



# HIZB-UT TAHRIR

## Quick Facts

Geographical Areas of Operation: East Asia, Eurasia, Europe, and the Middle East and North Africa

Numerical Strength (Members): Unknown

Leadership: Ata Abu Rashta

Religious Identification: Sunni Islam

Quick Facts Courtesy of the Counter Extremism Project

*Source: CIA World FactBook (Last Updated April 2018)*

## INTRODUCTION

*Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami or Hizb ut-Tahrir (Party of Islamic Liberation or Party of Liberation) is a complex pan-Islamist organization, with branches around the world, from North America to South Asia. The group ostensibly eschews violence, armed revolution, and political participation, and its hardline ideology and unique model cannot be said to fall within the parameters of either a terrorist organization, a political party, or revolutionary movement.<sup>1</sup> However, Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) has been banned in the Middle East, South and Central Asia, and parts of Europe for its extremist beliefs.<sup>2</sup> HT has never been directly connected to violence nor the funding of more violent groups,<sup>3</sup> but its radical ideology has influenced many in the West and elsewhere who have gone on to join violent jihadist groups. As such, Hizb ut-Tahrir occupies a unique space among global Islamist movements as what one scholar has described as a “conveyor belt” for extremism.<sup>4</sup>*

## HISTORY AND IDEOLOGY

In 1953, an al-Azhar University-trained Palestinian Islamic scholar, Sheikh Muhammad Taqiuddin al-Nabhani, founded Hizb ut-Tahrir in East Jerusalem, which was occupied by the Kingdom of Jordan at that time. While Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) alleges that Sheikh al-Nabhani had no prior political activity, he had engaged with the Muslim Brotherhood members (although it is unclear whether he himself was a member)<sup>5</sup> during his time in Egypt. Regardless, al-Nabhani identified intellectually with Muslim Brotherhood ideologue Sayyid Qutb, whose works would later inspire al-Qaeda,<sup>6</sup> as well as influential Palestinian Sheikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam.<sup>7</sup> However, HT was founded as a radical rejection of the Muslim Brotherhood, but because of a difference in strategy – the organization rejected the Brotherhood’s decision to cooperate with secularists in Egypt.<sup>8</sup>

Al-Nabhani’s structuring of HT as a modern political party was influenced by the contemporary emergence of pan-national identities and ideologies in the Middle East, such as Arab Nationalism and Baa-

thism. Like these parties, HT adapted the Leninist concept of the revolutionary vanguard in which an elite cadre forms a party organization to attract and marshal others in support of a “revolution” to take power.<sup>9</sup> Unlike Arab Nationalism’s embrace of secular, pan-Arab identity to promote unity, however, al-Nabhani based his own views and those of HT on the centrality of Islam in politics. The adoption of these elements of Hizb ut-Tahrir’s political structure set it apart from other Islamist organizations that emerged during this time. HT “had more in common... with secular parties such as the Baathists... than it did with the major Islamic political movement, the Muslim Brotherhood,” one assessment has noted.<sup>10</sup> These characteristics continue to inform HT’s structure and ideology today.

Hizb ut-Tahrir has a well-defined platform and ideology. The group views itself not as a religious organization, but rather as a political movement whose ideology is based on Islam. Therefore, it disavows nationalism, capitalism, and socialism as Western ideologies antithetical to Islam. Instead, the organization seeks to re-establish the Caliphate that ruled Muslims following the death of the Prophet Muhammad under the four righteous Caliphs.<sup>11</sup> HT has rejected the establishment of Islamic states in the modern era—stating that Iran and Saudi Arabia do not meet the necessary criteria to claim themselves as such. The group has also denied the legitimacy of the Islamic State’s claim to have reestablished the Caliphate under Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi,<sup>12</sup> which HT maintains does not follow the Prophet’s methodology.<sup>13</sup>

The modern Caliph envisioned by al-Nabhani and HT controls the religion, army, economy, foreign policy and political system of the Caliphate. HT explicitly rejects democracy and favors sharia—Islamic law—as the law of the land. The draft constitution of this Caliphate considers Aqeedah, or the Islamic belief system, as the foundation of the state. All legislation and the constitution itself must be based on the Quran, Sunnah, consensus of the Companions of the four righteous Caliphs (ashab al-ijma), and analogy (qiyas).<sup>14</sup> It is left up to the Caliph and his deputies to interpret and apply these instructions and thereby solve all social, economic, and ethnic problems that the ummah (the Islamic community) may face. Arabic will be the state language, which non-Arabic speakers would have to learn.

One element that makes Hizb ut-Tahrir different from many other Islamist groups is that the group has welcomed female members. However, the proposed Caliphate’s ruling structure would nonetheless relegate women and non-Muslims to subordinate administrative positions, as only male Muslims can hold the ruling positions of Caliph, his delegated assistants, governors, and provincial mayors.<sup>15</sup> The Caliph is also to appoint an emir (commander) to prepare the people for and to wage jihad (holy war/struggle) against non-believers, and to mandate compulsory military service for all Muslim men over the age of 15.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, while the Caliphate can make treaties with friendly, non-Islamic countries, it is forbidden from participation in international organizations governed by non-Islamic rules, such as the United Nations. The draft constitution further states that the Caliphate should not make treaties with Britain, America, France and Russia specifically—which it considers to be “imperialist states”—and calls for a state of war against Israel.<sup>17</sup>

HT has criticized the attempts of other Islamist parties to use democratic structures to their advantage. For example, the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Hamas, have all tried to engage with non-Islamic governments by holding ministerial posts or by participating in the electoral and legislative process in order to achieve some influence in high-level decision-making.<sup>18</sup> The group, by contrast, holds the belief that all Muslims who adopt democracy reject Allah as the sole legislator of the universe, and thus that those who accept democracy are apostates.<sup>19</sup> In this vein, al-Nabhani rejected completely the concept of gradualism as espoused by the Muslim Brotherhood. Instead, HT favors peaceful but radical political change through the demolition of the existing state apparatus and the construction of a new Islamic state.

Nevertheless, the organization does not favor the idea of forcibly seizing the state and mandating that society accept its ideology; rather, it prefers to persuade society to gradually accept its ideas, which it believes would lead inevitably to a change in regime. As one expert has explained: “Rather than slogging

through a political process that risks debasing the Quran and perpetuating the ummah's subjugation to the West, Hizb ut-Tahrir aims at global, grassroots revolution, culminating in a sudden, millenarian victory... when Muslims have achieved a critical mass of Koranic rectitude."<sup>20</sup>

HT's strategy to achieve this goal consists of three stages.<sup>21</sup> The first is to recruit members and build a strong organization. This stage is followed by HT's "interaction" with the ummah in an effort to impose its principles as the only legitimate version of Islam, one that is "stripped of all cultural accretions and purged of alien influences."<sup>22</sup> Finally, the ensuing grassroots revolution will re-establish the Caliphate. HT literature envisions one or more Muslim countries coming under the organization's control, creating a base from which it will be able to convince others to join the fold, generating what a domino effect. Leaders of HT—citing the lack of political space for opposition parties throughout the Muslim world, increasing despair and a lack of economic opportunity—believe that much of the Muslim world is approaching a "boiling point," making it ready for an Islamist takeover. The group seeks to take advantage of dispossessed populations to seize power in particular states, such as those in Central Asia, Pakistan, or Indonesia, as a prelude to the establishment of a broader Caliphate, removing wayward Muslim regimes and eventually overthrowing non-Muslim ones as well. Thus, the organization welcomed the overthrow of Arab dictators during the Arab Spring revolutions.

It is widely reported that HT shuns violence in the pursuit of these goals. That is certainly true at the early stages in the organization's strategy, and while there is no evidence that the organization is responsible for terrorist or guerilla attacks, HT's understanding of political violence is more nuanced than current analysis of the group suggests. Emmanuel Karagiannis and Clark McCauley provide two ways of summarizing the ideological complexities of HT's position on violent action: "The first is to say that they have been committed to non-violence for fifty years. The second is to say that they have been waiting fifty years for the right moment to begin violent struggle."<sup>23</sup>

These two perspectives may not be as different as they appear at first glance. Historically, few groups are unconditionally committed to nonviolence, and "Hizb ut-Tahrir is not exceptional but typical in this regard. Its commitment to nonviolent struggle is conditional and the condition sought is the declaration of jihad by legitimate authority,"<sup>24</sup> (i.e., the caliph). HT also endorses defensive jihads, where Muslims are required to fight against an invader if attacked—a position that clearly has the potential to be interpreted very broadly and has been applied by the group to Coalition forces in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the group was proscribed in Denmark after distributing pamphlets urging Muslims to "kill [Jews] wherever you find them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out."<sup>26</sup>

But even within Muslim majority countries, where the organization attempts to win over mass support in the hope that one day its adherents will rise up in peaceful demonstrations to overthrow the regimes they live under, HT has developed the concept of nusrah (seeking outside assistance) from other groups such as the militaries of target states.<sup>27</sup> It might be argued that HT's preferred method of political change to establish the Caliphate is in fact a coup d'état by the military that would have first embraced Islam as its guiding politico-religious principle.

HT has, since its founding, sought to employ nusrah to take power across the Islamic world, albeit so far without success. HT sought to encourage elements within the Jordanian armed forces to unsuccessfully attempt coups in 1968, 1969, and 1971. Similar coup arrangements failed in Iraq and Syria in 1968 and 1969, and a second effort in southern Iraq failed to gain traction in 1972. The group was also linked to a failed 1974 coup attempt in Egypt, where an HT-linked cell aimed to capture the Military Technical Academy as the first step to overthrow the secular regime of President Anwar el-Sadat.<sup>28</sup> Tunisia broke up party cells in 1983, and arrested dozens more HT members accused of plotting against the regime. The Syrian regime, too, launched major crackdowns against HT inroads into the Syrian military from 1999 to 2002. Hizb ut-Tahrir also attempted to persuade Libyan leader Moamar Ghaddafi, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, and Iranian Supreme leader Ruhollah Khomeini to assume the role of Caliph. The former two

responded by arresting and executing HT members, while Khomeini simply ignored the offer.<sup>29</sup> More recently, Pakistan indicted four officers in 2010 for passing sensitive information on a military installation to the group, and arrested five others, including a brigadier general, in 2011 for links to the organization's Pakistan branch, which in 2008 had called for the Pakistani army to attack the United States with nuclear weapons and missiles.<sup>30</sup>

From HT's point of view, the justification for non-violence lies in the example of the Prophet, who criticized the pagan leaders of Mecca, gathered followers around him, and initially resisted the use of force to establish the Islamic state.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, according to one expert:

The Party still thinks that it must follow the strategy of the Prophet: like Muhammad in Mecca, they must preach without violence. In practical terms, it means that when HT achieves a large following for its ideology, they could overthrow... regimes through peaceful demonstrations. Also like Muhammad in his war against the Arab tribes in Mecca, they could get outside assistance or *nusrah* from the military to organize a coup.<sup>32</sup>

Although HT as an organization does not adopt violence as a means to achieve its goals, another source of concern is that the group may radicalize members who then go on in their individual capacities to conduct violent acts. According to Zeyno Baran, "Hizb ut-Tahrir is part of an elegant division of labor. The group itself is active in the ideological preparation of the Muslims, while other organizations handle the planning and execution of terrorist attacks... Hizb ut-Tahrir today serves as a *de facto* conveyor belt for terrorists."<sup>33</sup> Indeed, several notable militants associated with more radical Islamist groups are known to be previous members of HT. Former founder and leader of Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain, Omri Bakri Muhammed, would leave the group to found al-Muhajiroun, a group later banned in the United Kingdom for funding and providing material support and recruits to terrorist organizations.<sup>34</sup>

Other prominent jihadists originated as members or affiliates of the group. One such case was British citizen Omar Sharif. British intelligence officials discovered a cache of HT literature in his home after Sharif blew himself up in a Tel Aviv bar in 2003.<sup>35</sup> Al-Qaeda leader and 9/11 mastermind, Khaled Shaikh Mohammed, reportedly spent time with the group. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who would lead the Islamic State's predecessor organization, al-Qaeda in Iraq, also spent time as a member.<sup>36</sup> Jihadist Ahmed Sheikh Omar, infamous for his execution of journalist Daniel Pearl in Pakistan in 2002, also belonged to the group, travelling with members to Bosnia during the 1990s.<sup>37</sup>

Hizb ut-Tahrir's strategy in the West has raised concern in many quarters about what is perceived to be HT's disingenuous dual track strategy of grassroots activism among Western Muslims on one hand and engagement with wider Western society on the other. According to Houriya Ahmed and Hannah Stuart of the London-based Centre for Social Cohesion, HT activism in Britain consists of two messages and two complementary aims, one for the UK's Muslim communities and one for the wider public and specifically intellectuals and opinion-makers such as journalists and politicians. Presenting itself as the vanguard of Islam, HT works within the British Muslim communities to promote political identification with Muslims globally and discourage any other sense of political loyalty. Ahmed and Stuart add that, "[i]n order to mainstream HT ideology amongst Western Muslim communities and avoid rejection by wider society, the party has downplayed its more intolerant beliefs and presents itself as defending 'true' Islam in the face of a perceived Western 'War on Islam.'"<sup>38</sup> Within society, HT works to present Islamism, the Caliphate, and its interpretation of *sharia* law as a non-threatening and viable alternative to current political thinking.<sup>39</sup> Despite this, the group rejects moderate Muslim clerics' embrace of the concept of al-Wasatiyyah, or Islam as a religion of tolerance, as an attempt to secularize religion.<sup>40</sup>

## GLOBAL REACH

Whatever the concerns and criticisms regarding HT's goals and methods, the movement has a significant following in many parts of the world. Some even claim that, "of all the banned Islamist groups in the former Soviet Union, Hizb ut-Tahrir is the only one that can be called a mass organization."<sup>4123</sup> It is also a popular organization among young Muslims in Western Europe<sup>42</sup> and national conferences in the U.S. and Canada in July 2009 indicate a resurgence of HT activism there.<sup>43</sup> The group's major organizational center is said to be in London, where most of its literature is published and a good deal of its fundraising and training occurs,<sup>44</sup> although some claim that Ata Abu Rashta, HT's current global leader, is based in Lebanon.<sup>45</sup>

Relatively little is known about HT's organizational structure, chain of command, or leadership. What is clear is that the organization is cell-based, and heavily influenced by the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary model that controls HT's worldwide activities and drastically reduces the possibility of the penetration of outsiders into its leadership echelons. The global leader of HT meets with regional leaders who distribute literature and funding to district leaders, who in turn redistribute these items as well as provide strategic direction during their monthly meetings to individual cells. For operational security, most cell members only know other people in their cell and are kept in the dark about other cells operating locally, nationally, and regionally.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Ahmed and Stuart claim that:

HT's ideology and strategy are centralized. HT global leadership issues strategy communiqués to the executive committees of national branches, which then interpret them into a localized strategic action plan... Whilst HT core ideology stressed the indivisibility of the Muslim '*ummah*' and rejects national identity, national strategies often reflect the ethnic origins of the various Muslim communities... National executives are encouraged to interpret strategy to best suit their localized needs.<sup>47</sup>

Because the group operates clandestinely in most parts of the world, its global membership numbers are unknown. Rough estimates of its strength in Central Asia alone range from 20,000 to 100,000.<sup>48</sup> Emmanuel Karagiannis estimates that there are around 25,000 members and many more sympathizers in the region,<sup>49</sup> with the majority in the Ferghana Valley in Uzbekistan and thousands of members in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan alongside "hundreds (perhaps thousands) in Kazakhstan and Russia, as well as Azerbaijan and the Ukraine."<sup>50</sup> The group's support base consists of college students, the unemployed, factory workers and teachers,<sup>51</sup> but it also seems to be making particularly strong headway behind prison walls,<sup>52</sup> where in the past 7,000 and 8,000 of its members were believed to reside in Uzbekistan alone.<sup>53</sup>

HT's growth in Central Asia has been significantly, though unintentionally, fueled by the repressive tactics adopted by the regimes there. With few exceptions, the states that emerged out of the Soviet Union smother, rather than engage, their political opposition. The anti-democratic policies adopted by these regimes unwittingly expand the influence of extremist groups like HT and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan from the margins of national political discourse to its center. When there is no room for moderate and reasonable opposition, the only channel for change comes through radical elements. In May 2015, for example, British members of HT gathered outside the Uzbek embassy in London to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Andijan massacre, despite the fact that the group was not directly involved.<sup>54</sup> Despite efforts by Central Asian authorities to infiltrate and crack down on the group's local branches—often disrupting the link between the international hierarchy of the party and local leadership to a more sporadic and ad hoc nature—the group continues to maintain a sizeable presence in the region.<sup>55</sup>

HT has capitalized on the political repression and poverty in Central Asia to recruit and spread its message. The group's regional branches have found a small but willing audience among young men living under authoritarian regimes. The group's message of pan-Muslim identity, and of the establishment of a caliphate, an "easy explanation for their own failure to achieve change in their personal lives, in society

or in the state system,” according to a study by the International Crisis Group.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, the group’s ideology provides a structured belief system “in an otherwise confusing and difficult social change” in these post-Soviet countries. They appeal to a sense of perceived “wider sense of receiving a bad deal from society and the state,”<sup>57</sup> in many cases providing material benefit and social support.

South and Southeast Asia are often seen as strongholds of HT activism. The group’s recruitment in Pakistan has relied on pamphlets, conferences, seminars, and daroos (religious lectures), as well as individual proselytization, mainly in urban centers. HT Pakistan has mainly targeted the urban middle class—rather than rural poor, which it sees as irrelevant to its political objectives—and “opinion-makers” such as journalists, trade unionists, teachers and lawyers. However, the party has failed to achieve a widespread presence in the country, due to competition from other Islamist parties, the lack of appeal of its Pan-Islamist outlook to the Pakistani military.<sup>58</sup> In Indonesia, however, Hizb ut-Tahrir has been more successful in establishing itself. The organization claims that it has recruited “tens of thousands” of members there.<sup>59</sup> While these numbers are difficult to verify, a 2007 HT conference in the country drew somewhere between 80,000 and 100,000 attendees from around the world.<sup>60</sup> HT also holds regular public protests and demonstrations in Pakistan, Indonesia, and Bangladesh. The organization’s presence at universities “points to a deliberate strategy of targeting students.”<sup>61</sup> Yet, the group has been banned in all three countries. HT also has a presence of unknown strength in, among other places, Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia, Afghanistan, Malaysia, China, Canada, Australia, South Africa, Russia, and Ukraine.

In the West, Hizb ut-Tahrir’s strategy uses Muslim identity and contemporary events in the organization’s outreach. The party’s 1998 strategy document instructs its national executives in the West to “incorporate localized international incidents”—such as the Palestinian-Israeli confrontation, the Balkan wars, and ostensibly the post-9/11 War on Terror as well—into a clash of civilizations narrative as part of an appeal to Western Muslims. HT’s objective is to “inflame and co-opt grievances” within Muslim communities in the West, and prevent their assimilation into Western society.<sup>62</sup> The organization has specifically targeted young, second generation Muslims—the majority of members and leadership in Britain being between 17 and 25<sup>63</sup>—to exploit their alienation from both the Western society in which they live and that of their parents.<sup>64</sup> Through mosques, HT-run schools, sports clubs, and workshops, the group works to proselytize its ideology to a vulnerable audience.<sup>65</sup> Further, members are encouraged to recruit extensively through their existing social networks: “mother-and-baby groups, student unions, even a chat with the neighbors.” As one former member notes, the group offers “a single, simple solution to all the political, social and economic problems of the world, from a religious perspective” to these young Muslims, and the delegation of important duties at a young age provides an “intoxicating” sense of power and community.<sup>66</sup>

In many cases, Hizb ut-Tahrir has used Western members with roots in South and Central Asia as a means to spread its message to those countries. The organization’s first manifestation in Indonesia came in 1983 through an Australian member of Jordanian-Lebanese origin named Abdulrahman al-Baghda-di.<sup>67</sup> Egyptian authorities arrested three British members of the party in 2002 for proselytizing the groups message.<sup>68</sup> Pakistani Muslims recruited in the West—particularly the United Kingdom—have also been instrumental in bringing the message of HT back to their country of origin and are largely responsible for its presence—albeit modest one—in South Asia.<sup>69</sup>

Much like its opaque membership and recruitment, HT’s secrecy makes it difficult to investigate its sources of funding. However, it appears that most of its money is raised in Europe, the Middle East, and South Asia.<sup>70</sup> Members are expected to contribute to the operational costs of the organization, including such mundane outlays as printing leaflets.<sup>71</sup> Organizational costs for HT remain relatively low because most members live in and operate out of their own homes and very few, if any, volunteers are paid.<sup>72</sup> However, a great deal of the organization’s technology in Central Asia has been funded and imported from abroad, signifying both the international scope of the movement and potentially the complicity of at least some officials responsible for customs and border controls among local governments.<sup>73</sup>

## RECENT ACTIVITY

In recent years, HT activities in Western countries have included the organization of protests, sit-ins, and petitions. The group, for example, asked Muslims to abstain from the 2015 parliamentary elections in Great Britain.<sup>74</sup> It also staged a protest against the killing of civilians in Aleppo outside the Syrian embassy in London in December 2016.<sup>75</sup> And in the United States, the local branch organized two events about the siege of Aleppo by Syrian regime forces and pro-Iranian militias.<sup>76</sup>

The branch of HT in Australia has become increasingly active in recent years due to the presence of a sizeable Arab community there. In March 2015, a video emerged of Hizb ut-Tahrir Australia leader Ismail Alwahwah calling for jihad against Jews at a rally in New South Wales.<sup>77</sup> In November 2015, the group organized a conference in Australia against “forced assimilation”.<sup>78</sup> In April 2017, the group’s Australia branch also received criticism for its release of a video, “Women of Hizb ut-Tahrir,” that supported domestic violence against “disobedient” wives.<sup>79</sup> The group also publicly blamed the West for a June 2017 terror attack in Melbourne that left two dead.<sup>80</sup>

HT has been active in other parts of the world, as well. The Pakistani government subsequently arrested a handful of members distributing flyers attempting to incite the public against the government and Pakistan’s state institutions in Islamabad in 2017.<sup>81</sup> The group in 2017 also launched a campaign to exploit the plight of the Rohingya Muslims displaced from Myanmar to Bangladesh.<sup>82</sup> In the Bangladeshi port city of Chittagong, HT posted and distributed posters calling for “fellow Muslims to unite” to support the Rohingya and also for “devoted army officers” to dethrone the ruling Awami-League government of PM Sheikh Hasina.<sup>83</sup> Members of Hizb ut-Tahrir were arrested in Muslim-populated areas of Russia in August 2012.<sup>84</sup> The Russian security agencies have also arrested members in the Crimea following the annexation of the peninsula by Moscow in March 2014.<sup>85</sup> The Russian FSB also detained six locals in Crimea in 2017 on accusations of being members of the group.<sup>86</sup>

Although state repression has led to a decrease of HT activities in Central Asian republics, Hizb ut-Tahrir has made inroads in southern Kyrgyzstan, which has suffered from ethnic tensions in recent years.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, the group held a demonstration outside the Uzbek embassy in Brussels during Islam Karimov’s visit to the European Union and NATO in January 2011, which was apparently the first open manifestation of HT in Belgium.<sup>88</sup> While the group appears to have scaled down its activities in Central Asia following the Arab Spring, it continues to face government persecution. In 2017, the Kyrgyz government shut down more than a hundred websites alleged to be affiliated with extremism, including Hizb ut-Tahrir’s regional language webpages.<sup>89</sup> Kyrgyz authorities also arrested eleven alleged HT members, including a local leader of the organization in December 2017.<sup>90</sup>

There are indications that the group’s leadership increased its focus on Arab countries. Following the Arab Spring revolutions of 2010-2012, there is a renewed quest for religious identity in the Middle East and North Africa, which has partly manifested itself in a renewed interest in political Islam. Seeking to capitalize on this trend, HT organized a much-publicized female conference in Tunisia in March 2012.<sup>91</sup> Additionally, HT has paid increased attention to the crisis in Syria by organizing public events and protests, including one in Chicago on December 24, 2011. The group even organized a protest in the Syrian city of Aleppo on November 9, 2012.<sup>92</sup> In April 2013, female members of HT staged a press conference in Amman, Jordan to discuss the situation in Syria, especially as it relates to women and children.<sup>93</sup> In the Palestinian Territories, where the group was founded, the movement appears to have also gained some traction. In 2015, the group attempted to hold a Caliphate conference in Ramallah in the face of Palestinian Authority opposition. In May of that year, the group also incited protest against a Jordanian cleric’s visit to the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, and saw several members arrested by the PA.<sup>94</sup> In April 2017, HT organized a rally of several thousand calling for the destruction of Israel. Hizb ut-Tahrir’s American branch, too, sought to rally through condemnation of in the Trump administration’s decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.<sup>95</sup>

The group has also faced setbacks in the Middle East and the Arab World. In September 2016, after a lower court overturned a ban on Hizb ut-Tahrir, the Tunisian government pushed unsuccessfully for a military court to reinstate the ban for “undermining public order.”<sup>96</sup> In July 2017, the government successfully banned HT from all activities for “inciting hatred” for one month.<sup>97</sup> In December 2017, Tunisian police arrested forty HT members at a broader protest in Sidi Bouzid for carrying “banners hostile to the state.”<sup>98</sup> In late 2016, the Jordanian government, too, arrested 15 senior members of Hizb ut-Tahrir for campaigning against changes to the school curriculum.<sup>99</sup> In Turkey, despite being allowed in 2016 to hold an annual “International Caliphate Conference”<sup>100</sup>—which drew a crowd of five thousand—the Turkish government in 2017 increasingly targeted the group, often conflating it with the banned Gulenist (FETÖ) Movement.<sup>101</sup> The Turkish government subsequently banned HT’s 2017 Conference<sup>102</sup>, and in December 2017, 58 members of the group, which is now outlawed in Turkey, were handed lengthy prison sentences by the Turkish courts.<sup>103</sup>

The Indonesian government banned Hizb ut-Tahrir in July 2017 for going against the state’s secular ideology and “causing friction in society”, after months of the group organizing protests against Jakarta’s Christian former governor Basuki “Ahok” Tjahaja Purnama, whom they accused of blasphemy.<sup>104</sup> The public pressure by both HT’s organized campaign against Ahok and others in the country’s increasing Islamist trend saw the former governor sentenced to two years in prison on blasphemy charges.<sup>105</sup> Beyond Indonesia, the BRICS countries—Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—agreed at their annual meeting in 2017 to label the group a terrorist organization along with several other violent groups based in South Asia.<sup>106</sup>

The ongoing Syrian crisis has also allowed Hizb ut-Tahrir to mobilize Muslims living in western countries. In this way, it has portrayed itself as a defender of Muslim populations in war zones. It will continue to appeal to these grievances, and to Muslim identity, in its recruitment across the Islamic world, and to minority Muslim communities in the West, particularly capitalizing on the rising anti-Muslim, nationalist, and nativist sentiment in Western populations in Europe and the United States. Finally, the group will probably attempt to increase its activities in Muslim-majority countries in South and South-East Asia. However, it will likely also continue to be proscribed by countries where it gains sufficient strength to be deemed a threat to ruling authority.

## ENDNOTES

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8. Krishna Mungur, “Islamist Distortions: Hizb ut-Tahrir a Breeding Ground for Al-Qaida Recruitment,” p. 61, *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 2, No. 4, Article 6, November/December 2009,



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