

## THE STATE AND POLITICAL ISLAM IN CENTRAL ASIA

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### ABSTRACT

*This article presents an overview of the topic of Islam in central Asia especially political movements in central Asia through their historical, social and political background and the nature of the states relations with political movements. Political Islam in central Asia is currently undergoing a transitional phase. Radical groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Hizb Ut-Tahrir (HT) no longer monopolize the Islamist scene. Through a descriptive-analytic approach, this article aims at examining and comparing the biography, political career, and beliefs of three representatives of political Islam in Central Asia, focusing on the complex relationship between the Islamic movements and the authoritarian regimes that have left no space for political opposition. The goal of this study is to examine and compare the biography, political career, and beliefs of three representatives of political Islam in Central Asia, focusing on the complex relationship between the Islamic movements and the authoritarian regimes that have left no space for political opposition.*

**KEYWORDS:** Political Islam, Islamic movement, Caliphate, Islamic State.

### INTRODUCTION

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the ideology of political Islam and Islamist organizations began to become important factors in Central Asian political life especially after the emergence of the newly born Islamic republics, namely, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. In the early 1990s, the Islamic movements flourished as a result of the frustration felt by the peoples of Central Asia recognizing that the newly born political systems represented a much degree of continuity with the past Soviet system. Moreover, the same political figures of the Soviet era came to power after independence and adopted the same totalitarian regime of Soviet predecessor in spite of the fact that these figures gave promises of political reform and raised slogans of Islam at the outset of their rule and before retreating from their earlier democratic political system. (Alexander Wolfer, 2014)

Such circumstances provided the fertile ground for the Islamic movements that called for political reform on the basis of Islamic laws. The Islamic movement of Uzbekistan which was officially formed by the late 1990s with the aim of overthrowing the Uzbek regime and replacing it with an Islamic state, expanded its goal in 2001 to encompass Central Asia, the Caucasus and China's western province of Xinjiang (Haase, 2008). Due to the lack of support for the movement in Uzbekistan and the measures taken against it by the government, the IMU had relocated to Afghanistan fighting alongside the Taliban and Al-Qaeda and making military attacks on Central Asia. In 2015 the movement pledged loyalty to the Islamic State. It is listed by the U.S. as a foreign terrorist organization (Thomas M. Saderson, 2010)

The Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan headed a grouping of opposition parties in 1992 against the government and the presidential elections, and resulted in a civil war which lasted for five years. In 1997, a peace treaty was signed and IRP's armed formations were integrated into government bodies. In the post-civil war period, the IRP has taken part in every parliamentary election (2000, 2005, 2010), gaining two seats. In September 2015, the party was banned by the High Court of Tajikistan labelling it as a terrorist group.

Despite the difficult and confined political space, the party is gaining popularity in Tajik society and the party currently has 41,000 members. The party has long denounced the use of violence as a tool of political change and has been keen to emphasize its commitment to the democratization of Tajikistan ( Saud, 2012). Hizb ut-Tahrir is currently the leading Islamist group in Central Asia aiming at reestablishing the Caliphate: recruiting members and building the party, re-Islamizing the Ummah (the community), and taking over the state and spreading Islam worldwide. HT favors a radical political change through the demolition of the existing state apparatus and the construction of a new pan-Islamic state.

Consequently, HT represents a real threat to the republics of Central Asia though it adopts a non-violent strategy to achieve its goal ( Ahmed & Stuard, 2009).

### ISLAMIC RENAISSANCE PARTY OF TAJIKISTAN (IRP)

#### Origins

The party was headed by Muhammad Sherif Himmat Zada and succeeded by Sayyid Abdulla Nuri, the students of

Muhammad Rustamov Hindustani who is considered the most influential underground spiritual leader in the Soviet Era.

Hindustani had studied at the Madrassa in Deoband, India, before returning home to open a clandestine madrassah in Dushanbe in the 1970s. He started producing a spirit of liberty of thought in young Muslims even in the time of Soviet Union. Young Muslims called themselves as Almalli al-shubban in that age. From that time a period of novelty of thought at ideological level started among youngsters. In spite of the difference of opinion, between young Muslims of traditional Ullema, the people of Renaissance ideology won appreciation and fame in mosques and various religious centers. This also created quarrelsome situations at some places between the youngsters of al-Mallali al-Shubban and various traditional Muslims (Rashi, 1991).

By 1974, Nuri Hindustan's student, had helped in forming an illegal Islamic organization and in 1987 headed a demonstrations in support of the Afghan Mujahideen. He was arrested with others on charge of organizing a protest against Russian occupation of Afghanistan and circulating Islamic literature. He was released after a year and continued his struggle and political activities and finally became the leader of Islamic Renaissance party (Perekrests, 2015).

The Islamic Renaissance party was officially established on 6 October 1990 as a branch of the Soviet union-wide IRP, which was formed three months earlier in Russia. In 1990 the Tajik IRP was given some support by the Kremlin in leadership. The reason for the support was that Kremlin leadership saw the IRP as a force that could take support away from nationalists while also pushing against the communist party in Tajikistan that was giving the Kremlin problems (Saud, 2012).

It was also established as an open organization, although it is believed to have existed underground since the late 1970s. the IRP received legal recognition as a political party in the changed political climate that existed after 1991. Despite the links to the party of the same name with branches throughout the Soviet Union, the Tajikistan IRP focused explicitly on republic level politics and national identity rather than supranational issues.

### **Ideology and Aims**

The thoughts of IRP are closer to the ideas of the Muslim Brothers. IRP presented itself explicitly as a sociopolitical organization. Its program denounced ethnic and national conflicts. It was firm in the view that is respected the constitution and rejected terrorism.

The Islamic Renaissance does profess a desire for all Muslims to live in accordance with the Quran, starting the desire to achieve such a goal through constitutional means (Rests, 2015). The party's initial platform which was made public on December 16, 1990, clearly demonstrates its

comprehensive religious orientation as follows: (Haghayghi, 1996)

- To explain to the people the real meanings of Holy Quran and hadith.
- To call to Islam by all means of mass media.
- To fight national and radical discrimination, impudence, crime, alcoholism and all other things that are forbidden by Sharia through understanding and appeal.
- To educate young people on the principles of Islam and for this purpose, to create instruction and training centers and madrassah.
- To strengthen Islamic brotherhood, to develop religious relations with the Muslim world and to seek for a relationship of equal rights with representative of other religions.
- To cooperate with other democratic parties and state organizations in all fields.
- To solve the problems of people according to the Holy Quran and Hadith.
- To ensure the distribution of food according to the Sharia.
- To ensure the principles of an Islamic economy and regaining ecological purity.
- To strength the family according to the principles of Islam and to ensure the rights of women and children.

Islamic Renaissance Party has resorted to peaceful means for the purification of Tajik society. These means include holding seminars and discussion on social evils, conference and lectures. In addition, women have been given active roles in the party's activities (Kabiri, 2012). Though publishing different articles, the party tries to bring up the youth in the spirit of Islam and encouraging them to have modern education and skills. So, the party that previously focused on attracting individuals from religious background is now seeking to recruit new members from among intellectuals and students.

### **Party structure**

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#### **The relation between IRP and its political regime**

The party started its political struggle to get registered as a legitimate political party, but the Soviets did not give permission for establishing a political party on religious grounds. After independence of Tajikistan, the party started illegally and demanded the government to ban all unislamic practices including stores selling pork and alcohol. The party also demanded renaming Tajik streets banning the way of cattle slaughtering and replacing of Friday with Sunday.

After registration of IRP as a Political Party in 1991 the political conflict against the government and the presidential elections continued which reached at its zenith in 1992. This status continued up till 1997, (years of the civil war in Tajikistan). IRP made use of mass mobilization and political agitation to form an alliance with the name of the united Tajik front (Haghyghi, 1994).

By the end of the war, Tajikistan was in state of complete devastation. The number of those killed was estimated up to 100,000 and around 1-2 million people were refugees inside and outside the country. Tajikistan's infrastructure, government services and economy were in disarray and most of the population was surviving on subsistence given from international aid organizations. In 1997, a peace treaty was signed and the general peace accord provided opposition to be incorporated into the central and local government bodies according to 30% quota.

IRP's armed formations underwent a gradual process of reintegration in state's military police and civil government bodies. The ban of IRP was lifted and the party was badly affected by the clash among its leaders because some accepted the peace accord while others didn't.

IRP has changed a lot, the party shared in parliamentary elections getting only two seats, and although it alleged government for rigging, it accepted the results and continued its political struggle peacefully showing a change from radical to a moderate reforming tendency, the successive leaders of the party declared and adopted anti-terrorist attitude. Sayyid Abdulla Nuri, the second leader of the party, declared that armed struggle could not be the only function of Islamic movements of central Asia. Similarly, Muhiddin Kabiri, the current leader, declared that Jihad cannot be the only criterion as advocated by the Islamic movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) (Alaxey 2010).

In 2000, the IRP was the most influential party in Tajikistan. It was the only religiously affiliated party, which represented in the national legislature of a central Asian country. However, the party was repressively treated and the party's women mosque was closed in 2010 by the authorities.

The IRP took part in parliamentary elections in 2000, 2005 and 2010 and won 2 out of 63 seats, refusing to acknowledge the election results. The party boycotted the 2006 presidential election. In the election held on 1 March 2015, the party failed to surpass the 5% vote barrier losing its only 2 seats in parliament.

According to a statement issued by Tajik Justice Ministry on August 28, 2015 the Islamic Renaissance party cannot legally continue its activities because the party does not have enough members to qualify as an officially registered party. The ministry asked the party to close all the party's branches in 58 cities and districts across Tajikistan.

On September 8, 2015 the government formally charged the ousted Deputy Minister of Defence Abdul Halim Nazarzoda for his involvement in an attack on the main police station in Vahdat district of Tajikistan that left nine officers dead. An official statement by the Ministry of Interior alleged Nazarzoda for his alignment with IRP. But the party insisted that the ousted defence official was not its member as the existing law banned military personal from joining political parties. Despite of this fact, the government arrested 13 top members including the deputy chairman and spokesman in the way of permanently disabling the group.

The people's democratic party of Tajikistan won the March 2015 parliamentary elections and it was the first time since Tajikistan's independence that IRP failed to meet 5% threshold needed to win parliamentary seats, and in September 2015 the Tajik supreme court called the IRP a terrorist organization and banned its activities in the country. The government alleged that the political party of over 40,000 supporters was involved in a deadly attack on the main police station (Laruelle, 2015).

The Tajik government has jailed several top IRP, while many former opposition fighters have been gradually forced out of positions in the Tajik security services. Kabiri, who is currently in exile, had already accused the government of closing a number of mosques and banning women and children from attending several mosques.

In conclusion, The Islamic Renaissance party has resorted to peaceful means for the purification of Tajik society. These means include holding seminars and discussion on social evils, conferences and lectures. Also women have been given active roles in the party's activities (Kabiri, 2012).

#### **Future of IRP**

The IRP which has long maintained a centrist moderate track may split and a more radical branch may emerge in the future which could lead to a more vicious conflict after the government's crackdown on IRP.

#### **HIZB-UT-TAHRIR (HT)**

The study will focus on the origins, aims and ideology, party structure, the relation between HT and its political regime and finally the future of HT.

#### **Origins**

Hiz ut-Tahrir was founded in 1952, in what was then the Jordanian controlled part of Jerusalem, by the Palestinian Islamic Legal Scholar and political activist Taqiuddin-an-Nabhani (1909-1977). He was educated at Al-Azhar University in Cairo and later worked in Palestine in the Islamic Courts, eventually becoming a judge. After the 1948 an-Nabhani was a leading member of East Jerusalem discussion circles among politically active Palestinians, many of whom later became involved in the Baathist movement of Arab socialism. An-Nabhani was also attracted by the ideals of Arab nationalism, but in contrast to many contemporaries, he based his political views on the centrality of Islam in politics.

Like many Arab political parties that emerged after 1930s, Hiz ut-Tahrir took on characteristics of a modern political party, with a program and structures. Many of these parties found inspiration in early Leninist ideas, echoing the concept of the party as a revolutionary vanguard. Most took on an ideology of nationalism or socialism, or both. Taqiuddin an-Nabhani was one of the first Arab intellectuals to argue the case for a modern political party using the constructs of Islamic discourse. Nevertheless, Hizb ut-Tahrir had much more in common in terms of political structure with secular parties such as the Ba'athists, later to become a ruling party in Iraq and Syria, than it did with the major Islamic political movement, the Muslim Brotherhood (Farouki, 2002).

Almost from the beginning Hizb ut-Tahrir acted as a non-constitutional party, the Jordanian authorities have rejected its application for legal registration, but it still functioned fairly

openly and as part of the wider political opposition. It gathered popular support in the 1950s in Jordan and the West Bank, and some in Beirut, where Nabhani was forced to live in exile.

HT picked up more support in the 1960s, and by 1968 the leadership considered that this was sufficient to seize power, not just in Jordan, but in Iraq and Syria also, led by pockets of backing in the armed forces in each country. The coup failed as did further attempts in Jordan in 1969 and 1971 and in southern Iraq in 1972. These failures and the subsequent arrest of many members seem to have led to sharp decline in enthusiasm and activity. The original premise of the party was that as in the seventh century. It would take thirteen years to follow the Prophet Mohammed's path in creating an Islamic state. The inability of the party to achieve stated aims led to a loss of members and some ideological confusion. An-Nabhani died in 1977, having seen no results, and the party continued to decline into the 1980s. he was replaced by Yusuf Sheikh Abdul Qadeem Zaloom, a founding member and also a Palestinian. But wider reactivation of the party only really began in the early 1990s, as a wave of interest in political Islam swept through the Muslim world, and events such as Gulf war, radicalized parts of Islamic society.

The popularity of the party had already spread beyond Jordan and Syria to North Africa, Turkey and South East Asia. The repression of Hizb ul-Tahrir in the Middle East led some of its members to set up new chapters in western Europe. It quickly gained ground among second-generation immigrants and now has important branches in the UK, Germany, Sweden and Denmark. With the Soviet collapse, it also started working in central Asia, where it began growing rapidly in the second half of the 1990s.

Although much organizational work may have shifted to Muslim communities in the west, the leadership still revolves around Palestinians in exile, mainly in Jordan, Abdul Qadeem Zaloom, who was probably resident in Amman, died in April 2003. He was succeeded by another Palestinian, Ata Abul Rushta, a civil engineer who studied in Cairo and previously headed in Jordan and has been linked to the party since 1955. Given his background, it seems unlikely that there will be significant change in the party's ideology under his leadership, although it is not known how much real influence the Amir has, compared with other active leaders (ICG, 2003).

#### **Ideology and Aims**

The stated aims of Hizb ut-Tahrir are straight forward and too ambitious to recreate an Islamic state, utopian interpretation of the Caliphate that once ruled the Muslim world, in which Islamic law would be introduced immediately in full. There is no gradualism or compromise in the program for change: Hizb ut-Tahrir views all other political, social or religious programs as irrelevant, since it argues that other

Islamic groups can do little until they concentrate on establishing an Islamic state in the full sense.

The ideology has changed abid from the outlines of Nabhani's writings in the 1950s and 1960s. Though there have been continuous efforts to build on his aspects of life and provide an alternative Islamic view on modern problems. Indeed, his writing have remained the basis for Hizb ut-Tahrir's ideology to the extent that they form an essential canon of belief which is difficult to challenge without undermining the essence of the party (Farouki, 2003).

His approach to Islam and politics distinguished Hizb ut-Tahrir from two major trends in Islamism in the modern era. On the one hand, the more traditional Islamic parties, such as the original Muslim Brotherhood, sought to implement aspects of Islam within existing constitutional frame works, a type of Islamic reformism, which concentrated on gradual change through education, and legal reform. Nabhani rejected this gradualism completely, arguing that only a radical transformation of society would produce a change in the lives of Muslims.

On the other hand, there were various followers of Sayyid Outb, who took up Islamic radicalism. Unlike early Islamic reformers, Nabhani rejected all attempts to compromise Islam with Western ideas of constitutionalism or nationalism. Hatred of the west, and particularly of the British, informed all his ideological writings. But he didn't follow Outb in rejecting modernity, indeed Hiz ut-Tahrir more than most Islamic groups has embraced modern technology and idioms, even its political methodology. While it claims to be based on early Islamic history, the party owes much to modern revolutionary movements such as Leninism.

In religious matters, Nabhani developed an independent viewpoint from the four major legal schools of Islam. Observers who would like to push him into the 'Wahhabi' camp for political reasons will have trouble doing so on the basis of his religious ideology: his beliefs are clearly not in line in many cases with the Hanbali school of legal interpretation that many 'Wahhabi' groups follow (Taji Faroulei, 2002). His independent approach means that much of Hizb ut-Tahrir's teaching on Islamic matters is considered heterodox by leading scholars in the major schools of Islam.

### **Islamic State**

Hizb ut-Tahrir rejects existing attempts to establish Islamic states as not s radical. Its vision of an Islamic state is absolute.

The details of what an Islamic state would look like are outlined in the range of literature produced by the party. Some of quite detailed but little are said on actual mechanisms of power. Nevertheless, the party has produced a draft constitution, which sketches the major provisions of such a

state. It is a strange mixture of anachronistic elements from the medieval Caliphate, placed alongside elements of the modern state. According to one scholar, "Nabhani attempted to resurrect models of reflecting the socio-economic life of societies much less complex than today's, making little allowance for the needs and circumstances of the contemporary age (Waheed, 2002).

The basic element of state would be a ruler, a Caliph, elected by a Majlis al-Ummah, or assembly, in turn elected by the people. Political parties would be permitted, provided they were based on Islamic ideology, and they would be called upon to hold the Caliph to account, within the set framework of the Sharia. The Islamic state proposed by Hizb ut-Tahrir is a utopian Islamic state that few Muslims would recognize as either attainable or desirable. Members do not show much interest in the detail of Islamic statehood.

The absolute nature of their goal and the lack of realism in their vision make Hizb ut-Tahrir unlikely to emerge as a major political force with mass appeal in any country, but the nature of its political structures has ensured longevity as similar fringe movements have faded away or merged with other groups.

### **Political methodology**

The party's writings elaborate three stages of political struggle, based on its interpretation of the historical mission of the Prophet Mohammed in establishing the first Islamic state.

The first: the stage of culture this involves finding and cultivating individuals who are convinced by the thought and method of the party. This is necessary to formulate and establish a group capable of carrying the party's ideas.

The second: the stage of interaction with the Ummah encourage the Ummah to work for Islam and to carry the Da'wah (message) as if it was its own, and so that it works to establish Islam in life, state and society.

The third: the stage of taking the government and implementing Islam completely and totally, and carrying its message to the world (Khailafah 1999).

### **Attitude to violence**

It is widely reported that Hizb ut-Tahrir, both in central Asia and beyond, eschews violence to achieve its ends. Some human rights activities have argued that it is essentially a peaceful group that operates only in the realm of ideas and propaganda. It has never been proved to have been involved in any violence in central Asia, and in its other global activities, it has generally pursued its aims, through peaceful propaganda.

### **Jihad**

The party's interpretation of Jihad is also somewhat confused at first glance. Nabhan's interpretation seems to be limited to Jihad as the responsibility of the Caliphate, and Hizb

ut-Tahrir argues that Jihad is not method of the party, by which the Caliphate can be rebuilt. There is much loose rhetoric about Jihad in party leaflets, which doesn't always underline these distinctions. And there is clearly some potential for a defensive Jihad to be interpreted in a very broad fashion. But the main thrust of Hizb ut-Tahrir thinking seems to have remained intact: The Jihad will come when the Caliphate is established (ICG, 2003).

### **Party Structure**

Penetrating Hizb-ut-Tahrir's structure is difficult. Interviewees refuse to answer questions on 'organizational issues', and often don't understand the structure themselves. Nevertheless, what can be gleaned from researchers and security services suggests that the organizational structure is identical across the region, at least in theory. It relies on a cell structure akin to early communist organizations, with strict internal discipline to avoid infiltration and maintain ideological purity.

At the lowest level members are organized in *daira* or *halka* (cells), normally of five members. At the district level or at the head of a large *mahalla*, or local neighbourhood committee (assuming there are several cells), the leader is termed a *Musa'id*, who organizes activities through several assistants (*Nakib*). The regional representative (*Mu'tamad*) is appointed by the central political council (*Kiادات*), of the international party, headed by the overall Amir of the party (since May 2003 the Palestinian, *Ata Abu-i-Rushta*).

Based on scant evidence, links between the international party and the local branches seem to be sporadic and ad hoc, rather than regularly organized. There is some scope for local branches to write their leaflets, and make their own decisions – when to distribute leaflets and where, for example some of these websites themselves and translate them on their own initiative. Ideological shifts, though, seem unlikely to come from below moving far from the party's central ideology is likely to lead to expulsion.

At the local level, individual members usually create new cells by recruiting heavily from existing informal social networks, such as kinship and clan.

They also use the close ties of the Uzbek minorities (in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) to expand to party in maximally safe ways (ICG, 2003).

The cell's leader is the only person who has access to the next cells organization's structure. The result is a hierarchical or pyramid-life structure that is very decentralized. Members know a few other members and so can betray little information about the organization.

The tight compartmentalization of HT ensures that little information is known about its financial structure. Its

members take Oaths of secrecy on the Quran, Oaths that are generally not broken even under sustain its activities. Its ability to create a virtual Islamic community on the internet has allowed the movement to reach the hearts and minds of members indicate that local entrepreneurs, party members and other sympathizers tend to make individual donations to HT. Meanwhile, more detached businessmen and Islamic charities are most likely to direct their money to HT's leadership committee, which in turn sends money to the movement's various regional branches. Funding is essentially drawn from a combination of private donations and the dues of party members. The latter is particularly significant, since in central Asia each member is obligate to donate between 5 percent and 20 percent of monthly income to the party (Saidazimova, 2007).

The precise number of HT members in central Asia is difficult to estimate. But HT claims to have upwards of 100,000 members in the area. However, more modest assessments place the number at some several thousand and many more sympathizers.

### **The relations between Hizb ut-Tahrir and its political regime**

The Uzbek authorities have often accused Hizb ut-Tahrir of organizing terrorist attacks. President Karimov argued that Hizb ut-Tahrir was responsible for blasts at the Israeli and U.S. embassies and the general prosecutor's office that killed at least three members of the Uzbek security forces in Tashkent in July 2004. HT stated denying any involvement in the events in Uzbekistan. It appears that there is no evidence connecting the group with terrorist attacks in Central Asia and this explains why it was not placed by the U.S. government on the list of terrorist organizations in the wake of September 11 attacks.

Nevertheless, the Karimov regime has portrayed itself as a pro-Western bastion of secularism and democracy, fighting its own "war on terrorism" against Islamic militants. However, Tashkent has failed to persuade Western governments to declare HT a terrorist organization. HT was also accused of being responsible for the May 2005 violence in Andizhan by Karimov's regime (Yakin, 2005).

There is no doubt that HT has radical views and deliberately uses extremist language to propagate its message to Muslim communities, but it presents a particularly difficult challenge to Western and Muslim governments, since it aims at a radical Islamic goal- the restoration of the Caliphate – without using violence as a tool of political change.

Because of its non-violence strategy, HT has already experienced two splits in Uzbekistan. In 1994, a group called *Akramiya* and headed by *Yuldash Akramov*, a former member of HT in Ferghana valley, broke away HT. although initially *Akramiya* retained the commitment to political but not military struggle, it is likely that group members participated in the May

2005 uprising in Andizhan and fought against the Uzbek security forces. In 1999, another group labeled Hizb an-Nusra seceded from Hizb ut-Tahrir in Tashkent area. It appears that the new group challenged HT's commitment to nonviolent methods as insufficient to bring about the collapse of the Uzbek regime and favored an armed struggle (Rotar, 2005).

Yet, Hizb ut-Tahrir might move to violence while seeking support "nusrah" in its third stage of change strategy by forming a coalition with the Uzbek military or officials in the country's Ministry of Internal Affairs in order to challenge the regime. Although the security apparatus is under firm control in Uzbekistan and the other republics, there may be groups within the police and military which, while secular themselves, believe that there is a common cause with HT that outweighs their ideological differences.

Hizb ut-Tahrir in Central Asia is strictly focused on Uzbekistan where eighty-eight percent of Uzbekistan's population is Sunni Muslim as of 2003. Ruled repressively, Uzbekistan keeps religion and government separate, and oppressive actions are taken against religious groups. Hence, the policies of governments in Central Asia have contributed to the growth of Hizb ut-Tahrir, particularly in Uzbekistan. Repression by the Uzbek government has given HT a certain mystique among some of the population, and the lack of alternative forms of political members from the mass of those opposed to the regime for political reasons. Poor economic policies have further undermined support for the government, and induced discontent among traders. Uzbekistan's restrictive border regime has also increased support for a group that advocates a universal Muslim State, with no national distinctions (Ibid).

Political regimes of Central Asia have responded differently to the existing challenge posed by Hizb ut-Tahrir. In Tajikistan over 1000 members of HT were jailed since 1998. In Kyrgyzstan, the persecution of hundreds of HT supporters has aroused a public discussion on whether HT should be registered or its members detained. The Uzbek leadership severely punishes anyone suspected of HT activity. HT is treated in the same oppressive way in the other republics of Central Asia (Crisis Group, 2003).

However, there are a number of potential dangers arising from HT ideology and activities in Central Asia. While HT's mission and objectives may appear as fringe elements in most Muslim-populated countries, the growing appeal of its extreme view is a cause of concern for local, national, regional and international actors, including U.S. government. HT's rhetoric is often aggressive. It frequently incite anti-Semitic and anti American sentiments, following the evens of September 11, 2001, HT has focused on casting itself as the voice of all Muslims in Central Asia, while presenting the cooperation of Central Asia government with the U.S. Led anti terrorist

campaign as treason and tantamount to a war against Islam and Muslims.

Another potential danger is that HT's vast transitional network, underground organizational structure, financial and technical capacities could push members of HT to join the ranks of militant and terrorist groups as a result of the official repression of the governments of Central Asia (Ahmed & Stuart, 2010).

### **Future of Hizb ut-Tahrir**

Hizb ut-Tahrir has grown in size and influence in Central Asia for the following reasons:

First and foremost, HT calls for a return to Islamic values. In its most extreme political manifestation, the party's goal is to establish a united Islamic Caliphate that would spread from the Middle East through Central Asia to Muslim areas of South Asia. To a lesser degree, return to Islamic values would fill that many perceive to be a dangerous moral vacuum. HT actively blames that move away from Islamic values for the number of social ills that plague Central Asia.

Second, HT casts itself as an organization bent on achieving Justice. HT's demand to reinstate Sharia Law resonates powerfully in Central Asian countries. In the absence of the rule of law and corruption, HT's message becomes more popular.

Third, an extremely significant factor in HT's popularity is the party's rejection of violence as a political means, unlike the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. In a region where memories of bloody ethnic clashes between Uzbeks and Meskhetain Turks, and Uzbeks and Kyrgyz are still fresh, the incursions of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in 1999 and 2000 fueled popular version to violent methods. Hence, HT's call for a supra-national Islamic identity and cooperation between all Muslim countries appears attractive to segments of the population, particularly in cases where political and social differences between various ethnic communities have created tension in the region.

Fourth, the fact that the authorities stifle channels for legitimate civic expression or for securing practical change through democratic means has further empowered HT's campaign. HT's leaflets are quickly becoming a major source of information for many that are disillusioned with the propaganda – style of Central Asian state media outlets.

### **ISLAMIC MOVEMENT OF UZBEKISTAN (IMU)**

#### **The origins**

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan is a group of militants from Uzbekistan established by Uzbek youth who were against the pro-communist government and it is tightly connected to Taliban. After an unsuccessful attempt to revolt

against the government of Uzbekistan, the party was banned, and its members fled the country. Islamic militants tried to change the economically and politically weakened governments into an Islamic Caliphate.

Its original goal was to overthrow the communist government of Uzbekistan, especially president Islam Karimov and establishing an Islamic Caliphate in Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries (Olimova, 2011).

The origins of the IMU date from the early 1990s, when Juma Namangani – a former Soviet soldier who fought in Afghanistan – and Tahir Yuldashev – an unofficial Mulla and head of Adolat party – joined forces to implement Sharia Law in the city of Namangan in Uzbekistan's part of the Fergana valley. Alarmed by Adolat's demands to transform Uzbekistan into the Islamic state, the government banned Adolat in March 1992 and a period of repression followed, forcing many Islamic militants to flee the Fergana valley. Namangani fled to Tajikistan where he participated in the Tajik civil war establishing a base for the fighters there. Yuldashev escaped to Afghanistan, and Saudi Arabia, where he established links to other Islamic militants. He also made clandestine trips to Uzbekistan, maintain contact with his supporters and setting up underground cells. By the late 1990s, the IMU was officially formed, its stated goal was the establishment of an Islamic state with the application of the Sharia in Uzbekistan (Sadarsan, 2010).

### **Ideology and aims**

The major goal and IMU was to topple the Islam Karimov regime and to replace it with the one based on principles of Sharia Laws. "The goal of IMU is to establish an Islamic state under Sharia" says Yuldashev in a statement. IMU thinks that when an Islamic system of state would be implemented in Uzbekistan all the problems of common man would be resolved. It would be the responsibility of state to take care of each and every citizen. In a policy document, IMU declared that "their type of Islamic government would have nothing to do with the Islamic Political systems of Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan or Saudi Arabia. In fact, our system would be based on the pattern of Islamic state of Madina. (Naumkin, 2005).

IMU demanded immediate resignation of Karimov which would lead to "a council of top-level Ulema to draft and pass laws in conformity to Sharia and also select people who will perform the political and executive function. The external relations of the Islamic state would be based on justice and fair play and all the existing treaties with enemies of Islam will be broken and a Jihad will be launched against all those states which persecute Muslims" (Rashid, 2002).

As Uzbekistan is declared one of the most undemocratic and not free countries by international

organizations, people had no other choice but to support 27 years long Karimov regime. There are lots of reports which confirm oppressive measures by Uzbek regime to continue its political opponents. Such measures include illegal detention, charge under terrorism act, extra judicial killings and confiscation of properties. "No body is free in Uzbekistan. Everything was controlled by Karimov. He was a cruel person. He did not allow any kind of opposition politics. He had appointed his cronies to all the important administrative positions. Corruption is rampant; you even have to bribe to go for pilgrimage" narrates Abujalil Boymatov, chairman, Human Rights Commission of Uzbekistan (Interview with respondent via skype on 14<sup>th</sup> July, 2014).

Under such circumstances underground Islam has got popularity especially among the young Uzbeks. Along with IMU, Hizb ut-Tahrir has also got grounds in Central Asia especially in Fergana valley. Both, Islamists especially IMU and the secular opposition forces had a similar agenda; change of Karimov regime which would definitely be 'change of system' now. Nevertheless, all the opposition forces are still not on a single page. There is least cooperation among opposition forces to chart out a single strategy for future political system of Uzbekistan (Saud, 2015).

### **Party structure**

Juma Namangani and Tahir Yuldashev played a vital role in forming the Islamic movement of Uzbekistan. The two prominent leader of IMU, Namanjani and Yuldashev, had been killed by a U.S. airstrike in November 2001 and August 2009 respectively. The IMU announced that Yuldashev's long-serving deputy, Abu Usman Adil had been appointed the group's new leaders who called on his followers to wage Jihad in the Southern portion of Kyrgyzstan, in the wake of ethnic violence against Uzbek minority. Adil was killed in an April 2012 US drone strike in Pakistan. In August 2012 the group announced that Adil's deputy, Usman Ghazi, was their new leader. On 26 September 2014, Ghazi reportedly pledged the allegiance of the IMU to the Islamic state of Iraq and the Levant (Pannier, 2015).

Concerning membership, IMU has attracted supporters from a variety of ethnic background, principally Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, Chechens and Uighurs. The IMU's recruitment efforts have also aimed at recruiting Germans. As of late 2013, the IMU claimed to have some 700 fighters and 140 advisers and trainers in Afghanistan, a further 2000 fighters in Pakistan, and an undisclosed number active elsewhere, including central Asia, Caucasus, Iran and Syria.

Sources of funding for the IMU have included Uzbeks who migrated to Islamic countries in the 1950s, in particular Saudi Arabia's Uzbek diaspora which numbers 300,000 people. Funds also come from a number of Turkish foundations and Islamist and pan-Turkic organizations, the Taliban, Al-Qaeda



and sympathetic foundations and banks throughout the Arab world (Cornell, 2005).

### **The relation between Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and its political regime**

The death of Islam Karimov will not give any leverage to IMU in Uzbekistan as departure of Karimov has not changed the security apparatus and religious policies in Uzbekistan. The interim president Shavkat Mirzo had remained very close to Karimov and is likely to continue his style of government. According to Abdujamil Boymatov, "he (Shavkat Mirzo) is more brutal than Karimov". Most of the Uzbek political scientist like Nasrullah Qayyamov, Allakhverdiyev and Kamaluddin Rabimov have declared IMU as the least security threat to Uzbekistan. They say that since the movement had negligible support in the country, how it can be successful here. The leadership especially Namangani and Yuldashev has died. The new leadership of Usman Ghazi is inexperienced and simply means that IMU is out of fighters. Moreover, dilution of non-Uzbek membership has also lost its significance among Uzbek public.

There are an estimated number of 1500-2000 fighters left with IMU and if we consider Islamtillah Faizullah's statement true, it means Uzbek members are only 500-550. Having such a small number of indigenous membership, IMU cannot achieve its objective to create an Islamic state in Uzbekistan (Interview with Abdujalil Boymatov via Skype on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2016).

### **Militant activities in Central Asia**

Tashkent witnessed the deadliest bomb explosions after the independence of Uzbekistan in February 1999 killing several people besides injuring dozens of others. The regime blamed both Islamists and the secular opposition forces for the blasts. Uzbek authorities stated that these attacks were the outcome of meeting between Juma Namangani and Muhammed Salah, head of the Erk party of Uzbekistan (Living in exile in Turkey) in Istanbul (Weitz, 2004). Regime started severe cracked own and imprisoned members of Islamist organizations who were sentenced to long imprisonment besides hanging six.

- In August 2000: IMU kidnapped and held hostage four American mountain climbers in the Karu-Su valley of Kyrgyzstan but the climbers escaped.
- In 2001: The IMU has carried out numerous attacks against U.S. and coalition forces.
- March – April 2004: IMU gunmen and female suicide bombers targeted Uzbek security forces in Tashkent, which killed 10 policemen and four civilians.
- In December 2011: IMU suicide bomber killed 19 people of the funeral of an Afghan government official.

- April 2012: IMU fighters attacked Bannu prison, Pakistan, liberating 384 prisoners.
- May 2013: The director of the police Department in Quetta, Pakistan, was murdered in an IMU suicide attack (K. Warikoo, 2013).
- May 2013: in concert with the Taliban, the IMU assaulted the Governor's compound in Panjshir province, Afghanistan. Two of the attackers and a policeman died in the attack.
- June 2014: the attack at Jinnah International Airport, Karachi, Pakistan, which killed 36 including the 10 attackers.

In late 2015, the Taliban liquated the IMU as a punishment for its betrayal by pledging loyalty to Abu Bakar Al Baghdadi, leader of Islamic state. It was then reported that Usman Ghazi and IMU members had been killed at a base in Zabul province.

Among the central Asian Jihadist groups fighting in the region, only the IMU has pledged support for the Islamic state. This support is an important development, not with standing the possibility of a split within the group. It has a proven track record of conducting high-profile attacks against strategic targets in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the possibility exists that it could expand its operations into Central Asia.

The IMU could also provide the Islamic state with a significant force multiplier in the region. The recent reestablishment of IMU sanctuaries in Northern Afghanistan, particularly in the Uzbek enclaves of Faryab and Kunduz, could also lead to the establishment of a sanctuary that would replace Pakistan's tribal areas. The IMU could use the area to launch operations into central Asia that would further their own strategic interests or these of the Islamic state.

### **The Future of IMU**

After the death of Mullah Omar not only Afghan Taliban has divided their ways, IMU has also been fractured and there are many splinter groups of the organization which are fighting in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and Syria. Usman Ghazi has pledged his allegiance to the IS. There are reports that Usman Ghazi has been killed in an ambush between Wilayat Khurasan and a Taliban group loyal to Mullah Omar in Zabul province of Afghanistan in November 2015 (Barr, 2016).

If Ghazi is killed then there is no one left who can ready claim the captaincy of IMU. All of its members are least known in the region and their native countries.

Despite these serious blows, IMU still struggles for its survival. Whether long with Taliban or IS (Wilayat e Khurasan) it continues its offensives. Its concentration in Northern Afghanistan has many gains. It can pose a threat to the NATO supplies through Northern Distribution Network (NDN), a

message to the Central Asian states that it is still alive and operational and it can easily mingle and hide itself in the ethnic Uzbek and ethnic Tajik population provinces of Afghanistan. There are other reasons of the rise of militants in northern Afghanistan which include “Less support from the central (Kabul) government, less confidence in local police, less coordination among security forces, and increased local Taliban propaganda” (Putz, 2015).

Faryab and Zabul are the main regions where IMU concentrates its strength. According to the vice president of Afghanistan, General Rasheed Dostam, leader of the Afghan ethnic Uzbek community, “whenever the fighting gets tough, it is the Uzbeks who are in the lead. They are fighting our troops at very close range” (Stancati and Hodge, 2015).

But there is a tug of war for supremacy in these regions between IMU and Taliban group. The latter has done serious harm to IMU in Faryab and Zabul provinces. Besides alleged killing of Usman Ghazi at the hands of Taliban in Faryab, most of IMU fighters have been eliminated from this region. It is said that by eliminating IMU from Northern Afghanistan “This Taliban achieved in 24 hours what the Americans were unable to do in 14 years”. (Nathaneil Barr, 2016). Nevertheless, Faryab could be cleared from all members of IMU.

After that Taliban – IMU fight, one of the IMU members posted on Facebook that “Taliban had killed hundreds of IMU fighters in Zabul and had laid siege to remaining IMU militants .. this might be our last last appearance on the Internet”, and still then no message has been posted by IMU on the Internet. However, there are reports that few splinter groups of IMU are busy in the region. Some are fighting in Syria as well Central Asian groups engaged in Syria include Imom Bukhari Bridge and Katibot Tauheed wal Jihad (Putz, 2015).

Besides the Wilayat e Khurasan, Sodiqlar group of IMU is engaged in Tajikistan. Members of this group were arrested by Tajik security officials from Sughd and Ghafurov area. Both the members have confessed that they were on a mission to recruit new members for their group. The Tajik state security agency says that “we heard of this group (in 2013) when we were investigating 16 suspects in Spitaman and Panjakent districts [also in Sughd province]. At that time, investigators considered Sodiqlar part of an existing movement, not a separate one (Mirsaidov, 2016).

### **The Relationship between the IMU, The IRP and Hizb ut-Tahrir**

One option for Hizb ut-Tahrir to expand its influence is to join with other groups that have similar aims but different tactics. There is ambivalence in its ideology about working with others, but the potential is clearly there and justified by the vague concept of appealing for outside assistance, or Nusrat.

However, the party has always rejected other Islamist movements as not following the correct tactics. The founder, Taquiddin an Nabhani, wrote, ‘Not a single correct structure, that aimed at the revival of the Ummah, was established in any of the Islamic countries during the post country’ (ICG, March 2003). But this has not stopped cooperation in certain circumstances, and given the frequent assertions by governments in the region that Hizb ut-Tahrir is merely one face of a united armed Islamist movement, it is important to explore whether these links exist and what potential there is for them to develop.

The only other significant Islamist movements in Central Asia have been the Islamic Renaissance party (IRP) in Tajikistan and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The IRP moved from being an armed opposition during the Tajik civil war to legal party taking part peacefully in the constitutional process. The IMU, however, increasingly became part of the international militant Islamist movement linked to the Taliban in Afghanistan and operated from military bases, initially in Tajikistan and later in Afghanistan.

The IMU has received the most international attention in recent years, especially since its dramatic, if unsuccessful, military incursions into southern Kyrgyzstan in August 1999 and August 2000 that shocked the region and exposed the weakness of Central Asian militaries. It was a guerrilla-like movement of perhaps 3,000 fighters that sought political and religious ends through force. Its bases and much of its organization were destroyed during the U.S. led military intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 (ICG, 2002).

The relation between Hizb ut-Tahrir and the two groups is very different. The party is largely hostile to the IRP, accusing it of “selling out,” by accepting the peace agreement and taking up posts in the government. Its attitude was summed up in a recent leaflet:

Although Islam never makes peace with Kufr [unbelievers], the leader of the IRP, A. Nuri, not possessing an adequate level of religious and political knowledge, in exchange for several [government] positions, made peace with the government of Tajikistan. As a result the government paralysed this movement. The party became a toy, acting only in the interests of the government (Harus, 2002).

This tension between the IRP and Hizb ut-Tahrir is mutual, especially at leadership level. Some ordinary members are more sympathetic, partly because of their own criticism of the IRP’s stance. But there seems almost no chance of any alliance between the two groups: the IRP is intent largely on survival in the increasingly intolerant Tajik political system and avoids any possible connotation of links to more radical movement.

The relation with the IMU is very strange. There have been several unconfirmed reports of meeting between Hizb ut-Tahrir leaders and those of the IMU and the Taliban. The supposed substance of these meetings is uncertain. The leader of Hizb ut-Tahrir (Indonesia), Ismail Yusanto, claims that the party discussed with Taliban leader Mullah Omar the idea of his leading the movement for a Caliphate, but that he was not interested in anything but Afghanistan (Dr Imran Waheeb, 2003).

Whether this might have led to some cooperation if there had been no intervention in Afghanistan is difficult to ascertain. A representative in London noted that there would be little point asking the IMU for assistance, since it did not have significant military capabilities. After the fiasco of the IMU's armed interventions in Kyrgyzstan, it seems likely that Hizb ut-Tahrir concluded there was little to gain and much to lose from an alliance with such an incomplete fighting force.

There are also considerable theological differences between Hizb ut-Tahrir and the wider neo-Wahhabi philosophy shared by the Taliban, al-Qaeda and similar groups. Little love is lost between Wahhabis in Central Asia and their HT 'brothers'. They reject each other as profoundly wrong on fundamental theological questions, notably the acceptance of certain hadith (sayings attributed to the prophet Mohammed). The main anti-Hizb ut-Tahrir website is Wahhabi-run, praises the Taliban, and rejects Hizb ut-Tahrir as 'secular modernists' (Suara Hidayatullah, 2002).

Nevertheless, the ideological basis of the IMU, ostensibly part of the wider Taliban-led forces in Afghanistan, was not always so clear-cut, and its documents demonstrate considerable sympathy with and admiration towards the Hizb ut-Tahrir, although there is evidence of frustration with its refusal to take up arms against the government. IMU documents contain no significant critiques of Hizb ut-Tahrir, though in notes on the party's activities, IMU officials frequently object to its peaceful tactics, asserting that 'we have to talk to the government in the only language they understand' (ICG Asia Report, 2003).

The attitude towards the IMU of ordinary Hizb ut-Tahrir members in Central Asia are interesting and slightly ambiguous, as an excerpt from an ICG interview with HT member demonstrates:

ICG: What do you think of the IMU?

HT: They are our brothers.

ICG: Do you support them?

HT: Yes, I support anyone who supports Allah.

ICG: They want to overthrow the government.

HT: Ah, I don't support that ... (ICG interview, Osh, April 2003)

Another long-standing member was less equivocal: Everywhere people want to build Islam. The IMU – IR also consider them brothers ... But they don't have a program'.

Others were more openly against IMU 'we have nothing in common with the IMU, we condemn them ... they also read the Koran, but they have different views. We need to prepare people towards the Caliphate'. (ICG interview, Jala-Abad, April 2003). But it is important to point out that most members have little knowledge of the wider Islamist movement. Asked what he thought of the Wahhabi movement, a member admitted he had only read encyclopedia (ICG interview, Karasu, April 2003).

The differences in tactics seem too great to overcome at the lower level, without significant ideological maneuvering on the part of the transnational leadership. Given the serious damage caused to IMU capabilities by the U.S. led intervention in Afghanistan, it is unlikely that a serious alliance would be particularly useful to the Hizb ut-Tahrir.

The party's insistence that any military action should be carried out only when there is a chance of success, and its general. Opposition to terrorism seems genuine. It does seem possible though that at least a part of Hizb ut-Tahrir, particularly in Uzbekistan, might respond to a call for more radical measures, but at present it probably has more to lose than to gain from such a move.

Overall, there is no evidence of significant organizational or ideological links with the IMU, beyond some possibly desultory contacts during the Taliban Era in Afghanistan. Whether there is any potential for future alliance with other groups may depend on whether some emerge in the future from the ranks of the IMU and possibly from other disaffected groups within Central Asian society.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper I examined the relation between the Central Asian states towards their Islamic movements. All states rely to some extent on inherited institutions to regulate their Muslim communities and perform the secular state, and all states employ to a more or lesser extent the "discourse on danger" to move against opposition forces, be they real or fictive. The short recounting of episodes of actual state engagement of Muslim affairs, however, showed differences in the results the states produce with their attempts to regulate and control. The social space for political maneuvering, the primary condition outlined in the beginning for a fruitful engagement of the religious parts of the society with the aim to strengthen societal integration and to foster economic development, appears in different size and show different characteristics.

In Tajikistan the relation between its political regime and the Islamic Renaissance party is peaceful relation. IRP has resorted to peaceful means for the purification of Tajik society, these means include holding seminars and discussion on social evils, conferences and lectures. In Uzbekistan and many Asian states the relation between their political regimes and Hizb ut-Tahrir is moderate relationship. Hizb ut-Tahrir stands a part from better know radical Islamist movements by its opposition to the use of violence. HT has grown in size and influence in Central Asia for the following reasons: First, HT calls for a return to Islamic values; Second, HT casts itself as an organization bent on achieving justice; Third, an extremely significant factor in HT's popularity in the party's rejection of violence as a political means; Fourth, the fact that the authorities stifle channels for legitimate civic expression or for securing practical change through democratic means has further empowered HT's campaigns. In Uzbekistan, the relation between Islamic movement of Uzbekistan and its political regime is more conflict relationship. IMU's initial objective was to overthrow the Uzbek regime and replace it with an Islamic state stretching from the Caspian Sea to China's Xinjiang province and encompassing the current Central Asian states.

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