From the beginning, Hizb ut Tahrir's leadership decreed that members should not participate in terrorist activities. This message has been continuously reverberated. There are, however, many allegations of links between the party and terrorist organisations. It should be stressed that none of these allegations are backed by concrete evidence. The Hizb ut Tahrir presence in Central Asia has been accused of having ties with various terrorist groups, one that has been mentioned especially often is the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, with which it shares many broader aims, primarily the institution of an Islamist political order in the region. However, according to the International Crisis Group and human rights organisations there is no proof of these allegations (ICG, 2002; ICG 2003; HRW, 2004). The opinion of the International Crisis Group is shared by various Western government officials who do not regard the Central Asian branches of the party as terrorist organisations. For instance, the US State Department, which included the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan on its list of terrorist organizations, does not list Hizb ut Tahrir.

There are, nonetheless, possible indirect links between Hizb ut Tahrir and terrorist groups and individuals. In Britain, three men, who in 1995 were arrested and charged with conspiring to assassinate the Israeli ambassador, were reported to have been in possession of Hizb ut Tahrir literature and to have helped organize Hizb ut Tahrir meetings in Manchester (Whine, M., 2006:5). Another man, Muhammad Babar - who is linked to the seven men currently on trial in London on charges of planning terrorist attacks between January 2003 and April 2004 - has stated that he became a member of Hizb ut Tahrir and another radical group, Al Muhajiroun, while at the university, when he became angered by the Gulf War (The Times, 24 March 2006). In the above mentioned cases, as well as in most cases, those behind the allegations only point at involvement in Hizb ut Tahrir activities while studying, the possession of Hizb ut Tahrir materials, and other rather indirect relations between suspects of terrorism and the party. More serious are the allegations that connect the party

to the other radical group mentioned above, Al-Muhajiroun, established in 1995 as a splinter group that broke off from Hizb ut Tahrir. According to leader Omar Bakri Muhammad, the two groups initially split because Hizb ut Tahrir was “too soft” (Siddiqui, M., 2004:6). His group has been accused of recruiting young Muslims in Britain to fight abroad in places such as Kashmir, Afghanistan and Chechnya (MEMRI, 24 October 2001). The previously mentioned Muhammad Barbar, testified in front of court that he had met Omar Bakri Muhammad. With regard to this link between Hizb ut Tahrir and Al Muhajiroun, it should, however, be stressed that it is rather indirect. The same holds true for speculation of the link between Hizb ut Tahrir and the suspects of the failed train attack in Germany in August 2006. Additionally, one of the Lebanese students that were arrested in this case is believed to have had links with Hizb ut Tahir (Der Spiegel, 22 August 2006).

Despite the above-mentioned allegations, authorities in the EU have not yet formally accused Hizb ut Tahrir for having links with terrorist organisations. In addition, there are no official reports that members have joined or become involved in the global jihad movement. However, it should be noted that some countries do see the organisation as a possible or potential threat to democracy and the rule of law (see for instance AIVD, 2004:46).

2.3 Methods and Tactics

2.3.1 Three stages

The methods and tactics used by Hizb ut Tahrir to achieve its ultimate goal – the establishment of its utopian Islamic Caliphate – are more of a theoretical than practical nature. Based on its interpretation of Islamic teachings, Islamic law, and socialist-revolutionary principles, Hizb ut Tahrir has formulated a three-pronged approach. Each stage is comprised of a number of specific actions towards social and political change. These three stages are the following:

“The First Stage is 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 is 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 is the stage of establishing government, implementing Islam generally and comprehensively, and carrying it as a message to the world” (www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org, Accessed 10 April 2007).

Unlike more traditional Islamic parties, Hizb ut Tahrir refuses to be involved in local politics, making it impossible for regional leaders to co-opt the group. Although Hizb ut Tahrir describes itself as a political party, it does not want to participate in elections or want to be part of coalition governments (GlobalSecurity.Org, Accessed 10 April 2007). The process towards the utopian Islamic Caliphate is viewed more as a social or intellectual process rather than a political one.

For the above-mentioned intellectual struggle and intellectual transformation, Hizb ut Tahrir focuses primarily on highly educated Muslims. The method is the so-called Islamic da'wah through which society can be transformed into an Islamic one. Within the EU, the concrete translation of this concept is distributing

leaflets at universities and near mosques, or to organise meetings on current political and social issues, such as the situation in Iraq, the cartoon issue in Denmark and Guantanamo Bay. According to Hizb ut Tahrir itself, “[w]hat is manifested in these political actions is culturing the Ummah with the Islamic culture in order to melt her with Islam and to cleanse her of the corrupt creeds, false thoughts and erroneous concepts including the influence of *Kufr* [disbelief, TTSRL] thoughts and opinions” (www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org, Accessed 10 April 2007). Although the method of da’wah seems very theoretical and impractical in relation to the stated goal, it cannot be denied that the party has managed to attract tens of thousands of Muslims in Europe who believe in its method.

2.3.2 Recruitment

Given its strong focus on intellectual struggle and transformation, the recruitment activities of Hizb ut Tahrir are aimed at students and middle-class professionals. To a lesser extent, the party is also appealing to frustrated youth and immigrant delinquents who have lost faith in the “system” in which they live and who are attracted to Hizb ut Tahrir’s rejection of Western values (Baran, Z., 2004). Within the EU, the party mainly focuses on the first of the above-mentioned groups. In the United Kingdom, for instance, initially, Hizb ut Tahrir sought to recruit only among university students at Imperial College, London University. From there it spread to other colleges and thereafter to Birmingham (Baran, Z., 2004).

Although all Muslims are welcome to join the party, irrespective of differences among the various tendencies within Islam, in practice Hizb ut Tahrir seems to concentrate on the largest Muslim group in a particular country, i.e. South Asians in the United Kingdom, Moroccans in Belgium, and Turks in the Netherlands and Germany. In addition, the overwhelming majority of Hizb ut Tahrir followers are Sunni Muslims, both in Europe and elsewhere.

Both inside and outside Europe a number of new members come from quasi-Marxist, left-wing backgrounds. “Britain’s Hizb ut Tahrir members are clearly influenced by growing up among England’s assorted leftists, but wanting to be Muslims, they invert the revolutionary concepts to which they are exposed and adopt methodology without necessarily adopting content” (Baran, Z., 2004). Outside Europe, “[m]embers come from the ranks of the young and unemployed,” because they are attracted to Hizb ut Tahrir’s “emphasis on social order, equality and assistance to the poor”. [...] “Membership is usually expanded directly through a loose association of close friends, family members and relatives, mimicking traditional social networks” (Baran, Z., 2004). The recruitment process through family and friends also holds true for Western countries, where groups of friends at universities and colleges play an important part in recruiting new members.

The recruitment of new members and sympathisers also takes place via the internet (Baran, Z., 2004). In most Western countries they pay a lot of attention to their websites and many Hizb ut Tahrir members are very active on discussion boards and chat rooms. Examples from different countries include www.expliciet.nl, www.kalifaat.org, www.khilafah.com, www.islam-projekte.com, www.hizb-ut-tahrir.dk, and www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org.

3. HIZB UT TAHRIR AUTOPSY

3.1 *Hizb ut Tahrir in Discourse*

As mentioned above, Hizb ut Tahrir has branches in some forty countries, in a number of which the party is considered a terrorist organisation. Within the EU, where religiously inspired political parties enjoy relatively greater freedom than they do anywhere else, only Germany has outlawed Hizb ut Tahrir.

For the EU member states, Hizb ut Tahrir presents a particularly difficult challenge since it holds extremist views, but advocates only peaceful change. In many EU countries, the party is regarded as holding anti-Semitic sentiments and supporting the idea of violent jihad, albeit not openly (AIVD, 2004: 46).

In January of 2003, the German Federal Minister of the Interior, put a so-called *Betätigungsverbot* on Hizb ut Tahrir, prohibiting all of the party's activities in Germany. Given the relative insignificance of the party in Germany, this restriction came as a surprise to many. Due to the international character of Hizb ut Tahrir and the specific characteristics of German legislation, the government could not outlaw the organization as a whole, but its membership became illegal. According to the Minister of the Interior, the party was banned because its members could be classified as "fundamentalist Islamists preaching hate" and were conducting "massive anti-Jewish propaganda" (RFE/RL, 26 October 2005). The restrictions were based on the perceived threat that Hizb ut Tahrir posed on the German democracy and constitution. Following these measures, German police searched twenty-five buildings with links to the party or its members, but no arrests were made. Afterwards, the Minister admitted that the *Betätigungsverbot* has a symbolic function first, stating it ought to warn every person or group that wants to violate the German constitution. (Het Parool, 20 January 2003).

Some of the activities on the basis of which Hizb ut Tahrir was banned in Germany also occurred in the United Kingdom. In fact, the party faced a lot of criticism from NGO's and political organisations in relation to its Islamist and alleged anti-Semitic ideas. In 2005 a 27-year-old British Muslim and trainee journalist with *The Guardian* lost his position with the newspaper when it was exposed he was a member of Hizb ut Tahrir (The Guardian, 22 July 2005). Following allegations that party members had spread anti-Semitic propaganda, in 2004 the British National Union of Students imposed a ban on alleged anti-Semitic student organisations, including Hizb ut Tahrir and Al Muhajirun (www.nusonline.co.uk, Accessed 15 April 2007).

Nonetheless, despite the fact that the party has a far larger following in Britain, the authorities in London never took concrete steps against Hizb ut Tahrir. After the London bombings in July 2005, Prime Minister Tony Blair announced the British government's intention to ban the organization under new anti-terrorism legislation that prohibits the glorification of terrorism (Guardian, 21 November 2005). This intention, however, was never implemented. The Organization of Chief Police Officers, intelligence chiefs, and civil liberties groups reacted by stating that Hizb ut Tahrir is a non-violent group which is not involved in terrorism and is not tied to Al Qaeda (Guardian, 21 November

2005). They also warned that a ban could backfire by forcing a non-violent group underground. As a result, the Prime Minister ultimately shelved the proposal to outlaw Hizb ut Tahrir (The Independent, 18 July 2006).

In Denmark, the party came under fire on the personal level when the head of the Danish Hizb ut Tahrir branch, Fadi Abdul-Latif, was found guilty of distributing anti-Semitic propaganda and given a sixty-day suspended prison sentence in 2003 (BBC, 27 August 2003). Abdul-Latif was arrested after handing out leaflets inciting violence against Jews on a square in Copenhagen. Reacting to the arrest, the Danish government expressed serious concerns about Copenhagen being one of the most important centres of Hizb ut Tahrir within the EU. Moreover, the Danish Minister of Justice began searching for a legally-based means to ban the organization (BBC Europe, 18 August 2005). According to the Minister, the anti-Semitic remarks "have no place in the Danish society" (BBC Europe, 18 August 2005).

In the Netherlands, a number of Members of Parliament also expressed their concerns about Hizb ut Tahrir's presence and its influence among Muslim immigrant groups perceiving the party as a threat to democracy and the rule of law (BZK, 8 September 2005). Several right-wing politicians have asked for a ban on Hizb ut Tahrir's activities in the Netherlands, but have not receive significant political support (BZK, 8 September 2005).

3.2 Root and Trigger Causes

The main root cause for the establishment of Hizb ut Tahrir was the founding of the state of Israel, or in other words, the defeat of the various Arab forces in 1948. The activism of the founding father, Taqiuddin an Nabhani can be seen as a direct reaction to this event. He believed that the only way to rectify the "loss of Palestine" was to re-establish the caliphate that had been dissolved in 1924 (www.hizb.org.uk, Accessed 15 April 2007).

The root and trigger causes of the development of Hizb ut Tahrir today are much less clear and vary from region to region and from country to country. Focusing on the EU member states the main root causes for the establishment of Hizb ut Tahrir branches and the growth of its membership and support are causes closely related to the (perceived) needs and wants of immigrant Muslim communities, in particular of young Muslims. Three of them stand out: 1) the need of an identity while living in a non-Muslim society, 2) perceived marginalisation within these societies, and 3) frustrations over developments in the Muslim world. Several studies in the UK, France, the Netherlands and Denmark have pointed to these three factors.

According to a Danish study, for example, there is increasing evidence that second and third generation Muslim youth are appealed by the idea of Muslims being one big family, and that Muslims are all victims of Western oppression and moral decay (Danish Institute for International Studies, 2006:56-57). Islamist ideologies, with their concept of the Ummah provide such an identity, as well as answers to existential questions of young second and third generation Muslim immigrants who have been raised largely without religious instruction (Washington Post, 14 January 2006).

Trigger causes that provide pace and direction to the growth of Islamist groups in general and Hizb ut Tahrir in particular include the following events, incidents and developments: military interventions in the Middle East (such as the US-led invasion of Iraq); the arrest and perceived illegal or unfair treatment of Muslim terror suspects (think of Guantanamo Bay, the secret CIA flights, and arrests of Muslims in the UK and other EU member states); violent incidents in the Muslim world (think of the use of excessive violence against demonstrators in Uzbekistan, or events in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories); perceived discrimination or rejection by the state or Western society (as reflected in high unemployment rates or fierce debates on the idea of prohibiting head scarves at schools); and rows over criticism on Islam by the West (such as the Danish cartoon issue and the film of Theo van Gogh and Ayaan Hirshi Ali in the Netherlands).

Hizb ut Tahrir has reacted to most of these issues, through which it has managed to mobilise thousands of Muslims within the EU. For instance, it organized gatherings against the Danish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad not only in Denmark, but also in most of the EU member states in which it has branches. (cf. Lieshout, van, K. and Bakker, E, 2007:14. A trigger cause of a different nature that explains the attractiveness of Hizb of Tahrir is the concept of small study groups of about half a dozen persons, which satisfies the need of many youngsters to belong to a group. According to a second Danish study, Hizb ut Tahrir members value the group identity and the clear rules provided by the party (Caver, M. and Ege, O., 2004:133).

A development also seen in European countries since '9/11', is the growing interest of young Muslims to 'defend the *ummah* worldwide' (Danish Insitute for International Studies, 2006:56-57). The youngsters appeal to different Islamic ideologies, such as the ideology presented by Hizb ut Tahrir but also jihadist discourse (Danish Institute for International Studies, 2006:56-57).

3.3 Dynamics of Hizb ut Tahrir's Development

As mentioned earlier, after the establishment of Hizb ut Tahrir, the party quickly developed branches in several other Arab countries. This growth later followed in Western Europe (1980s) and Central Asia and some countries in the Far East (1990s). In general, the development can be considered as one of growth, that has been especially spectacular in Western Europe and Central Asia. These are the two regions in which the party is most active (Lieshout, van, K. and Bakker, E, 2007:16). The development of Hizb ut Tahrir in Arab countries has been far less striking and with ups and downs of their own. The ups may best be explained by the disappointment and frustrations in relation to the lack of success of other ideologies, such as Arab nationalism, socialism, and those related to the Islamic revolution in Iran. The downs are to a large extent explained by the success of other political parties and movements, for instance Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Islamic Action Front in Jordan, or the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. The downs are also explained by the repressive policies of the autocratic regimes in the Arab world. Similar policies in Central Asia, however, do not seem to be able to stop the growth of the party in that region (Lieshout, van, K. and Bakker, E, 2007:16). Due to a lack of reliable open sources on membership of Hizb ut Tahrir in countries such as Uzbekistan and

Tajikistan, it is difficult to be specific on the issue of growth or decline. Nonetheless, measured by increasingly fierce reaction of the authorities in these countries on the mere presence of the party, it seems that the perceived importance of the organisation as a political player is steadily increasing.

3.4 Factors of Decline

The question of the factors of decline seems irrelevant for cases within the EU. In most of the EU member states in which it has established branches, the development is one of growth. As stated earlier, the only exception is Germany where the activities of the party have been banned. This does not mean that the supporters of Hizb ut Tahrir in Germany have stopped their political activities. For instance, the Hizb ut Tahrir website under the name www.schiksalsfrage.de and www.kalifat.org now functions under a different name (www.islam-projekte.com). The same holds true for many other activities that were formerly organized under the banner of Hizb ut Tahrir.

4. HIZB UT TAHRIR'S IMPACT

The main impact of Hizb ut Tahrir on the state and society within the EU has been an increase in the awareness of the fact that Islamist ideologies appeal to many second and third generation Muslim immigrants. Until recently, Islamist ideas were regarded to be the domain of small extremist groups with little following within Muslim communities. Nonetheless, they were regarded as violent groups that pose a (terrorist) threat to society. The growth of Hizb ut Tahrir has shown that Islamist ideas are more popular than previously assumed, and that not all Islamists believe in the use of violence. Basically, Hizb ut Tahrir has contributed to a more diverse view on Islamism, though this insight is far from completed. Much questions remain open with regard to the nature of this party and its impact on society and how to deal with its spreading of anti-Semitic, anti-Western and non-democratic ideas and sentiments.

Concerning the lessons learned, it seems that making the party an illegal one will not stop its members from being active; they will simply go underground. Strong debates on whether or not Hizb ut Tahrir poses a threat only seem to make the party more attractive to more radical Muslims. Perhaps the Danish approach is the best in cases of hate speech or the distribution of anti-Semitic ideas: not persecuting the party, but its individual members who have committed these crimes. However, more comparative research is needed in order to be able to formulate the most appropriate policies towards Hizb ut Tahrir in Europe.

5. FUTURE PROSPECTS

Within the EU, Hizb ut Tahrir is most likely to grow in terms of number of members and supporters. The anti-Muslim attitudes that are partly related to terrorism and the fight against terrorism, will probably continue to produce an environment in which young second and third generation Muslim immigrants will be attracted to Islamist ideas and activist parties such as Hizb ut Tahrir.

Because of its growth and political activities, Hizb ut Tahrir is likely to attract more attention from politicians, policy makers and the media who are concerned about the possible implications to society or who see a down right terrorist threat in all radical Islamist movements. Moreover, in the future, more events may occur where Hizb ut Tahrir members are linked to terrorist organizations.

This may lead to fierce debates in parliament or the media. Nonetheless, more bans or persecutions are not to be expected. The party seems well aware of how outsiders perceive its activities and ensures that it downplays its most extremist ideas and defends itself from allegations of (indirect) links with terrorism.

6. CONCLUSION

A case-study on an organisation such as Hizb ut Tahrir as part of an overall large research project on counter-terrorism might suggest prematurely that Hizb ut Tahrir falls in the category of labelled terrorist organisations, or at least belongs to a group of organisations that pose a serious threat to our democratic society. However, such qualifications cannot be given to Hizb ut Tahrir without serious reservations. The question can even be raised whether such qualification is fit for this organisation at all. Although, in its philosophy Hizb ut Tahrir has anti-democratic tendencies, it also rejects the idea of violent jihad to achieve their goal of a caliphate. Most allegations on the terrorist connection of the organisation or some of its members point at rather indirect links, are not based on solid sources, or should by their numbers be assessed as mere coincidences.

On the other hand, experience shows that organisations such as Hizb ut Tahrir are "very smart in walking the very fine line between propaganda and incitement to terrorism", according to Paul Wilkinson, director of the Center for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence at the University of St. Andrews (RFE/RL, 26 October 2004). However, outlawing this organisation without a proper cause might have the opposite effect. It is therefore important to monitor with prudence and to act on facts instead of allegations.

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