

## INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

## HIZB UT-TAHRIR—LEADER OF THE ISLAMIST ANTIDEMOCRATIC CAMPAIGN

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Samuel Huntington has described the future of the world as a clash of civilizations, especially of the democratic (Western) and Islamic worlds. The relations between their ideologies are moving in this direction: there is general antagonism in this sphere; aware of its material-financial and military-political superiority, the liberal West has become too aggressive. This has increased the radicalism and animosity of the Islamic groups fighting for human minds, particu-

larly in ideological terms. In his article “The Road from Tashkent to the Taliban,” Zeyno Baran, director for international-security and energy programs at the Nixon Center, was quite right when he said: “It is time to name the war correctly: this is a war of ideologies, and terrorist acts are the tip of the iceberg.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Z. Baran, “The Way from Tashkent to Taliban” [www.nationalreview.org], 2 April, 2004.

### Terrorist Acts in Tashkent and Bukhara

In late March and early April 2004 Tashkent and Bukhara were shaken by a series of terrorist acts very different from the incursions we witnessed in 1999-2001. The “shakhid belts,” women as suicide terrorists, the demonstrative attacks on the militia, and the powerful blasts that create pyrotechnical effects are novel elements. Tashkent and Bukhara, two cities that suffered from the terrorist attacks, and the rest of Uzbekistan were living in an unannounced state of emergency. The country, hitherto a pillar of

stability in Central Asia, was once more confronted with terror; the state and society were dragged through a grave moral, political, and psychological test.

An extensive discussion of terrorism, as well as of the global nature of this threat and the antiterrorist struggle has been resumed. The antiterrorist units launched a special operation: a term that is becoming a household one among the Uzbeks.

The operational-search and investigative measures that were carried out hot on the heels of those responsible for the night attacks on the militia (and their accomplices) in places where they could have found shelter turned up a huge number of “shakhid belts” and metal bits and pieces they are stuffed with, detonators, descriptions of how to assemble parts into an explosive device, more than ten sacks of ammoniac saltpeter, barrels with powdered aluminum, several thousand cartridges for automatic guns, and all sorts of religious-extremist publications.

It turned out that the terrorists had planned to blast the Bukhara-Palace Hotel, a synagogue, the Dilkusho market building, the mayor’s office, and the regional department of internal affairs; in Tashkent their targets were the U.S. embassy, the Intercontinental Hotel, the National Security Service building, and the head of state’s out-of-town residence.

The law enforcement bodies are still working on the case; their operational-search and investigative actions have already prevented several large-scale terrorist acts; they detained several suspects for organizing and carrying out terrorist acts, as well as several possible accomplices. There is information that these people had contacts abroad and that these actions were of an international nature. It has been established that many of the criminals were trained in terrorist camps in Pakistan and other countries.

Experts are convinced that the physical evidence gathered and the fact that some of the detained were known to the law enforcement bodies prove beyond a doubt that the terrorists were members of religious-extremist structures (the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, IMU, the World Front of Jihad, and Hizb ut-Tahrir).

At a briefing on the terrorist acts and investigation results, the republic’s Public Prosecutor-General said that it had been established that several groups (jamoats) have been acting in Tashkent and the Bukhara and Tashkent regions (vilaiats) since 2000. Their actions can be described as the most dangerous type of religious-extremist terror. The investigating groups have also established that the suicide terrorists of the jamoats were guided by the ideas of Hizb ut-Tahrir, combined with the radical elements of the ideas preached by the Islamic Movement of Turkestan and other extremist Islamic trends. The information already gathered proves beyond a doubt that the jamoats are the grass-root cells of Hizb ut-Tahrir, a sort of factory that turns young Muslims into terrorists with the help of ideology and gradual inculcation of the ideas of radical extremism. According to the statements of the detained, they were subjected to brainwashing, which planted the ideas of “jihad” in their minds.

Ideological pressure makes use of illegal audio, video and printed matter and DVDs calling for overthrowing the constitutional order by force and setting up an Islamic state, which in the future would make up part of a single Caliphate.

A leaflet called *Zhikhodiy amaliyega kandy kirishlyk* (How to Join in the Practice of Jihad) was found on many terrorists; it contained detailed descriptions of how to gather the strategic and tactical information needed to perform an action of jihad and to ensure safety of the jamoat members in the process. The documents, statements, and eyewitness accounts suggest that there is a strong hierarchically arranged criminal structure headed by one person (the so-called Chief Amir). Operating from abroad he oversees the jamoats, coordinates their activity and contacts with other international extremist structures, and looks after finances and training in specialized camps.

So far no complete analysis of the events in Tashkent and Bukhara is possible: investigation is still going on. It is for the court of justice to pass the final verdict, yet today we have to answer questions about these terrorist acts and the problem of terrorism as a whole. Indeed, why was Uzbekistan selected as a target? What drove the Uzbek women to suicidal attacks? Are these acts part of a wider offensive of international terrorism (Russia, Spain, Iraq, etc.) or are they local efforts? There are no final or reliable answers to these questions, therefore here I shall analyze only one aspect of the problem.

Since the late 1990s Central Asia has been the victim of periodical flare-ups of terrorism. No one doubts that terrorism is rooted in extremist pseudo-religious ideology. It seems that to successfully fight terrorism we should resolutely oppose the spread of this ideology.

## Democracy and the Hizb ut-Tahrir Ideology

Islam, a very complicated world religion, offers no unambiguous answer (either positive or negative) about its attitude toward democracy.

The ulema, clerics, and other prominent figures of the Muslim world have worked out a sort of methodology: if someone wants to prove that Islam and democracy do not contradict each other, he starts with their philosophies and points out that both highly value human life and honor. Certain Islamic institutions (such as the shura, or council) are likened to parliaments, political parties, madhabs, etc. Those who want to prove that Islam and democracy are opposing systems point out that in the past Christianity and Islam were enemies; that the social functions of both systems are different, etc.<sup>2</sup>

Many experts on religion say that an impartial investigation of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam shows that some of their tenets can be interpreted as democratic or authoritarian.<sup>3</sup>

This vagueness (present in many other specific issues) adds importance to the interpreters of the Koran, Sunnah and Shari‘a as divine instruction and the source of Muslim law and ethics. In other words, the interpreters act as intermediaries between God and the faithful; they are also the guardians of divine order and interpreters of ideals. This makes them privy to serving the Divinity; the nature of their religious knowledge allows its bearers to exercise spiritual and moral guidance of the community of the faithful in the name of religion.<sup>4</sup> It is for the clerics to decide when any of the original texts should be used and how they should be interpreted. Unable to argue or check the use and interpretation, the faithful have to accept them as God’s position on the issue. In certain circumstances the choice of text is all-important. This gives the clerics (the ulema and the clergy), who have good command of Arabic and a good knowledge of the main Islamic texts, the Koran and Sunnah, a monopoly on interpretation, explanation, and use of the holy texts.

To create a better idea of the Hizb ut-Tahrir ideology I would like to quote the words of a prominent Muslim figure Seyed Mohammad Khatami: “At all times, passion and hatred, the two gravest ailments, have proved to be the main obstacle to a correct understanding of Western civilization as the greatest event in recent human history. Burdened with passion or hatred, reformers and those who wanted to restore the old traditions suffered from extremism or idleness. They lost their road in the struggle between traditions and innovations.”<sup>5</sup>

Charged with anti-Western emotions Hizb ut-Tahrir has aimed the entire range of grudges and ire against the West; it outright rejects everything that is connected with its “godless” way of life, while Western democracy, especially the human rights principle, has been proclaimed the source of all evil. Therefore, according to the Hizb ut-Tahrir ideology, recognition of democratic principles and their implementation in Muslim society is a grave sin against the genuinely faithful followers of Islam.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Discussions of the relations between Islam and democracy are very much in vogue now. The clerics and liberally minded philosophers insist on a very similar or even close nature of both systems, while radical Islamists concentrate on their differences.

<sup>3</sup> This is what Azerbaijanian specialist in Islam Hikmet Hajji-zadeh thinks (see: *NG-Religia*, No. 004 (16), 15 April, 1998.)

<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the role of the clergy and Muslim clerics see: Z.I. Levin, “K voprosu o sotsial’noy roli musul’ manskogo dukhovenstva,” *Islam i sotsial’nye struktury stran Blizhnego i Srednego Vostoka*. Collection of articles, Nauka Publishers, Moscow, 1990, p. 130.

<sup>5</sup> Seyed Mohammad Khatami, *Traditsia i mysli vo vlasi avtoritarizma*, Moscow State University Press, Moscow, 2001, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> It is well known that Hizb ut-Tahrir regularly explains its attitude toward democracy in books and leaflets such as *Hizb ut-Tahrir* and *Kalifat* (The Caliphate). The party has published several books on the subject: *Demokratia—sistema neveria* (Democracy is a Faithless System) that condemns acceptance of democracy as a blasphemy. All its program works have been translated into the Central Asian languages.

## The Hizb ut-Tahrir's Radical Ideology and Its Assessment in the West

Like many other radical organizations, Hizb ut-Tahrir has found favorable conditions in the West. Unlike the Muslim countries, the West is less concerned with radical Islamism for several reasons.

- First, the West does not regard Islamism, as preached by Hizb ut-Tahrir, a threat: the norms, standards, and codes of Western mass consciousness have nothing in common with those to which Hizb ut-Tahrir appeals. In other words, the basic Islamic concepts (*kufir*, or lack of faith, *harom*, prohibited, etc.<sup>7</sup>) produce no impression on public opinion in the West, since it is not easy to transform liberalism or Euro-Christianity into Islamism.
- Second, the West knows quite well that critics of Western values and institutions are not a bad thing to have—they are even useful. The West knows that criticism is important and that it creates an atmosphere of constructive tension and pluralism, thus helping the system to survive by inventing new approaches and methods of crisis settlement.
- Third, certain Western strategists may look at Islamist groups as geopolitical pawns to be used in unexpected (or even deliberately created) circumstances.

Another thing is even more important: the Western legal system has so far failed to formulate its attitude toward what can be conventionally described as “anti-democratism” flourishing in Western societies themselves. (By anti-democratism I mean groups, movements, and parties that reject democracy.) There are two different views on the subject in Western science: supporters of radical liberalism are convinced that freedom should be absolute since any limits destroy democracy. They are convinced that “democracy means admitting those who deny democracy.”<sup>8</sup> More realistically minded people believe that the freedom to act that political forces enjoy in democratic society should have certain boundaries to restrain those who want to liquidate democracy itself using democratic measures.

When assessing the radically minded Islamic groups, Hizb ut-Tahrir in the first place, the West, however, often tends toward the first of the two viewpoints. Hizb ut-Tahrir says the following about its strategy: “By being here, we shall create our own state in our homeland and then take revenge on you for all insults you hurled at us.” Today, experts agree that the term “Islamism” should be understood as “political Islam.” As a contemporary ideology, “Islamism” took shape against the background of communism, socialism, and capitalism and uses Islam as a theoretical and practical foundation. Radical Islam is one of its branches. It can be described as a belligerent ideology that uses the phraseology of violence to win people over to its cause; it is always prepared to use violence, while its activists are interpreting Islam literally as a religion of intolerance.<sup>9</sup>

The term itself, while fully revealing the essence of this phenomenon, stresses its political, rather than religious, component.

## Regional Security in Central Asia and the Hizb ut-Tahrir Threat

Those who know little about the Central Asian realities may think that some of the local countries tend to overestimate the threat presented by Hizb ut-Tahrir. This is true of certain experts, politicians, and

<sup>7</sup> Islam has created a system of assessments of behavior of its followers from *farz* (obligatory) to *harom* (prohibited). When imposing their political views on others the party's apologists always appeal to these categories in an effort to mobilize the entire Muslim society to fight for their political aims.

<sup>8</sup> Iu.A. Iudin, *Politicheskie partii i pravo v sovremennom gosudarstve*, Forum-Infra-M publishing group, Moscow, 1998, p. 64.

<sup>9</sup> For more detail, see: Graham E. Fuller, *The Future of Political Islam*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2003; Is Islamism a Threat. A Debate [<http://www.meforum.org/meq/dec99/debate.shtml>].

human rights activists who apply Western human rights standards to the local developments. They are convinced that the problems created by religious extremist organizations are overstated on purpose. Some of the experts take this as a definite sign of authoritarianism.

When talking about the threat presented by Hizb ut-Tahrir, we should apply a systemic approach which takes into account the set of factors responsible for the threats lingering in these countries.

First, self-identity and the present state of public consciousness are all-important. In Uzbekistan, for example, most of the local people describe themselves as Muslims; traditional Islam is part and parcel of public consciousness and everyday life.

The religious-political teaching of Hizb ut-Tahrir took shape in the Middle Eastern confrontational context and if not re-adjusted may be distorted by the mass consciousness of the Central Asian population. Such fundamental concepts as *kufr*, *harom*, and *halol* can affect the mind and individual behavior. This shows that the degree of response to the Hizb ut-Tahrir ideology and its contaminating power is high enough. It is skillfully adapted to Islam and the tactics of “guidance in the Divine name.”

Today, in the independent Central Asian republics the traditional religious schools and institutions are just trying to find firm ground, they have not yet formulated their positions on many contemporary social and political issues in relation to the Islamic specifics and the Muslims’ spiritual requirements. Early in the 20th century Islam had to discontinue its official activities; its ideas ceased to develop, while the positions of traditional schools weakened or were lost altogether. Today, the Islamic clerics of Uzbekistan have to work hard to restore the lost schools, to improve the educational system, and to reform the Islamic ideas. This is very much needed in order to meet the growing spiritual requirements of the faithful and to create intellectual protection against radical Islamism of the Hizb ut-Tahrir type.

Second, democratic values and institutions are just beginning to develop, which means that the social shock absorbers (the free press, elections, parliament, democratic opposition, and meetings) that are part and parcel of liberal civilization able to dampen open or latent discontent of the masses do not work.

Third, many of the region’s socioeconomic and political problems have remained unresolved so far. A large sector of the lower and middle social layers continues looking at the 1980s way of life as an ideal social order—this makes the situation even worse. Taught by the Soviet system to cherish egalitarianism people find it hard to accept the growing diversity of the market economy. As a result popular discontent is rising.

Standardization, one of the ways to fight diversity, directly stems from the Hizb ut-Tahrir program; certain social sections are eager to accept it. Standardization in the name of religion is undoubtedly an obstacle on the road toward social development and one of the conditions that lowers its creative potential, dampens social energy, and undermines society’s ability to meet the challenges of history.

The radical program of Hizb ut-Tahrir is antidemocratic, it preaches integration that smacks of imperialism; it is idealistic and even utopian. This program can be easily passed for an ideology of social justice; these elements have been skillfully arranged and adorned with Islam.

In fact, the faithful are led to believe that they are being offered simple and convincing answers to the most painful questions of the country’s socioeconomic, spiritual, and moral development; they are told who is to blame and what should be done. A God-fearing Muslim has no chance to disagree: everything is presented in the name of religion; disagreement is tantamount to a loss of faith, which must be paid for in hell.

The general lack of profound religious knowledge among the faithful does not allow them to contest these positions; after speaking even once to Hizb ut-Tahrir supporters they fall easy prey to the sect and become its ideological prisoners. At first, they are robbed of an ability to think for themselves—this is banned by the Hizb ut-Tahrir ideology—later they develop into ideological fanatics regarding all other people as unfaithful. Inside the organization, criticism is taken as a “durability test of faith.” This is typical of many conservative religions, trends, and sects.

As a radical wing of Islamism Hizb ut-Tahrir has burdened Islam with its ideology of confrontation; it is mercilessly exploiting religious values and criteria to make an even deeper impression on the minds of the faithful.

Any religion, especially Islam, is a vehicle that if skillfully loaded with all sorts of ideas, even contradictory one, will easily carry them for a long time. It seems that the Hizb ut-Tahrir ideologists have realized this.

If legalized in the Central Asian countries, Hizb ut-Tahrir could develop into a great threat. It seems that it will inevitably step up its activities in an organizationally (institutionally) weak and religiously undeveloped region of key geopolitical importance. The situation looks promising for Hizb ut-Tahrir. If it develops along these lines, we can expect the public to turn away from liberalism to Islamism. According to the Hizb ut-Tahrir ideology, liberalism and Islam, or rather Islamism, are two enemies (the degree of their opposition depends on the level of Islamization of society). Liberalism will be confronted with a nearly insurmountable (or insurmountable) ideological barrier. Hizb ut-Tahrir describes the West and its ideology—liberalism—as one of the worst sides of world evil, which deliberately destroys and disorganizes life, and as an enemy of Islam and the Muslims.

In an effort to win the greater part of society over to its cause, Hizb ut-Tahrir is gradually creating a psychologically unhealthy atmosphere in various spheres, including foreign and ethnic policies in the first place, as well as in relations between religion and the state. Any society that accepts this organization as a legitimate force will rapidly deteriorate into a totalitarian state in which social consciousness will become even more radical.

The party itself insists that it rejects violence as a means of reaching its goals,<sup>10</sup> yet radical ideology speeds up destabilization and confrontation for the simple reason that it divides individuals, societies, and states into legitimate and illegitimate, the latter forced to embrace Islam under the threat of liquidation. Any careful reader of the Hizb ut-Tahrir programs can detect the consistent propaganda of “jihad” as a struggle against the infidels and suicide terrorist acts of shakhids as one of its methods. The programs also contain ideological justification for a totalitarian state that terrorizes its own citizens. According to the experts of the R. Nixon Center, while not directly involved in terrorist acts, Hizb ut-Tahrir surely encourages people to commit acts of violence. This is a terrorist-producing factory.<sup>11</sup>

After studying the social and political involvement of social segments, Arend Lijphart, one of the most prominent Western political scientists, has concluded that democratic societies can be divided into consociational democracies and majoritarian democracies.<sup>12</sup> In a consociational democracy, its main units (ethnic, religious, ideological, and cultural) all work together and none of them find themselves isolated for a long time. In a majoritarian democracy, a certain sociocultural group dominates over the others, thus keeping certain segments away from political life.

An analysis of the situation in Muslim societies (Uzbek society included) suggests that in the nearest future they will have little chance of acquiring conditions conducive to a consociational democracy. They will be dominated by the majoritarian form of democracy for several reasons, one of them being the presence of bearers of Islamic ideas and an antidemocratic program fraught with totalitarianism.

## *C o n c l u s i o n*

Sadly, Islam and democracy are unlikely bedfellows, yet democratization of society does not reject Islam or lower its social status. At the same time, a ban on liberalism in the name of religion will not help to resolve the socioeconomic and political problems—it will drive them even deeper. By contrast, liberalism can change the nature of traditionalism; it gradually enriches it by encouraging an exchange of ideas

<sup>10</sup> The recent terrorist acts of 29-31 March, 2004 in the Bukhara Region and in the city of Tashkent cast doubt on these statements. According to Prosecutor-General of Uzbekistan R. Kadyrov the investigating bodies found indirect evidence of Hizb ut-Tahrir's involvement in these events.

<sup>11</sup> See: Z. Baran, op. cit.

<sup>12</sup> See: A. Lijphart, *Demokratia v mnogosostavnykh obshchestvakh: sravnitel'noe issledovanie* (Democracy in Plural Societies), Aspekt Press, Moscow, 1997, p. 38.

and opinions. When functioning properly the social shock absorbers of liberalism will finally stabilize society and open the road to sustainable and dynamic development for Islam.

Islamism knows no bounds in its criticism of democracy: it seeks complete monopoly over everything and control over all spheres of human life—something that liberalism does not allow it to accomplish. No wonder, Islamism treats liberalism as a contagious and dynamically developing disease.

Hizb ut-Tahrir is out to discredit liberalism and show itself as the true defender of Islam; it has likened our times to the distant past when Islam was first formed as a religion and has proclaimed itself a Messiah of our epoch. This organization has learned well that “rules should be studied in detail so as to discover how to violate them in the best way possible.” By establishing its very restrictive standards of piety, the party has contracted the field of legitimacy; by the same token it has made its ideology highly intolerant and radical and has intensified the Islamic side of individual and collective thinking and conduct by presenting freedom, liberalism, the West, and all those who share these values and support these institutions as enemies.

In this way Hizb ut-Tahrir is compromising Islam and its followers; it is a source of concern and fear; it tries to adjust its ideas to Islam and sow doubt in the hearts and minds of the faithful about the future of Islam’s social and political potential. In other words, by “reviving” Islam Hizb ut-Tahrir has achieved the opposite: it is compromising the key Islamic values. The party’s social ideas are generating many questions: how can totalitarianism, censorship, and systemic control raise the standard of living? How can they help develop intellectual potential, creativity, and production in Muslim societies? Is the party socially naïve or is it plotting against Islam and the Muslims?

Islam in Central Asia is an eternal factor. It has been there and will stay in the region. We can say that it is a cultural matrix of the local nations. Students of religion, analysts, experts, and politicians should carefully study the phenomenon of religious extremism in Central Asia in order to find a way to combine Islam with a secular state, and Islam with democracy.