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Just Peace Diplomacy Journal's primary areas of interest are peace, security and stability, militarism, energy and international presence in the Middle East and Central Asia.

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Our Vision:

In the beginning all people were one nation (Holy Qur'an, 2:213)
Throughout human history, peace has always been the 'primary state' and war the 'accidental state'. Peace is beautiful, compassionate and constructive, while war is fearsome, merciless and destructive. Unfortunately, despite this, war has been one of 20th century's most major problems, and has proved to be the symbol of the beginning of the 21st century. As portrayed by the contemporary history of international relations, particularly in the Middle East and Central Asia, war is not the solution, nor is it constructive or helpful in solving problems; rather, it causes problems and is the root of the continuation of violence, instability and insecurity.

War is not the solution to the differences between governments and nations. Only with peace which is based on justice, i.e. '*Just Peace*', can we reach a stable and permanent solution to our differences. Diplomacy and constructive dialogue which take into consideration the rights of both parties, is the only path to establishing '*Just Peace*', stability and world security. Our aim is to change international relations with the active participation of nations on the basis of '*Just Peace*'.

Let there be a group among you who will invite others to good.
(Holy Qur'an, 3:104)

We, as part of the international network of intellectuals, are able to play an important and constructive role in the establishment of mutual understanding, of dialogue and in the reduction and amelioration of global problems. Our intention is to provide solutions and means for the positive and just cooperation of nations with each other, and to reach this end independent of governments, through a realistic understanding of nations and governments from each other, and through clear, truthful and constructive dialogue.

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1. Establishing justice between the countries of the South and the North.
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4. Thinking globally and acting against extreme nationalism.
5. Realistic understanding of the realities of the world.
6. Upholding and respecting human rights and the principles of democracy.
7. Accepting and moving towards the destruction of weapons of mass destruction throughout the world/on a global scale

Our priorities in the current situation are to analyse the issues and problems of conflict-zones such as those of the Middle East, the Persian Gulf and Central Asia.

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1. Inviting and facilitating for intellectuals from different parts of the world to engage in dialogue with each other.
2. Dialogue between intellectuals and international organizations.
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4. Organising international scientific conferences dealing with regional and global issues.
5. Publishing scientific research work on peace studies in the form of books and journals.
6. Providing education internationally on the culture of dialogue, understanding, compromise, justice, freedom and spirituality.

We are a private, non-governmental organisation. Our offices are based in Europe and the Middle East.

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Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islami (Islamic Party of Liberation) and Future of Islamism in Central Asia

Farhad Navaei
International Peace Studies Centre (IPSC)

Abstract

Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami (Islamic Party of Liberation) is a political – religious organization which aims primarily at reviving the Islamic mode of life and communicating this divine religion’s message to the world. Its secondary mission is to combat the US, bring down lackey regimes, and create, in their stead, religious Islamic governments. The present article will discuss the Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami (Islamic Party of Liberation) in detail, including its establishment, strategies, ideology and organizational chart. The article will, moreover, analyze the future of Islamism in Central Asia using a descriptive – analytical approach. As such, data is collected on the Party and analyzed. The Party promotes a simple yet attractive ideology: To end poverty, inequality, and discrimination, corrupt regimes should be toppled, and in their place Islamic governments ruled by Islamic law should be established. The Party also challenges Western models of secularism on the grounds that they are superimposed on the people. The Party is centralized on promulgating “jihad” (holy war). The Party has increased its activities and gained more power ever since the presence of the US in Central Asia and set - up of various bases in these

countries. For this reason, the ruling secular political climate in the region has been on a downward spiral. Regional states' power – mongering tendencies, as well as their inability to win political groups and to solve the peoples' economic – social problems have resulted in daily rise in the Party's members. Apparently, there is a direct correlation between the regional secular states' success in promoting democracy and the rise of fundamentalism in Central Asia.

Keywords: Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami (Islamic Party of Liberation), fundamentalism, religious identity, Dar ul-Islam, Dar ul-Harb, "jihad" (holy war).

Introduction

Central Asian Muslims have gone through many hardships over the past two centuries (both at the time of Czarist Russia and the Communist rule) to hold on to their religious beliefs. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and establishment of republics in Central Asia and the Caucasus, people felt they obtained religious freedom, but, before long, they realized that the freedom they had was transient and superficial. This was due to the fact that despite the collapse of the Communist regime, the former Communists were now at the helm in the fledgling republics in the region. Disillusionment with freedom in this region resulted in the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and in Islamic groups being major players in the Central Asian developments in the 1990s. Using the deep - seated Islamic beliefs and tendencies in the region, these groups embarked on large - scale efforts to expand in the region. Recent developments have well proven that Islam is a major force in the region, in particular in shaping the region's new identity, and especially after the September 11, 2001 events which unfolded in the US. As such, Central Asian political elites regard political Islam as their number one rival. Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami (Islamic Party of Liberation) stands out among religious political organizations. This Party has gained momentum in recent years, especially during and after the Taliban rule. This article intends to provide a general overview of the Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami (Islamic Party of Liberation). After the overview, attempt will be made to discuss the Party's ideology and

motivations. The article will then elaborate on how the Party revolves around the notion of caliphate and “jihadism”. After this, attempt will be made to outline the Party’s main objectives of reviving the Islamic “ummah” (nation) and implementing Islamic “shari’ah” (law). The article will then focus on the Party’s organizational chart and strategies implemented by prominent members to reach designated objectives. The next part deals with how Party members behave toward and interact with the people. This is followed by a review of how realistic the Party’s objectives are and how there are diverse regional efforts to counter the Party. Finally, the article will discuss the future of Islamism in Central Asia and the Caucasus and wrap up with a conclusion.

1. Overview of the Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami (Islamic Party of Liberation)

The political – social party known as Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami (Islamic Party of Liberation) was established in 1953 in Bait ul – Moqaddas as a branch out of the Ikhwan al – Muslimeen with the aim of setting up a caliphate - based Islamic government. Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami rapidly rose and spread in the Middle East, North Africa, and Southeast Asia. Arab dissidents spread the Party’s influence over to the sub-continent, Afghanistan, and then Central Asia. Since the mid 1990s, however, the Party has been active only in Central Asia.¹ Party leaders contend that they are all for peaceful non – political initiatives aimed at creating global awareness about the need to set up an Islamic rule. The Party’s Palestinian born founder Taqiuddin al-Nabhani has decreed that all Muslims should have a part in setting up the Islamic rule. Al-Nabhani believes that as a religious and political leader, a caliph is a representative of the Holy Prophet (S) and should appoint a man as the religious commander to declare “jihad” against unbelievers, including the US. The Party is established on the belief that if Islamic rule is established, it will not recognize the existing ethnic, tribal, regional, and national differences. Since inception, al-Nabhani’s organization has been anti – Zionist, a feature promulgated by Hajj Amin Al – Hosseini, grand religious leader of Bait ul – Moqaddas who was martyred. During Hosseini’s religious leadership, al-Nabhani worked in the appeals court in Bait ul – Moqaddas and was considered Hajj Amin’s

colleague. Among other founders of the Party, reference can be made to Khaled Hassan, a founder of Al – Fatah, affiliated to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). In addition, Sheikh Assad Tamimi, who is one of the founders of the Party, later became the spiritual leader of Islamic Jihad. Al – Nabhani was also a member of the underground fundamentalist group Ikhvan al-Muslimeen which was established by Hassan al-Bana in Egypt in 1928 and spread worldwide, promoting the set up of Islamic government. When he was at the Al-Azhar University in Cairo, al-Nabhani joined Ikhvan al-Muslimeen but later left the party as he felt it had swerved from its main objectives and direction.² Central Asia Muslims welcomed this Party; however, there are no exact numbers of Party members in Central Asia. Some analysts contend that there are several thousand members mostly in Uzbekistan and Kyrghizistan. Statistics, however, indicate that over the past few years, while around 10,000 people in Kyrghizistan have converted to Protestantism, only 3,000 people total have joined the Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami ; nonetheless, most of these numbers are presented by Western sources to possibly downplay Central Asia’s popular Party and deflate the morale of its followers. As such, they should be taken with a grain of salt. In any event, the non – violent approach of the Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami members to spread their philosophy has resulted in many people joining the Party on a daily basis. As such, it is difficult to determine the exact number of the Party’s followers in the region. Some estimate this number to be between 15,000 and 20,000, but the Party contends that it has far more members. In the meantime, military forces and observers note that the Party has way less members than these numbers.³

This Party, which is based in Forghaneh Valley, has never been involved in violent measures. Security forces, however, are concerned due to the Party’s influence over radical movements in the region such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan which was later renamed as Turkmenistan’s Islamic Party. While the latter has been ranked among terrorist groups, the US has not categorized Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami as a terrorist group.⁴

2. Ideology

2.1. Caliphate

Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami is determined to set up an Islamic government run by the Muslim caliph and believes that as the world is currently under the rule of the West, all Islamic countries should unite to establish the Islamic caliphate. The Party has a multi-faceted ideology. For instance, countries that are part of this supranational government cannot have foreign relations. Also any Islamic country refusing the rule of the Party and the Islamic caliphate has to be fought against. The Party's second top leader Abdul Qadeem Zallum has noted that it is religiously imperative for these countries to embrace Islamic caliphate, and this is a vital issue, even if the war takes years and leads to the death of millions.⁵ Once this supranational government is set up, its relations with other states will be based on the doctrine of "jihad" between the land of Islam and the land of unbelief. The Party has defined "jihad" as war for the sake of God. This war does not require armed forces.⁶ When the Islamic government is set up, it is time to invite the nonbelievers to convert to Islam: Muslims should assist the Caliph in converting people worldwide to Islam. After this step, these countries will become part of the land of Islam and will participate in spreading Islam worldwide through "jihad" and invitation to convert to Islam.⁷ The Party considers the entire world a great venue to invite people to Islam but believes that Arab countries are more adequately equipped to do so due to speaking the language of the Quran and "hadith" (traditions narrated from the Prophet and Imams). The Party intends to run the economy based on "jaziyeh" and "kheraj" (Islamic taxation) which is equivalent to capitalism. "Jaziyeh" is the tax Muslims demand from unbelievers as a reflection of their obedience to and compliance with Islamic law. Another characteristic of the Party is its opposition with Western democracy and Western –promoted human values. These will be discussed in the next section.

2.2. Jihad with the West

Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami also claims that the West is full of Jews and Christians who have established a united front against Islam. The Party

contends that the West promotes democracy to prevent the spread of Islam, since it is fearful of Islam's power to shape civilizations. The Party deems all political norms and conventions, as well as international rights and organizations, as the symbol of unbelief and, as such, rejects them all. The Party defines democracy as the "political framework of capitalism". Democracy is the rule of the people, by the people, for the people. Democracy is founded on the principle that people have the right to sovereignty and the right to vote and execute and as such are the legislators. Muslims who accept democracy reject the belief that God is the only legislator.⁸ Rejecting all forms of non-Islamic government, laws and organizations is indicative of a radical outlook. For instance, the Party believes that democracy results in immorality and perversion. Such perversion appears in the form of homosexuality and sex with animals. Also collective sex which is the hallmark of animals is a hallmark of democracy.⁹ As such, the Party believes that the spread of democracy is part of the ideological war between capitalism and Islam. The US resorts to various measures including media slander, distortion of Islamic concepts and laws, implementation of atheist laws, and legislation to enforce anti – Islamic policies. All of these are aimed at alienating the Muslims from their religion. The West also uses this measure to dominate the Islamic governments through contracts, agreements, and commitments in order to dominate the Muslims and cripple the Islamic "ummah".¹⁰ They use fiery statements to encourage Islamic governments to combat the atheistic governments. For instance, they asked Islamic armed forces to conduct "jihad" against the US and Britain and to help set up the Islamic government through coup d'état. In September 2008, the Pakistan branch of the Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami published a pamphlet in which it asked the Pakistani Armed Forces to use its military power, including its nuclear capabilities, to deal blows to the US. When the US toppled Saddam Hussein, the Party criticized the US invasion as an attempt by the unbelievers to occupy Islamic lands. The Party asked Islamic governments to react to the US invasion and called on all Muslim nations to rush to the aid of the Iraqis, since the Iraqis needed the Muslims' help.¹¹ Interestingly during Saddam's invasion of Kuwait in the 1990s, the Party supported Kuwait's annexation to Iraq as a prelude to the unity of Islamic countries. Farid Qaseem said this about

the move, “Islam believes that all borders should be effaced. In the Quran, we have only one nation. The borders were not established by the Muslims. They were introduced and implemented by the Europeans.”¹²

2.3. Goals of the Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami

Hizb ut-Tahrir endeavors to restore the Islamic mode of living and to invite people worldwide to convert to Islam. This will enable the Muslims to live the Islamic way of life in Dar ul-Islam, leading to the creation of the Islamic society in which everything runs in accordance with religious laws governed by the Islamic government under the leadership of the Islamic Caliph. This is the government in which the Muslims choose the Caliph to whom they vow allegiance. The Caliph in turn acts in accordance with the Book (Quran) and “sunnah” (tradition) of the Prophet of Islam and promotes Islam worldwide through invitation and “jihad”. The party also restores the Islamic “ummah” through enlightenment. It endeavors to restore Islam’s initial glory and to run the world according to Islamic law just like in the past. The party, moreover, embarks on returning to the principles of Islamic guidance for all people. In the war against unbelief, the party relies on strategizing and acting in a way to ultimately unite the world of Islam.¹³

3. Structural Organization, Strategies, and Prominent Members

Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami has created a complex political challenge in the region and in the entire world due to its commitment to non-violent approaches to materialize political interests and increase its popularity. This commitment sets the Party head and shoulder above any other religious group. The Party’s doctrine has three phases for the fulfillment of its objectives:

Phase 1: Accepting members and converting people to Islam. This allows the Party to have members worldwide who are motivated to accept the Party’s ideology, mission, and goals. Those who are convinced of the Party’s mission will be invited to join the Party and in

turn pursue the same strategies and methods (to get more people to join the Party).

Phase 2: Interacting with the “ummah” (presenting the message of Islam to other Muslim communities). The Party attempts to motivate the “ummah” to convert and perform religious duties in such a way to live an Islamic life every day as a Muslim.

Phase 3: Establishing an Islamic government based on Islamic “shariah” and conveying the message of Islam to the entire world and not just to the Muslim communities. The Party believes this is the stage during which the entire world of atheism should convert to Islam. Some international observers hold that this stage is reminiscent of the 1979 Revolution in Iran. They contend that even though the Party has so far followed non-violent measures, it will resort to violence in this phase after it gains popularity and will endeavor to take control of the sensitive sectors of government such as the Judiciary, armed forces, and mass media. The campaign to support a candidate for the 2006 Kyrgyzstan presidency proved the Party’s attempts to take the reins of power in hand.¹⁴ After this, the Party turned full circle and tried to increase its ratings. As such, the Party is believed to be currently in Phase 1 in Central Asia, namely accepting members. In recent years, the Party’s members have been mostly unemployed and illiterate youth. But for a few years now, the Party has focused on more prominent groups such as students, merchants, NGO activists, women’s groups, activists, local leaders, and even experts such as engineers, high school teachers, and state clerics. All these groups have been dissatisfied with the absence of the rule of law, inability of governments to solve economic problems, and increased government violence to create order. The existing discrimination among some ethnic minorities has paved the way for the Party to recruit more members and questioned the legitimacy of the governments. For example, 92 percent of Party members in Kyrgyzstani are Uzbeks. This is while reports by Kazakh and Kyrgyz sources indicate that in recent years the Party has brought together the Kazakhs, Kyrgyzs, and Tajiks. The Party recruits members from among local businessmen and merchants and from among laborers and industrialists during the winter. The newly recruited

members study the Party's strategies, ideology, and plan in order to become a member. They are then encouraged to use the Party's leaflets to recruit new members from among traditional social networks and weekly men's meetings and monthly women's meetings.¹⁵ In Central Asia, the Party works in small five to seven member groups known as "doiras" or "halkas". These measures have, for instance, thwarted the efforts of Uzbek police to place the arrested Party members in a new bloc in the prison or to infiltrate the command hierarchy. Mushrif is the Party's current leader. Each member knows only members in his/her own group. Only Mushrif knows the seniors of the other groups.

Here is the leadership structure of the Party:

1. global
2. national
3. local
4. urban
5. individual¹⁶

The lower echelons are entrusted with submission and reporting. Each country has its own independent Party, but all these parties report to one global leader. The most famous Party member and global leader is the renowned Islamic scholar Ata Ibnu Khaleel Abu Rusta. Other leaders are as follows:

1. Dr. Nisrin Nawaz (English speaking spokesperson)
2. Abd al – Wahid (Sheikh Abul Hassan Mohammad Nafi Abdul Karim Salih)
3. Bekr Salim Khavaldeh (prominent Jordanian member)
4. Bishar Ali (lawyer and director of the Islam TV Channel)
5. Waseem Dorhi (spokesperson for Australia)
6. Nawid Boot (spokesperson for Pakistan).¹⁷

4. Al – Tahrir's Popularity in the Region

Several factors contribute to the popularity of the Al – Tahrir Party in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Among major reasons contributing to

the Party's spread, reference can be made to the leaders' tactics in recruiting new members. While other religious groups have membership restrictions (such as Uzbekistan's Islamic Movement which only takes male members), Al – Tahrir Party does not set any preconditions for membership. This derives from the Party's belief that everyone is equal before God. As a result, anyone can join the Party, irrespective of race, gender, ethnicity, etc. This has turned the Party into a civil democratic movement rather than a radical religious movement (as some Western writers define it). Authoritarian regional regimes that are incapable of identifying and solving social and economic problems are the major reason behind the Party's popularity. The Party is increasingly aware of and responsive to social problems besetting the people. This has increased the Party's power and popularity. AIDS, addiction, and prostitution will be the most important social problems in the next decade. Ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union, religious leaders have felt the decline of moral values coupled with increased influence of the pop culture. They regard the rise of venereal diseases as the most flagrant sign of increased modernization and Westernization, which have resulted in moral downfall.¹⁸ The Party believes that the governments' enlightenment of the people does not solve the issues at the roots. It holds that the root cause can be traced in people turning their back on genuine Islamic values. Declining regional conditions are among other factors conducive to the Party's popularity. When the region's economic and industrial results are at the lowest possible level and when all governments are facing a prospect of domestic chaos and unbridled violence, the Party emerges as the promoter and supporter of social and economic justice. The Party demands that governments put an end to corruption, avarice, and power abuse. People in rural and urban areas whose standards of living have dramatically declined are very supportive of the Party. In 2005, Kyrgyzstan's debt amounted to about \$1.3 billion, a figure equal to its total annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In the same year, Uzbekistan's average income was \$15 per month per person. Poverty is at a dangerous level, and, based on official statistics, more than 80 percent of the people of Kyrgyzstan live below the poverty line. All these prove how fascinating the Party's views to end all social despair can be. In addition, there are still ethnic

disputes between the Uzbeks and Meshkatiani Turks (1989) and between the Uzbeks and Kyrgizs (1990). Under such conditions, the Party is inviting the Muslims to unite and work together to set up a supranational identity.¹⁹

5. Behavior of Party Members

Early on, the Party focused on distributing books and religious leaflets among only the members. Later on, Party activists focused on delivering public statements and speeches to raise awareness. In Kazakhstan, the Party's leaflets were initially distributed in 2000 during the celebrations for the ancient city of Turkestan. After this, the Party decided to mail leaflets to PO boxes and promoted their activities with local media through interviews, stories, and reports.²⁰ Among other activities which the Party has embarked on, reference can be made to charity events and support for vulnerable and needy people. This has contributed immensely to winning people over to the Party. This approach was initially used to help support the families of activists who were in custody. Later, however, it transcended the Party boundaries and encompassed people from many walks of life. Apparently, the Party adopted a bottom up approach to initiate social change and bank on the social wealth. The Party assists poor families by paying their phone bills and providing free food during religious celebrations. These are now hallmarks of the Party. According to a local reporter, these measures are reminiscent of how Protestant missionaries distributed free food, clothes, and even money in Central Asia to gain more supporters.²¹ All these measures have made the Party notorious for being caring and concerned for the people, contrary to the government that seems aloof from the people. Given its reputation, the Party will not have any problems recruiting more followers in the future.

6. Conflicts and Fulfillment of Hizb ut-Terri's Ideals

While the Party has an enticing philosophy about social issues, the people in the region are not opting for Islamic caliphate. Even though Central Asian population is mostly Muslim, they do not want the rule

of Islamic laws under the banner of a supranational government. An Uzbek academic has noted, “We did away with the Russian caliphate and do not want another form of caliphate”.²² The Taliban rule in Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001 well proves the rise to power of a religious group with radical views. Given the diversity in Muslim countries, the borders, as well as irreconcilable differences, there is no chance of a religious group coming to the helm. Even though the Party is currently a prominent Islamic movement in Central Asia and has recruited youth in the region with its non-violent nature, it is facing some intrinsic contradictions which will make the fulfillment of its goals very difficult, if not impossible. Also since more than 90 percent of world trade takes place in the world of unbelief, as put by the Party, it will be impossible for the Party to engage in any trade with the unbelievers. Another threat facing the Party stems from it being non-violent. How long will the Party be able to follow its policy of non – violence? Will the Party change its strategy as regional states exert more pressure on it? There are members who are expressing opposition with the Party’s tolerance and non – violent strategies. Such differences have resulted in breakaway groups, such as the Akramiyeh Party.²³

7. Regional Efforts to Counter Hizb ut-Tahrir

Various Central Asian states have adopted diverse approaches to counter the increasing popularity of the Party. The more despotic republics have adopted more strenuous and violent approaches. Those that are relatively more democratic have resorted to less suppressive measures.²⁴ Most governments, however, are bent on uprooting the Party. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have pursued suppressive methods by way of mass arrests and torture to combat the Party. Human rights watchdogs believe this is a flagrant violation of human rights. Judicial officials have leveled serious allegations against Party members.²⁵ Families of those arrested have also been harassed. The Kyrgyz officials acted in a more interesting way. State officials adopted less suppressive measures and resorted mostly to fines and suspension. Recently, the Kyrgyz Judiciary has summoned Party officials to court. In 2001, around 6,000 people were arrested in Jilalabad on the charge of promoting the Party’s ideology. At present, the government has decided

to hold dialogs with Party leaders. Lower echelon members of the Party are establishing connection with power wielders. These governments are, moreover, countering the Party's fascinating message through using local media and state – sponsored clerics. This approach, however, has not been all that successful, since these people are not very popular among the people. In Osh region in Kazakhstan, 80 percent of the religious leaders are self-taught and lack high level religious training. This is in stark contradiction with the structure of the Tahrir Party which is comprised of highly respected individuals who are not prone to corruption.²⁶

8. Future of Islamism in Central Asia: Strengthening Fundamentalism

The present author holds that current conditions in Central Asia have contributed to bolstering Islamic fundamentalism. One of these is the organizational power of parties in the region. Among the three major parties in the region, the Hizb ut – Tahrir Party is head and shoulder above others when it comes to organizational ability. The Party has sent its messengers to the people in the form of Sufi leaders to extend membership offers. Also even though main Party leaders are not completely known and though they mostly work in Europe and especially in Britain, they have well mobilized their supporters. Among other measures, reference can be made to the setup of a website for religious propagation.²⁷ The regional peoples' identity is an important factor conducive to Islamic fundamentalism in the region. Central Asia houses groups and nations whose identities are characterized by their submission to Islam. These are Muslim groups with their special identities standing against other groups and nations that want to dismantle them. Over the past century, this confrontation has emerged as the fight against antagonistic ideologies and nationalities such as Russian – socialist and socialist – communist which have been promulgated by government officials and councilmen. As a result, submission to Islam, as a major source of identity, has left a major impact on the lives of Central Asian nations: As with other nations and identities, the Party derives its identity in contradiction with “others”, especially if the latter have always attempted to overpower the Party

and rob it of its identity. Cold War era Stalinist policies and pro - West secular governments' measures in the modern age are among such attempts. More than anything else, this promotes radical movements in the region. Even though these movements have taken the form of fundamentalism and have features which Docmechian regards as the main characteristics of fundamentalism in Central Asia (multi-pivoted, perseverant, all-encompassing),²⁸ it should be kept in mind that the recent penchant for fundamentalism is the regional Muslims' way of countering the identity the Russians imposed on them during the Cold War and the identity slapped on them by secular governments after September 11th. The latest such example can be seen in the Tajikistan government's policies to eradicate religion. Regional governments' efforts to combat the religious identity of the Muslims is multifaceted and ranges from legal action, such as different amendments to the Constitution, to tightening the grip on the people by way of suppression and exertion of pressure on them. Among such legal measures, reference can be made to policies of the government of Tajikistan in March 2009 based on which new religious laws have gone in effect. Due to extremely restricting the religious groups, this law has sparked massive criticism by the opposition and even by countries such as the US. The law allows the state to more strictly control the religious groups active in the country so much so that they allow only the government approved version of Islam to be practiced! They have also enforced a new censorship law on religious literature (including foreign texts) and limit religious practice to venues approved by the government. This law makes it very difficult for new religious groups to register. As such, there are numerous religious schools that are not registered, as well as religious centers established after independence (namely after 1991), as well as hundreds of mosques worldwide that are not registered and as such deemed illegal. A large number of underground schools have been raided by police and security forces on the grounds that they advocate extremist ideologies. Even though many young Tajik women are avid to wear scarves and cover their hair, the government brands head covering as a hallmark of foreign culture and as such bans it at schools. The government expels those students who do not comply with this law. Even though all religions are facing legal restrictions, Islam is faced with more vehement limitations. For

example, the new law has excluded minorities such as Uzbeks and Pamiris who are Ismailite Shiites in a drive to prioritize Hanafi schools.²⁹ Along with the authoritarianism dominating the country, these measures pave the way for the people to opt for non – democratic rule. Central Asian states, like other republics that emerged after the Soviet collapse, have a history of communist totalitarian rule, and as such they lack strong democratic traditions and civil society mindset. These countries are not politically developed either. The president wields power and total control in all these countries and dominates all groups and organizations. As such, the president is incapable of winning the opposition groups over. The governments' inability to satisfy the opposition and resolve the peoples' economic and social problems will naturally result in the people turning toward fundamentalism. As noted earlier in this article, most people in the region regard Islam as a means to restore their identity. While Islamic values and adherence to Islamic principles are prevalent in other Islamic regions, including the Middle East, they are non – existent in Central Asia. This can be fundamentalism. In other words, Islamic values and norms have been neglected in the 70 years of communist rule and then during the pro – West secular governments' rule. Naturally, the people would like to restore their Islamic identity in any way possible, including membership in fundamentalist groups. In the wake of September 11, 2001, the West has dispatched troops to the region and used software to pursue its policies. This has increased the need to rely on Islam as the religion that will restore the people's identity. It should be borne in mind that one of the major goals of Hizb ut –Tahrir is to combat the presence of Western troops in the region and the spread of their exported culture. As such, the rise of pro – West secular governments has dramatically increased the penchant for fundamentalism.

9. Conclusion

Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami emerged in Central Asia following a branch out from Ikhwan al – Muslimeen. The Party opts for a caliphate - style Islamic government and enforcement of Islamic principles by the Muslims. The Party has become popular in the region for its abstinence

from resorting to violence to fulfill political goals and using “jihad”. The Party was established as a response to the ineptitude of regional regimes to solve economic, political, and social crises besetting the Muslims. As such, the Party pursues the policy of helping people in the region and working side by side with them; however, what stands out for the Party is the role it plays as a social – rather than a political – movement. By adopting a bottom up approach, the Party primarily endeavors to solve the problems besetting the people and to prove the regional governments incompetent and undeserving, a feat it has been largely successful in accomplishing. Despite the Party’s conservative policies and peaceful efforts, regional governments have tried to combat it in any way possible. They have pursued a wide range of policies, ranging from violence to long term imprisonment and execution of Party members to defining “state sponsored Islam” and placing their chosen clerics amidst the people. Also regional states implemented their secularist policies while ignoring the peoples’ demand for Islamic law. The failure of these governments to institutionalize democracy and resolve the main problems besetting the people has given rise to the Party’s success. Along with this, the inflexibility of regional states toward the peoples’ demands has helped promote fundamentalism.

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