

THE BROOKINGS PROJECT ON
U.S. POLICY TOWARDS THE ISLAMIC WORLD

ANALYSIS PAPER
Number 4, July 2003

COUNTERING THE CALL:
THE U.S., HIZB-UT-TAHRIR, AND
RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM IN CENTRAL ASIA

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NOTE FROM THE PROJECT CONVENORS

The *Brookings Project on U.S. Policy Towards the Islamic World* is designed to respond to some of the most difficult challenges that the U.S. will face in the coming years, most particularly how to prosecute the continuing war on global terrorism while still promoting positive relations with Muslim states and communities. A key part of the Project is the production of *Analysis Papers* that investigate critical issues in American policy towards the Islamic world. A special focus of this series is on exploring long-term trends that confront U.S. policy-makers and the possible strategies and options they could adopt.

Over the last decades, Islamist opposition groups have gained in power and popularity from Algeria to Indonesia. Their rise has often been the result of popular frustration with ruling regimes. One of the most notable of these has been Hizb-ut-Tahrir, a group particularly active in Central Asia that makes a steadfast claim to non-violence, yet carries the potential for great volatility. One of the serious challenges for the U.S. in the coming years will be how it chooses to interact with Islamist groups like Hizb-ut-Tahrir, not only in Central Asia (the seemingly forgotten battlefield of terrorism just a year ago), but across the Islamic world. Whether such groups join the mainstream or turn towards violence could be a critical determinant of winning the war on terrorism.

As such, we are pleased to present “Countering the Call: The U.S., Hizb-ut-Tahrir, and Religious Extremism in Central Asia.” A journalist originally from Kyrgyzstan, Alisher Khamidov uses his first-hand knowledge of the group and the region to shed new light on this critical issue. We appreciate his contribution to the Project’s work and certainly are proud to share his analysis with the wider public.

We are grateful for the generosity of the MacArthur Foundation, the Government of Qatar, the Ford Foundation, the Education and Employment Foundation, the United States Institute of Peace, Haim Saban, and the Brookings Institution for their support of the Project’s activities. We would also like to acknowledge the hard work of Ellen McHugh and Sean Shecter for their support of the Project’s publications.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With its vast energy resources and strategic geopolitical location, Central Asia has not only become an arena for renewed competition and cooperation amongst the great powers, but also a region that characterizes some of the darkest challenges of globalization: turbulent ethnic and religious tension, illicit drug-trafficking, environmental degradation, and pervasive poverty. As the international campaign against terrorism enters its second year, the region also faces new security challenges. While large-scale operations by armed Islamic militants have ceased, other groups have emerged to exploit growing social concerns with state repression, official corruption, and deteriorating living standards.

Among the most important of these more extreme Islamic groups is the Hizb-ut-Tahrir al Islamiyya (HT), the “Party of Islamic Liberation.” Despite being officially banned by most Central Asian governments, HT operates in most countries in the region, as well as having representation among émigré communities around the world. Striving towards a relatively idealistic goal of restoring the Ottoman-era Islamic caliphate, it has been able to harness public popularity primarily through a commitment to nonviolence and an appeal for social and economic justice. However, increasing suppression by secular authorities, as well as differences between competing factions within the party, indicate that the group could turn violent, or serve as a breeding ground and support structure for

other violent groups in the region, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) or Al-Qaida.

With over 4,000 troops stationed in the region and \$580 million in annual aid, the U.S. certainly has a vested interest in preserving stability in Central Asia. However, Hizb-ut-Tahrir also represents a challenge for broader U.S. policy towards Muslim states and movements. How the United States chooses to respond to the emergence of HT in conjunction with governments in the region, as well as more broadly, sets a framework for how the United States will deal with Islamist groups nominally committed to nonviolent social change, who enjoy increasing grassroots support. Indeed, it is the party’s very commitment to nonviolence as a form of political protest that places it in a different category from groups engaged in terror tactics. The manner in which the party can be induced to move from religiously inspired extremist protests to engagement in mainstream political life in Central Asia may provide key lessons for crafting a well-informed policy toward similar Muslim movements elsewhere in the world.

The United States has a vested interest in ensuring that its regional partners in Central Asia and beyond develop along pluralistic and democratic lines. To promote stability in Central Asia and to successfully counter the rise of extremist forms of social protest, as in the example of Hizb-ut-Tahrir, the United States must

adopt a long-term policy that emphasizes vigorous economic and political reforms, promotes regional cooperation and trade, and assists local authorities in attracting foreign investment. The policy must also allow for dedicated foreign aid to nuanced conflict prevention projects, including to educational institutes and grassroots social programs designed to cushion the effects of the transition to a market economy on especially vulnerable segments of the population.

THE AUTHOR

ALISHER KHAMIDOV is a journalist originally from Kyrgyzstan. From June 1998 to July 2001, he served as Director of the Osh Media Resource Center (OMRC), a non-profit independent media association in southern Kyrgyzstan. He also acted as a regional coordinator of the Central Asian Media Support Project. Mr. Khamidov has written a series of articles on religious and ethnic conflict in the Ferghana Valley and political developments in Kyrgyzstan and in Central Asia, which have been published in IRIN (Integrated Regional Information Network of the UN) and EurasiaNet (Open Society Institute's News service).

Currently, Mr. Khamidov is a Muskie Fellow in International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame. He has also worked with Notre Dame's Sanctions and Security Project, the NEH Summer Institute on Eurasian Civilizations at Harvard University and at the Foreign Policy Studies Program of the Brookings Institution.

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COUNTERING THE CALL: THE U.S., HIZB-UT-TAHRIR, AND RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM IN CENTRAL ASIA

In the context of the global “War on Terror,” radical Islamist organizations require much-needed attention. This paper will consider the emergence of Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT), and its introduction into the states of Central Asia. It will detail the ideology and organization of the party, as well as addressing the panoply of reasons for its popularity and rapid growth in the region. The paper will go on to examine the similarities and difference between HT and other modern Islamist organizations, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Muslim Brotherhood. In the context of governmental reaction to these two groups, it will consider the efficacy of the response of Central Asian governments to HT so far and offer policy options for the U.S. government.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE HIZB-UT-TAHRIR

Hizb-ut-Tahrir began as a transnational religious movement founded by Taqiuddin an-Nabhani al-Falastani, an ethnic Palestinian, in 1953. The first HT recruits came from the Palestinian section of the Egypt-based *al Ikhwan al-Muslimin*, otherwise known as the Muslim Brotherhood. This worldwide organization is presently headed by Abd al-Kadim Zallum, also an ethnic Palestinian. Since its founding, HT’s membership has expanded from the Middle

East to countries with Muslim populations all around the world.

Hizb-ut-Tahrir pursues international Islamic solidarity in countries with a large Muslim populace. In what appears to be a utopian view of political Islam, HT members strongly adhere to the belief that only the formation of an Islamic state regulated by *Shariat*, Islamic law, can address the ills of society. HT sees the process of modernization and secularization in many Muslim-populated countries as a Western plot against the *umma*, the Muslim community of believers as a whole.

Despite its rejection of modernization, HT has extensively utilized modern methods of communication and dissemination of information to the party’s advantage. In recent years, HT has set up offices in several European countries, including Germany and the United Kingdom. With its headquarters based in London, HT raises funds and trains recruits to spread the movement across the world. In doing so, HT relies on new technological advancements and facilities, including the Internet, email, webcasts, and other use of modern audio and video technology.”¹

Central Asia has become a major outpost in HT’s international movement. HT emerged in Central

1 Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: the Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 119.

Asia to fill the vacuum that resulted from the failure of Marxism-Leninism and then Central Asian nationalism, but shares their end goal of building a new form of governance. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent process of nationalization have served as catalysts for the spread of HT ideology. A sudden euphoria of independence engulfed the region in the early 1990s, opening up Central Asia to the outside world and ushering in various brands of Islam—each with its own agenda. Millions of Central Asians, in search of a new, post-Soviet identity, turned to their “Islamic roots.” The number of mosques, madrassahs, and seminaries in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan alone quadrupled in first three years of independence and various kinds of religious missionaries flooded into the cities and towns of the region.

Among these foreign missionaries were groups subscribing to HT ideology. They came to the region over a decade ago and established the first party cells, each of which consisted of five or six people. These cells then branched off at such a rapid pace that, by the late 1990s, estimated HT membership was in the thousands.

THE REGIONAL CONTEXT: A CLIMATE FOR TROUBLE

The remarkable growth of Hizb-ut-Tahrir can be attributed, in large part, to underlying economic, social, and political issues that have made Central Asia fertile soil for the introduction of radical ideas. The turmoil caused by poverty, disease, crime, and repressive governments has led to the broad radicalization of political and religious groups seeking change.

Each of the countries in the region has experienced precipitous economic decline, and living standards have fallen drastically over the past decade. For example, in 2002, the average salary in Uzbekistan was less than \$15 per month. In Tajikistan, more than 70 percent of the population gets by on less than \$30 per month. Before the start of the U.S.-led anti-terrorist

campaign in Fall 2001, Uzbekistan was on the verge of a major economic crisis. This was because it had consistently avoided significant structural reform. Similar problems held in Kyrgyzstan as well. By 2002, the national debt of Kyrgyzstan had reached approximately \$1.5 billion, an amount equal to its annual GDP. Poverty is endemic and there has been no change in poverty levels from 1996 to 2003. The situation is even more dire considering the country’s massive unemployment, which linked to HT’s growth. Kalyk Imankulov, the Kyrgyz Security chief, has asserted that over 80 percent of Kyrgyz live at or below the poverty line and that Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s power base is found among this vast pool of impoverished citizens. The economic situation shows little sign of improving soon.

Furthermore, growing popular sensitivities over persistent social problems are playing into the hands of HT activists. The spread of HIV, increased drug addiction, and prostitution have emerged as major problems with the prospect of expanding in the next decade. Since the break-up of the Soviet Union, religious leaders in the region have voiced concern over deteriorating values in their communities, linking the moral decline with the post-Soviet penetration of Western pop culture. They consider the spread of sexually transmitted diseases as perhaps one of the most tangible signs of growing modernization and secularization that promote the population’s spiritual degeneration.

Most importantly, intolerance of political opposition and suppression of democratic institutions and mass media outlets by local governments have channeled public dissent into other forms of activity, such as the work of Hizb-ut-Tahrir. It is noteworthy that the group thrives in areas of Central Asia where there are few robust and representative political parties, civil society organizations or independent mass media.

Faced with these unique challenges of governance and domestic interests, each of the leaders of Central Asian states has responded differently.

- Kyrgyzstan, where roughly 4,000 U.S. troops are now located, actively pursued economic and democratic reforms upon gaining independence. Of the five Central Asian republics, it is widely considered to be the most democratic and to have the most vibrant civil society. Incursions into Kyrgyz territory by the armed Tajikistan-based Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in summer 1999 and 2000 and the growing political confrontation between various political factions have helped to weaken the central government. Kyrgyzstan is also reeling after riots in the southern Aksy province in March 2002 that left a number of citizens dead. President Askar Akayev, a physicist who once represented the region's best hopes for democratic reform, responded by taking an increasingly hard line. Yet, President Akayev finds himself in a tenuous position. His poor handling of the fallout from the riots prompted criticism not only from the opposition, but also from hard-liners within government. This has left Akayev politically isolated.

- Although Uzbekistan seems politically stable, in contrast to Kyrgyzstan, a number of terrorist attacks and the activities of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan indicate that appearances may be deceiving. Uzbekistan's bellicose attitude toward neighboring states and its sometimes chauvinist conception of leadership have also alienated its neighbors, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan, exacerbating already difficult problems of regional security. This disposition is an important risk factor for crisis in Central Asia and is fueled by the ongoing collaboration of Uzbekistan with the U.S.-led anti-terrorist campaign.² To date, around 1,500 U.S. Air Force and Special Operations personnel have been deployed to the country's Khanabad Air Base near the Afghan border. It appears that Uzbek President Islam Karimov has extended assistance less by altruistic motivations than more by the

desire to have the United States as a powerful new ally in fighting the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which the U.S. designated a terrorist organization in September 2000.³

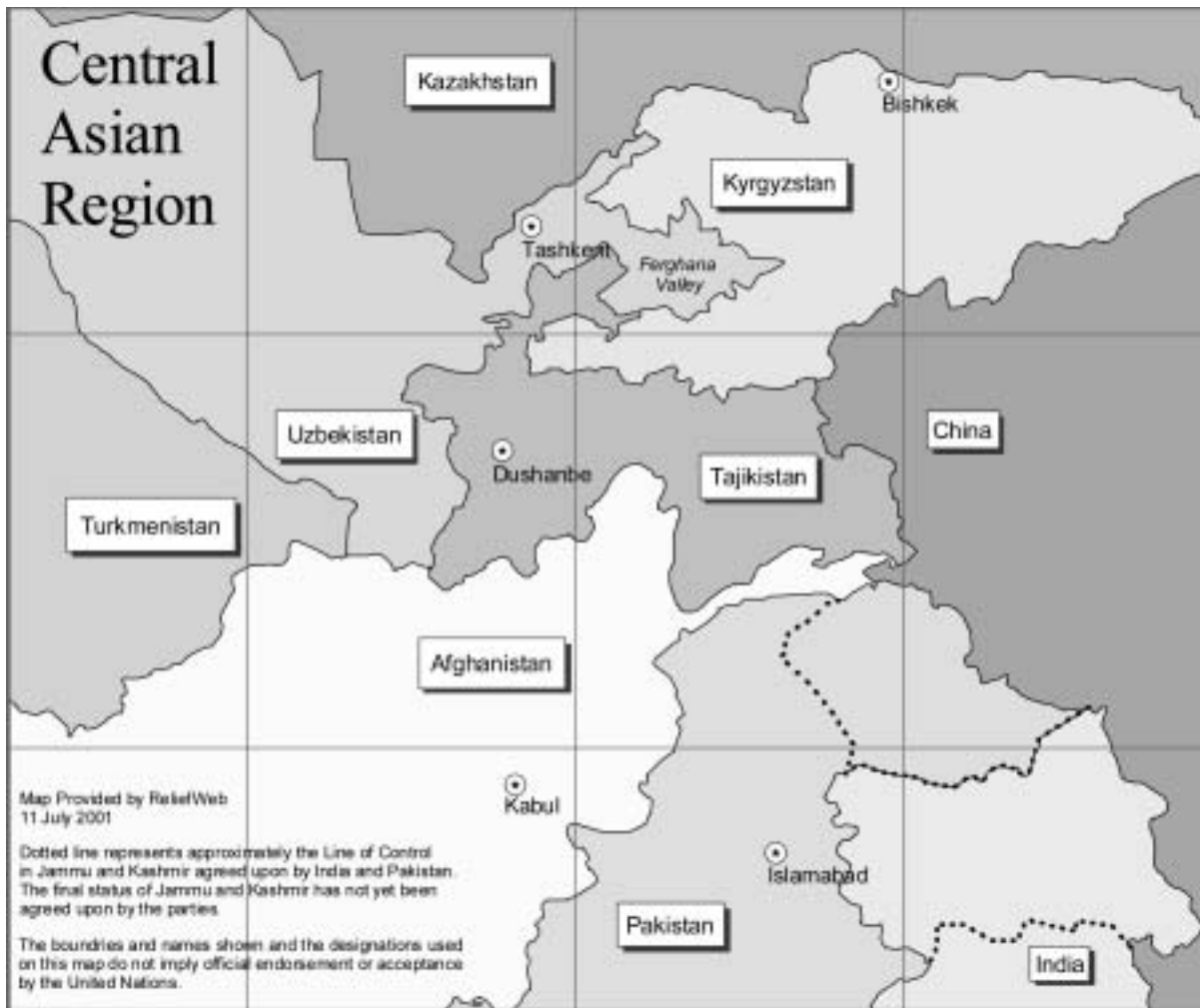
- Rebuilding itself after a long civil war (1992–1997), Tajikistan is in similar straits. The settlement that ended the war provided for the sharing of power between President Imomali Rakhmonov's government and the United Tajik Opposition, which is dominated by Islamic opposition leaders. However, this agreement is currently under threat. The increasing consolidation of economic and political power in the hands of a small elitist circle and differences between regional factions threaten the fragile sense of security among ordinary citizens. Despite the fact that open skirmishes in the streets are less of a problem than they were during the war five years ago, the assassination of several prominent government and public figures indicates that some of the warlords still maintain informal control over official structures. They continue to engage in fierce fights with each other.

One particularly troublesome area for all of Central Asia is the Ferghana Valley. The Ferghana Valley, a veritable hotbed of tension, is a region of nearly 9 million people divided by the artificially imposed borders of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Its population has experienced deteriorating living standards and growing social discontent among the various resident ethnic and religious groups. Recent riots at border posts in both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have highlighted the growing risk of inter-ethnic conflict in and around the Valley. According to local observers, the major source of popular discontent is the governments' inability to resolve border disputes and regulate inter-state commerce. In the late Soviet era, the Ferghana Valley became engulfed in inter-ethnic turmoil. The relatively large size of the ethnic Uzbek

2 Igor Torbakov, "Trend Towards Political Confrontation in Central Asian States Accelerating Since September 11," March 26, 2002. Available on-line at <http://www.eurasianet.org>.

3 Center for Defense Information. "In the Spotlight: Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)," March 25, 2002). Available on-line at <http://www.cdi.org/terrorism/imu.cfm>.

Central Asia and the Ferghana Valley⁴



population in different parts of the Valley under the jurisdiction of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan creates considerable potential for ethno-nationalist provocations. These security challenges are also fueled by the stark differences in relative military power between Uzbekistan on the one hand and Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan on the other.

Across the region over the last decade, increasing numbers of ordinary people have come to equate

democracy and market reform with official corruption and lawlessness. As a result, broad dissatisfaction with Central Asian governments has grown. Together with mass unemployment in certain parts of Central Asia, poverty has increased the prospect of localized trouble. At the same time, cross-regional trade in drugs and guns has intensified and is disrupting order in some of the more vulnerable areas. In addition, scarce natural resources, particularly arable land and water, raise popular concerns about the future.

⁴ Reprinted with permission from the Center for Preventive Action. *Calming the Ferghana Valley: Development and Dialogue in the Heart of Central Asia*. Sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations and the Century Foundation (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1999), p. 2.

One potential implication is the violent overthrow of existing authoritarian regimes and the hijacking of this social outburst by extremist religious groups such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir or the IMU. Most illustrative of this prospect was the eruption of the Tajik civil war in 1992 when the resurgent Islamic parties mobilized public support in an effort to replace a weak post-Soviet regime with an Islamic state.

Disputes between the people and government officials have continued to turn violent.

An incident in August 2002 in the town of Arslanbob—located in Jalalabad, a region in Southern Kyrgyzstan that was the scene of major riots in March of that year—illustrates the extent of anti-government sentiment. A mob surrounded the police after a Hizb-ut-Tahrir activist was taken into custody. The police opened fire, wounding one person. Although the Kyrgyz authorities were able to prevent the escalation of riots in this instance, the tension among residents remains high. There are a sufficient number of variables to suggest that some localized incidents, such as a riot, border clash or terrorist incursion, can potentially translate into widespread violence or civil unrest domestically, or into interstate military confrontation. The earlier events in Aksy, Kyrgyzstan are but one example of this dangerous trend.

Finally, heightened security measures against the infiltration of Islamic militants have also had serious economic ramifications. The expansion of border restrictions has hampered trade, denying many farmers—especially in the Ferghana Valley—their chief source of income. Widespread harassment and extortion of travelers and traders by ill-trained customs officials and border forces have helped to aggravate existing tensions. In 2001–2002, the mining of border areas became another issue. Regional governments, especially Uzbekistan, sowed mines to hinder the movement of Islamic militants, but so far it is civilians who seem to have suffered the most, leading to more discontent with the government.

THE ALLURE AND DANGERS OF HIZB-UT-TAHRIR

While the region's social, economic, and political conditions have placed Hizb-ut-Tahrir in a better position to increase its popularity among impoverished and vulnerable segments of population, there are a variety of other reasons why the organization is attractive to so many Central Asians.

First and foremost, Hizb-ut-Tahrir 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, a return to Islamic values would fill what many perceive to be a dangerous moral vacuum. As already indicated, HT actively blames the 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 *Shariat* law resonates powerfully in Central Asian countries. Where the rule of law is weak and corruption and greed—especially among local and national leaders—are rampant, its message is popular.

Third, an extremely significant factor in HT's popularity is the party's rejection of violence as a political means, unlike the IMU. In a region where memories of bloody ethnic clashes between Uzbeks and Meskhetian Turks (1989), and Uzbeks and Kyrgyz (1990) are still fresh, the incursions of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in 1999 and 2000 fueled popular aversion to violent methods. Hizb-ut-Tahrir'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.

Finally, 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.⁵ 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. Indeed, Sheikh Sadiq Q. Kamal Al-Deen, the director of the Islamic Center of Islamic Cooperation in Osh and the former Mufti of Kyrgyzstan, cites the "minimal political participation of the population, the growth of distrust of authority, and skepticism about the utility of democratic institutions" as key factors in the growth of Hizb-ut-Tahrir.⁶

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 views is a cause of concern for local, national, regional and international actors, including the U.S. government. HT's rhetoric is often aggressive. It frequently incites anti-Semitic and anti-American sentiments. Following the events 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 Asian governments 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 transnational network, underground organizational structure, and financial and technical capacities make it attractive to sponsors of terrorism. Although HT's direct links with more violent groups are as yet undetermined, as later explored, the official repression and demonization of its activists could push disillusioned members to join the ranks of militant and terrorist groups such as the IMU or Al-Qaida.

HT'S ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND STRATEGIES

HT's organizational structure and strategies are worth looking at in detail in order to understand its operations in Central Asia. Its doctrine seeks to achieve its goal of creating an Islamic form of governance in three distinct stages:

- The first stage is mainly a proselytizing or recruitment phase in which the party reaches out to Muslims in an effort to persuade them to accept the idea, mission, and goals of the party. Convinced individuals are invited to join the party and assume its methods and strategies. They are then expected to join the outreach effort.
- The second stage involves interaction with the *umma*, taking the message to the broader Muslim community. In this stage, HT attempts to persuade the *umma* to embrace its view of Islam so that the Islamic way of life becomes an everyday practice for each Muslim and encompasses all affairs of his/her life.
- The third stage sees the establishment of an Islamic government that will implement the norms and practices of *Shariat*, generally and comprehensively, and will carry it as a message to the world.⁷ Some observers suggest that this stage is very likely to be violent, as it is reminiscent of the Iranian Revolution in 1979. They believe that, just as the Iranian Islamists shifted to attacking their opponents and former allies after Ayatollah Khomeini sanctioned violence in later stages of the revolution, so will Hizb-ut-Tahrir after it has gained a sufficient popular base. According to some observers, in the third stage, HT activists are likely to attempt to seize the control of major government structures such as law-enforcement, army and broadcasting services. Some local media reports indicate that HT is already successfully implanting its activists in these key structures.

5 International Crisis Group, "The IMU and the Hizb-ut-Tahrir: Implications of the Afghanistan Campaign," January 30, 2002.

6 Ibid.

7 More information about the goals and objectives of Hizb-ut-Tahrir can be obtained at its official website: www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org.

In Central Asia, HT appears to be in its initial stage—the recruitment stage. While the precise figures depicting level of support for HT are unavailable, local observers in the Uzbek part of the Ferghana Valley suggest that current active support is at roughly 10 percent of Uzbekistan's 26 million population.⁸ In Kyrgyzstan, government officials downplay the threat and estimate HT membership at 3,000 people.⁹ However, most observers suggest that the membership of HT is much higher and is continually growing in all republics.

In Central Asian republics, the bulk of HT members come from the ranks of unemployed and uneducated youth. In recent years, HT has also taken its message to broader groups, including college students, merchants, NGO activists, women groups, grassroots activists, local leaders and even educated specialists such as engineers, high school teachers, and government clerks. All these groups are discontented with the perceived lawlessness in their society, the authorities' inability to deal with economic problems and the increasing reliance of officials on violence to maintain order. Perceived and real discrimination among some ethnic minorities continues to provide new recruits for HT and further undermines the legitimacy of government structures. For example, one study found that about 92 percent of HT members in Kyrgyzstan are ethnic Uzbeks.¹⁰ However, local media reports indicate that the membership in the party increasingly crosses ethnic lines. Kyrgyz, Kazakhs, and Tajiks have reportedly joined the party in recent years.

The dispute over membership numbers lies, in part, in the HT's recruitment strategy. Very reminiscent of Bolshevik strategies in pre-revolutionary Russia, Hizb-ut-Tahrir operates in Central Asian republics in

small secretive cells of usually five to seven people called "*doiras*" or "*halkas*," which make-up a large pyramidal structure. Headed by a *mushrif* (group leader), each group member knows only the members of his/her circle and only the *mushrif* knows the next stage superior. This arrangement also adds to both HT's security and the veil of secrecy about its activities and motives. For example, it has made the attempts of the Uzbek police to plant agents in new HT cells and to penetrate the chain of command nearly impossible.¹¹

HT continues to expand its membership by proselytizing to merchants in bazaars and local markets, especially during the winter months when farmers and craftsmen are idle. New members are approved to join the party upon the recommendation of an existing member and after carefully studying the program, strategies, and ideology of the group. Then they are encouraged to attract additional new members by distributing leaflets containing the party's propaganda through traditional social networks and weekly meetings of men.¹² In recent months, HT has even approached local media outlets by sending them letters requesting cooperation. New activists who join the party have reportedly enjoyed handsome financial awards and incentives.¹³

Of particular concern are the vague future plans of HT in Central Asia. HT members often cannot explain how the caliphate would be achieved, what economic or social policies it would pursue, and what the role of other religious traditions and ethnicities in a truly Islamic society would be.¹⁴ Another major concern is whether the party will remain committed to nonviolent means as it moves to its second and third stages. The worry is that it will follow the example of the Muslim Brotherhood, which in essence "changed lanes" from

8 International Crisis Group, "The IMU and the Hizb-ut-Tahrir: Implications of the Afghanistan Campaign."

9 Alisher Khamidov, "Islamic Radical Group Steadily Increases Support Base in Kyrgyzstan," September 5, 2002. Available on-line at <http://www.eurasianet.org>.

10 Igor Grebenshikov, "The Hizb-ut-Tahrir through the eyes of Kyrgyz journalists," *Media Insight Central Asia*, January, 2002.

11 Rashid, *Jihad: the Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, 120.

12 International Crisis Group, "The IMU and the Hizb-ut-Tahrir: Implications of the Afghanistan Campaign."

13 According to Imankulov, in addition to the regional network in Central Asian republics, HT receives financial support from sympathizers in Jordan, Egypt, Indonesia and Pakistan.

14 International Crisis Group, "The IMU and the Hizb-ut-Tahrir: Implications of the Afghanistan Campaign."

non-violence to violence in Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood's activities were relatively peaceful at the outset, concentrating mainly on community development projects. However, widespread state repression and radicalization soon led the group to emerge as a major government opponent, and it was later responsible for the assassination of key political figures.¹⁵

HT members deny this possibility and claim that the party is a dedicated non-violent organization. However, Hizb-ut-Tahrir's pledge to remain nonviolent leaves many local and international observers skeptical. HT members openly admit that they share the longer-term objective of constructing an Islamic state with the IMU. Local authorities and some observers contend that HT's rhetoric about its nonviolent nature is simply blunt propaganda. Recent interviews with HT leaders suggest that there are indeed individual members within HT who may become disillusioned by a non-violent strategy and may react violently to government provocations. For example, "Ali," one of the upper command mushrifs of HT-Uzbekistan, has publicly stated that: "Hizb-ut-Tahrir wants a peaceful jihad that will be spread by explanation and conversion not by war. But ultimately there will be war because the repression of the Central Asian states is so strong."¹⁶

Part of the risk of violence may lie in the possibility of breakaway groups forming, not unlike what happened with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Despite its alleged cohesion, there are reports of internal confrontations between leaders of the HT. For example, a fraction called Hizb-an-Nusra (Party of Victory) has already branched off from the HT in the Tashkent area, presumably because of disagreements over the party's strategies for political struggle. Some local and international analysts predict further splits within the party and do not exclude the potential of these leading to violence.

RADICAL GROUPS IN COMPARISON: HIZB-UT-TAHRIR AND THE ISLAMIC MOVEMENT OF UZBEKISTAN

In thinking about how to deal with Hizb-ut-Tahrir and Islamic radicalism more broadly, it is important to acknowledge that all Islamist groups are not the same. Within broader Islamic movements, HT falls under the category of the so-called *al-da'wa al Islamiya* (The Islamic Call) camp as opposed to *al-thawra al Muslimin* (The Muslim Revolution) camp. While *al-da'wa al Islamiya* doctrine seeks to change society gradually and indirectly by concentrating first on the structures and value systems of a society, the *al-thawra al Muslimin* groups opt to change society directly through political, possibly violent means. Vivid examples of the *al-thawra al Muslimin* camp in Central Asia are the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Tajikistan-based United Tajik Opposition (UTO) dominated by the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP). However, the ultimate goal of both camps is the same—the establishment of an Islamic form of governance.

Tahir Yuldoshev and Juma Namangani, ethnic Uzbeks from the Namangan province of Uzbekistan, founded the IMU in 1999. The movement's main goal was to oust the regime of President Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan. The IMU is believed to have received active support from Islamist networks from the Middle East and South Asia, including the Taliban in Afghanistan. It had also reportedly maintained links with Usama bin Laden and trained its forces in al-Qaida's military camps in Afghanistan. The Garm valley, a mountainous region of Tajikistan, became the stronghold of the IMU in the late 1990s.

The IMU became a serious regional player in the last decade of conflict in Central Asia. Namangani and Yuldoshev fought alongside the United Tajik Opposition in the Tajik Civil War (1992–1997). In

15 For more information on the Muslim Brotherhood, see Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and Pharaoh*. The University of California Press, 1993.

16 Rashid, *Jihad: the Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, 135-36.

August 1999, a band of 800 IMU militants infiltrated southern Kyrgyzstan, where they captured villages, took hostages and threatened to attack Uzbekistan. In August 2000, rebels led by Namangani made incursions into southern Uzbekistan, mountainous areas just outside of Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, and several areas in southern Kyrgyzstan.

The response by the governments to the IMU was robust. Both the Kyrgyz and Uzbek authorities moved quickly to eradicate unsanctioned Islamic activity before the crackdown came under wider international scrutiny. Apparently, the governments were concerned that if the insurgency dragged on, the international community might begin to promote the notion of a negotiated settlement, as in Tajikistan at the end of the Civil War. Karimov's government, in particular, was steadfastly opposed to engaging the insurgents in peace talks. The United States branded the IMU as a terrorist organization in September 2000, thus tacitly supporting regional military action against the Islamic fighters.

During the U.S.-led military action in Afghanistan that began in October 2001, the IMU fought alongside the Taliban. At the time, international media reports indicated that the organization was destroyed and that its membership was in disarray after its leader, Juma Namangani, was supposedly killed during U.S. aerial bombing in Mazar-e-Sharif in November 2001. However, local reports also suggest that the remnants of the IMU were able to escape through porous borders to the north back to Tajikistan. Central Asian security services estimate the current IMU membership at some 300 disorganized fighters.

IMU goals were often seen in the region as extending beyond the creation of an Islamic state. According to regional security services, the IMU's hidden agenda in the 1990s was to secure channels for trafficking drugs from Afghanistan to Central Asian countries.

However, local experts in the Ferghana Valley suggest that the use of force to demand negotiations with the Uzbek authorities was indeed the aim of IMU leaders. Experts indicate that the IMU really did hope to gain power via the "Tajik peace talks scenario."

If we compare and contrast the IMU and HT directly, the differences are instructive. While the IMU and HT seem to share the ultimate goal of constructing an Islamic state, there is a significant divergence in their tactics and strategies. In recent years, Hizb-ut-Tahrir has sought to distance itself from the IMU and other violent Islamic groups both in rhetoric and in practice. When addressing local Muslims, Hizb-ut-Tahrir regularly juxtaposes its pledge to nonviolence to the violent campaigns of the IMU.

While the IMU gained public attention by its violent incursions and statements, HT, in contrast, distributes leaflets and books that often contain scathing criticisms of regional governments. Party activists also rely on underground meetings rather than public speeches. These techniques make Hizb-ut-Tahrir operatives hard to find and to silence. They also let Hizb-ut-Tahrir members send messages more quickly than the government can suppress or discredit them.¹⁷

Significant differences can be also found in the recruitment strategies. In contrast to the IMU's methods of attracting new members by offers of cash and intimidation, HT emphasizes recruitment of new members by means of persuasion and personal conviction. While only Uzbek males filled the IMU's ranks, HT accepts men and women regardless of ethnicity or color, since it claims to be a party for all Muslims.¹⁸

Despite regional governments' exaggeration of HT's link with the IMU, local media reports indicate that members of these two groups interact.¹⁹ During a widespread crackdown on HT in 1999 and 2000, some members of the group found refuge in the

17 Davron Vali, "Banned Islamic Movement Increasingly Active in Tajikistan," September 5, 2002. Available on-line at <http://www.eurasianet.org>.

18 Private discussion with Zakir, Osh based mushrif of HT dai'ra. Osh, Kyrgyzstan. June 2001.

19 See Zamira Eshanova, "Central Asia: Are Radical Groups Joining Forces?" October 11, 2002. Available on-line at <http://www.eurasianet.org>.

Taliban-controlled regions of Afghanistan, where they reportedly joined the IMU ranks. In addition, the IMU has supposedly used HT literature to eliminate the illiteracy of its members.²⁰

A MORE APT PARALLEL: HIZB-UT-TAHRIR AND THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

While the IMU may not be the best parallel, there are other Islamic groups elsewhere, whose developmental characteristics share similarities with the HT. Despite some differences in doctrine, the developmental dynamics of *Ikhwan al Muslimin*, or the “Muslim Brotherhood” in Egypt may be the closest model to helping to understand Hizb-ut-Tahrir better.

The Muslim Brotherhood was founded as a youth organization in 1928 by Hassan al Baana. The group aimed at moral and social reform in Egypt through education, information and propaganda. After World War II, as the government in Egypt grew increasingly secular, the Brotherhood became politicized and was active in carrying out terrorist activities. In 1954, the Egyptian government banned the group and arrested hundreds of its members partly because the group fiercely advocated the rule of *Shariat* in Egypt. Feeling excluded and politically marginalized, the Brotherhood members attempted to assassinate Egyptian President Nasser later that same year.

The Egyptian government responded by throwing nearly four thousand members of the group into jail and forcing thousands more to flee to Syria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Lebanon. President Nasser ordered the execution of top leaders of the Brotherhood in 1966 after several failed attempts to assassinate him. Nasser’s successor, Anwar Sadat, chose a conciliatory path toward the group, only to be assassinated by extremist members in 1981. This was primarily in response to his signing the peace agreement with Israel in 1979. In later years, as secular administrations stayed away from the radicalization of the

group, the Muslim Brotherhood gradually entered into mainstream politics. The 1987 alliance between the Socialist Labor Party, Liberal Socialist Party, and the Brotherhood won 60 seats in the Egyptian national parliament, 37 of which were by Muslim Brothers. In the 1990s, the Brotherhood boycotted elections to protest government manipulation of the polls.

With its vast financial network and seventy branches worldwide, the Muslim Brotherhood remains a very important organization. It has endured over decades, having survived both cycles of growth and spates of repression, as well as infighting, which led to divisions into factions. Some of its spin-offs, which have been able to benefit from the Muslim Brotherhood’s clandestine financial networks, include a number of violent jihad groups. al-Jihad and al-Gama’at al-Islamiyya in Egypt, HAMAS in Palestine, and *mujahideen* groups in Afghanistan all have spun-off or gained support from the group. The experience with the Brotherhood has, nevertheless, demonstrated that such groups may enter mainstream politics if they perceive that the secular governments will abide by the established rules of the game.

Due to their common origins, the Muslim Brotherhood and Hizb-ut-Tahrir have striking similarities. As in Egypt, HT’s current focus in Central Asia is on moral and social reform through education, information and propaganda, and instilling the rule of Islamic law in society. The secular regimes of Central Asia, like the Egyptian leaders before them, have chosen repressive means to counter HT’s growing popularity. The effect has been to radicalize a broader segment of the Muslim population. Of worry is that local decision-makers seem to have ignored the option of creating conditions under which HT could be induced to enter mainstream politics by adapting its rhetoric to the daily problems and challenges of local populations. The path towards violence could then be repeated. Similar to the experience of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in the 1950s, the present danger in Central Asia is that the

20 Rashid, *Jihad: the Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, 133.

further radicalization and demonization of HT members will lead them to join the ranks of terrorists or even plot assassinations of secular rulers.

REGIONAL EFFORTS TO COUNTER THE HIZB-UT-TAHRIR

The challenge that policy-makers must now address is how to keep HT's activities nonviolent while ensuring that its activists do not join terrorist groups. A greater challenge is to create mechanisms under which HT could cease its aggressive rhetoric and become involved in the official political process. Each republic in Central Asia has chosen a different response to counter HT's growing popularity. Republics with more dictatorial regimes and a larger number of practicing Muslims have tended to take a very tough and intolerant stance. Governments with a relative degree of democratic practice have applied less repressive measures. However, the common goal across the region has been the containment and the complete eradication of the group. As the growing membership and influence of the HT illustrates, no government has been particularly successful in their strategy.

In the first category, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have applied the most repressive measures against Islamic activists through mass arrests and torture. Without distinguishing between moderate believers and radical Islamists, the Uzbek authorities have thrown several thousands suspected of extremism into jail, where they languish in deteriorating conditions. According to Human Rights Watch reports, such arrests directly violate practitioners' fundamental right to religious freedom.²¹ Annually, dozens of HT activists are sentenced to decades-long imprisonment on fabricated charges of inciting inter-ethnic hatred in Tajikistan. Law enforcement officers often press arbitrary charges and plant narcotics and religious literature on ordinary believers. They also harass family members of

those who have been arrested by extorting money and exposing them to countless interrogations.

In Kyrgyzstan, the authorities have imposed far less repressive measures, primarily in the form of fines and suspended prison sentences. In 2001, however, the Kyrgyz authorities arrested about 6,000 people for spreading HT leaflets in the Jalalabad region alone.²² In an effort to explore peaceful options for engaging the party in political process, the Kyrgyz authorities have recently attempted to establish dialogue with members of the group. Discarding the government's overtures as lacking good faith, HT has declined the offer. However, individual HT cell leaders are reported to be in touch with local government officials through informal social links. Largely as the result of Kyrgyzstan's relatively favorable treatment, many HT followers from Uzbekistan have sought refuge in Kyrgyzstan in recent years.²³

Central Asian governments have also employed local media outlets and state-controlled clergy to counter HT's messages. However, such efforts have not yielded significant results, as both the state-supported clergy and the media lack credibility among the wider public (again, there is a strong parallel to similar situations in the Middle East and South Asia). Meanwhile, those clerics collaborating with the government appear incapable of presenting any credible arguments to counter HT doctrine in mosques. For example, in the Osh region of Kyrgyzstan, 80 percent of imams and mullahs (local clergy) are self-educated individuals with no higher religious education.²⁴

Unlike state supported clergy members and government officials, HT activists enjoy a reputation as highly honest, incorruptible, and determined individuals. Recent local media reports indicate that increasing numbers of HT members attend local mosques, where they continue to spread their

21 Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2002: Europe and Central Asia." (Available on-line at <http://www.hrw.org/wr2k2/europe22.html>).

22 Grebenshikov, "The Hizb-ut-Tahrir through the eyes of Kyrgyz journalists."

23 International Crisis Group, "The IMU and the Hizb-ut-Tahrir: Implications of the Afghanistan Campaign."

24 Grebenshikov, "The Hizb-ut-Tahrir through the eyes of Kyrgyz journalists."

message. In the meantime, moderate Islamic leaders who have preserved their independence and criticized the authorities for their inept policies have been suppressed and are kept under strict police surveillance or home arrest.²⁵ It is these very leaders who have the authority and capacity to counter the extremist views of HT by reinterpreting Islamic scriptures and sacred texts in a way that promotes ethnic cohesion and religious cooperation.

Hizb-ut-Tahrir members often cite a desire to participate in political and social life as an important reason for joining the party.²⁶ This critical question of political participation is at odds with U.S. policies in a number of other regions, particularly the Middle East, where the United States is allied with authoritarian governments that are facing internal demands for reform. Thus, any technique in Central Asia that successfully incorporates Hizb-ut-Tahrir into mainstream politics can offer invaluable insights on crafting more viable policy strategies toward similar Islamist movements in other regions, including countries such as Algeria, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, and Yemen.

WHAT SHOULD THE UNITED STATES DO?

Hizb-ut-Tahrir is an increasingly influential Islamist organization that appears unlikely to fade from the Central Asian scene in the near-term. Indeed, the organization and, in turn, the response of local governments, has the capacity to shape regional stability in Central Asia for years to come. After the events of September 11, 2001, the United States has come to see Central Asia as a region of strategic importance in the war on terrorism. In addition to deploying more than 5,000 troops across a series of airbases in the region, U.S. assistance more than doubled in 2002, from \$250 million to \$580 million. Given the potential for HT to destabilize Central Asia, the United States must develop a response to HT's growing influence. At this time, however,

the United States does not have a coherent policy towards either the HT or the regional governments' policies towards it.

The United States must therefore develop a plan of action. This policy, though, may have wider implications. The strategy that America builds towards the HT will be important for ensuring U.S. interests not only in Central Asia, but also within the rest of the Islamic world. That is, the U.S. response to HT will set an important precedent and model for how governments can respond to the increasing presence of politically mobilized Islamist groups and their demands throughout the world.

In order to craft a well-informed and effective policy toward Hizb-ut-Tahrir, it is important to understand the perceptions that compel certain groups of Muslims to embrace extremist ideologies and violent tactics. Groups like Hizb-ut-Tahrir and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan are successful in their recruiting because they are able to cast themselves as a vehicle for the under-represented and oppressed segments of the population. These portrayals draw on very legitimate grievances, especially in impoverished communities. Meanwhile, with increasing financial aid from the United States and high level diplomatic visits with Central Asian leaders, the U.S. is seen to be on the side of the local elite and the failing status quo. As such, the U.S. is identified with the political, social, and economic trends that have brought about misery for ordinary people. In recent years, many Central Asian leaders have been accused of corruption and abuse of power, while the United States is perceived to care less and less.

This issue has become more acute in the last year, as U.S. interest in the region has increased as part of the war on terrorism. Human rights activists contend that the Bush administration is condoning official corruption and softening its tone on show trials and other

²⁵ See reports of *Memorial*, a Russia-based humanitarian and human rights organization. <http://www.memo.ru/eng/>

²⁶ International Crisis Group, "The IMU and the Hizb-ut-Tahrir: Implications of the Afghanistan Campaign."

human rights violations. For example, increased U.S.-Kyrgyzstan cooperation, together with President Askar Akayev's intensified campaign against dissenting opinion, has led to accusations of an informal quid pro quo between the countries. The U.S. is thought to have restrained its criticism of Kyrgyzstan's human rights record in return for military access to Kyrgyzstani facilities.²⁷ The general public also feels that economic activity generated by contract services and supplies from the new allied base in Kyrgyzstan are benefiting only a handful of people, including President Akayev's family. Likewise, Kazakhstan's strategic importance is believed by many to have muzzled criticism of corrupt business practices by President Nursultan Nazarbayev and his family. An investigation into the possibility that Nazarbayev accepted a payment from Exxon Mobil has been going on for months in the United States, with scant signs of a breakthrough.

An added problem for the U.S. is that only a very limited segment of Central Asian population—which includes pro-western government officials and civil society representatives, students in pro-western universities, workers in U.S. funded enterprises—is exposed to the positive aspects of American society, such as individual liberty, the rule of law, and economic prosperity. In recent years, many Central Asians have instead come to equate the United States with ever “expanding and poisonous” pop-culture, materialism, militarism, and even racism.²⁸

The United States has a fairly diverse range of policy options to assist its regional partners in countering extremist views and the growth of underground religious groups such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir. These options range from designating HT as a terrorist and extremist organization to more nuanced programs designed to address the underlying causes of the growing support for extremist views. Based on the conclusions of the preceding discussion, the United

States should develop a cohesive and informed strategy designed to preserve regional stability, while tackling the underlying problems that generate violence and support for radicalism.

1. Avoid Designating HT as a Terrorist Organization

As the example of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt demonstrates, lumping Hizb-ut-Tahrir and the IMU together in the same category of terrorist organizations would be a simplistic move that could legitimize the repressive measures of Central Asian governments. Having asserted links to terrorist activity, Central Asian authorities have now banned HT. They also continuously lobby western governments to recognize the HT as a terrorist organization to help cut off its international funding and connections.²⁹ This suppression is partly rooted in secular leaders' fears that the party's growing appeal for social and political justice challenges their legitimacy in the public eyes. Although such fears have a degree of credibility, it is the violent suppression of opposition movements and unwillingness to foster open political debate that undermine the legitimacy of regional governments.

Branding Hizb-ut-Tahrir as a terrorist organization will have serious implications for regional security. It will further embolden the ongoing official harassment of ordinary believers and lead to widespread public outcry. Such a measure will also be seen by local religious factions as an U.S. effort to support oppressive governments in the war against terrorism. As such, it will undermine U.S.-led efforts to counter Islamic extremism among local populations. It may also backfire and encourage either the HT organization, or individual members or breakaway groups, to join forces with more serious terrorist groups such as the IMU or Al-Qaida.

27 Scott Horton, a view expressed at the OSI Forum “Kyrgyzstan: One Year after Aksy,” March 18, 2003.

28 Stephen Zunes, “American Policy Toward Islam,” *Foreign Policy in Focus*, September 12, 2001.

29 Nikolai Tanaev, Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan, announced recently that the Kyrgyz authorities had discovered a stockpile of guns in the village of Arslanbob, which the authorities claim belonged to HT.

2. Explore Options for Involving HT in the Political Process

Elsewhere in the Muslim world, radical Islamic parties have emerged as the result of the denial of their right to participate in political discourse. For example, such Islamist groups as the Muslim Brotherhood and the FIS in Algeria competed fairly and nonviolently during their countries' brief political openness. However, when secular and military forces abolished their anticipated election victories, radical factions within these groups turned violent. They adopted terrorist tactics against their government opponents, as well as foreigners and broader segments of civilian society.³⁰

The United States must reconsider encouraging any blanket policy by Central Asian governments of viewing Islamic parties to be the enemy and instead work to bolster Islamic parties' involvement in political process. The general lesson appears to be that while exclusion of such groups leads to violence, inclusion forces them to compete for voters and offer real governing options, leading them to moderate. Principled support of democracy and human rights, in this regard, is key to moderating radical Islamists.

The option of political engagement has persuasive historical evidence. Some Islamic parties compete and respect the law in a relatively open political process in countries like Turkey, Jordan, and Yemen. Recently, the Islamist Justice and Development Party (AK) in Turkey won about a third of the votes, which, under Turkey's electoral system, has given it almost two-thirds of the seats in the national parliament. While it is considered Islamist, the AK has gradually become far more moderate than once expected. Recep Erdogan, its leader and former mayor of Istanbul, is even viewed as one of the leading advocates of Turkey's inclusion into the EU.

3. Open Lines of Communication

Until now, the U.S. government has ignored the possibility of establishing or encouraging any form of

communication with members of Hizb-ut-Tahrir. Partly this is due to the U.S. administration's unwillingness to engage in dialogue with religiously inspired extreme activists and thus provoke domestic criticism. It may also be the result of skepticism among policy-makers regarding the likely outcomes of such communication. Meanwhile, many HT members have continually expressed their readiness to engage in communication and discussion under the condition that official harassment and torture of its members should stop. Except for the Kyrgyz authorities, Central Asian governments have refused to talk to HT and have intensified the crackdown on its members.

At present, it appears worthwhile for the United States to explore the option, in conjunction with regional governments, of establishing some form of communication with HT activists who appear willing to do so. However, as the Kyrgyz case demonstrates, such an effort will not succeed if it lacks good faith. Open lines of communication with HT may facilitate the monitoring of the movements' activities and future plans firsthand. It could also provide insights into how to keep the resources and structures of the movement away from terrorist groups and prevent its activists from joining terrorist organizations. The U.S. government should also consider calling on regional governments to legalize Hizb-ut-Tahrir's activity and attempt to engage the Islamic group in a dialogue. Local analysts suggest that if Hizb-ut-Tahrir enters mainstream politics, its popularity may suffer as it faces the challenge of turning its rhetoric into reality.

4. Promote the Rule of Law and Respect of Human Rights

Many of the region's most acute problems stem from popular perceptions of lawlessness and the pervasive lack of accountability among government officials and popular perceptions of lawlessness. Linked to this, Central Asian authorities often exaggerate the security threat posed by radical Islamists. This has led to the widespread use of torture, which is routinely

³⁰ Zunes, "American Policy Toward Islam."

employed by secret services to secure self-incriminating statements against suspects. Officials have also resorted to torture in order to compel defendants to decline legal representation. In addition, authorities have often planted evidence, such as illegal religious pamphlets, on suspects.³¹ The governments' reliance on repressive measures, however, is actually aiding the radicals' attempts to recruit new members and fan popular discontent.

A change in government strategy with less emphasis on repressive measures is needed. The Kyrgyz authorities have already made adjustments in their approach to some success. Currently, the law enforcement structures are targeting individual leaders and taking them to court. Instead of jail sentences, courts often choose to impose fines in monetary sums. While the impact of the new measures is difficult to assess, they are, nevertheless, being enforced, thus strengthening the rule of law.

The United States and other Western governments should link any restructuring or adjustments of foreign debt to regional governments' strong adherence to and implementation of their international obligations in the area of human rights protection, promotion of legal reforms that will ensure an impartial judiciary, independent legislation, and transparent mechanisms for the political participation of various groups. Efforts by government agencies to include ethnic minority groups more fully in government, the judiciary, and law-enforcement structures must also be strongly encouraged.

5. Support Civil Society and Democratic Institutions

As noted above, the lack of a viable outlet for legitimate civic expression and for securing practical change through democratic means has further empowered Hizb-ut-Tahrir. The party's new recruits often come from ethnic minorities who feel they are largely under-represented in political and economic spheres.

In partnership with local organizations, U.S. agencies can help direct the activities of the Central Asian civil society groups to address better the needs and interests of marginalized segments of the community. The contribution of international grant-making institutions in fostering grassroots mobilization of underrepresented groups is indispensable. U.S. agencies must also continue fostering relations with local grassroots groups, media outlets, and the local business community. Assistance from international business partners in the form of legal training, seminars, and roundtable discussions is in particular demand. For example, the collaboration of the ABA-CEELI (the American Bar Association) with local human rights organizations and student groups in south Kyrgyzstan has been particularly fruitful and has resulted in the formation of juridical clinics and consultation centers to serve the needs of ordinary people.

6. Back Independent and Moderate Islamic Clergy Leaders

There are many moderate Muslims in all Central Asian republics who believe in a vision of Islam that embraces free thought, free speech and tolerance. Many of these individuals have strongly condemned the September 11 attacks and have expressed sympathy for American citizens. Sadly enough, these moderate voices are currently under attack by both extremist interpreters of Islam and authoritarian secular leaders. For example, since late 1997, Uzbek police and security forces have arrested thousands of Muslims who did not follow the officially authorized version of Islam, or people who attended places of worship other than those approved by the state. The authorities are targeting other religious groups as well. For example, the internal affairs department of Chirchik, a town in Uzbekistan, raided a Baptist worship service being held in a private home on September 8, 2002. All religious literature was confiscated and the identity papers of those in attendance were seized. The group was accused of "inciting religious hostility," simply because of the Christian content of some materials.³²

³¹ "Rights Observers Sees No End to Religious Persecution in Uzbekistan." September 22, 2000. Available on-line at <http://www.eurasianet.org>.

³² International Christian Concern, "Country Report: Uzbekistan." December, 2002.

(Available at <http://www.persecution.org/humanrights/uzbekistan.html>)

All Central Asian governments must respect the constitutional right of citizens to practice religion in private and public without restriction. While governments should be encouraged to implement the constitutional separation of state and religion, it is important that they also reconsider the Soviet methods of registering religious communities, designating state-sponsored Islamic leaders, and of maintaining strict control over religious institutions.

As the authorities stop the harassment of believers, political space will open up for genuine discourse. Moderate Islamic clergy leaders will then be able to speak out more strongly against Usama bin Laden and other extremists' views of Islam. By organizing panel discussions, addressing Muslims in their mosques, and using local media outlets, such leaders can significantly reduce the growing popularity of extremist religious views.

The U.S. government and other private organizations can also provide settings and forums to encourage this process. Local clergy and other civil society leaders can benefit from U.S. Department of State sponsored visitor exchange programs to share views with many American Islamic activists and members of the Muslim community. American Muslim leaders, who are viewed with a degree of respect and admiration among Central Asian Muslims for their bravery and courage (especially after September 11th), should be encouraged to visit Central Asia and engage in discussion and debate with Muslims there.

7. Encourage Foreign Investment, Cross-Border Trade and Travel

The poor implementation of some U.S. backed reforms in such spheres as privatization, land ownership, rent subsidies and utility tariffs, have inevitably increased inequality and have resulted in enrichment of a small circle of elites at the expense of the poor majority. The United States and other international donors must rethink existing policies that often lead to the marginalization and exclusion of ordinary people. Instead, they must emphasize more inclusive measures where-

by the benefits of foreign investment and globalization can be more fairly and proportionately distributed among all layers of community.

All Central Asian republics presently face grave economic problems and are in desperate need of foreign investment. Due to specific developmental needs, particularly in energy and environment, Central Asian republics require coordinated and integrated assistance from USAID. Business training remains the most acute need in Central Asian republics. USAID contractors such as Pragma International and Booz-Allen have been crucial in fostering business links between local medium-size enterprises and foreign companies. Further advice and assistance in attracting foreign companies and investment are crucial.

Cross-border projects throughout Central Asian republics are also in great demand. Important areas of cooperation include training public officials and aiding them in introducing new standards of personnel management, training border control officials, and preparing specialists in peace-building and community mediation. U.S. involvement in the area of potential conflict prevention is very encouraging. The USAID recently awarded five grants, totaling \$22.2 million, as part of a regional conflict prevention strategy in Central Asia. These grants are part of USAID's Community Action Investment Program (CAIP), a program designed to build social stability and alleviate sources of potential conflict in the five Central Asia republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. CAIP will focus on communities where the potential for conflict is most acute, such as the Ferghana Valley. This is an excellent first step, but much remains to be done. Programs to encourage local capacity building should be viewed as a part of the long-term fight against terrorism (by taking away the lawless environments that terrorism thrives in) and thus should receive priority.

CONCLUSIONS

Hizb-ut-Tahrir has grown in size and influence by effectively casting itself as an Islamic outlet for those Muslims in Central Asia, who are disaffected by political and economic developments over the last decade. In turn, the local governments' reliance on repressive measures in response has actually aided the radicals' attempts to recruit new members and fan popular discontent. A growing concern is that Hizb-ut-Tahrir's support will continue to build amid the ongoing political and civil turmoil. With the political situation in Central Asian republics increasingly volatile, the situation could break down into conflict, with the group and/or its membership and resources turning from non-violent protest to violent support of terrorism.

Religious protest parties such as the Hizb-ut-Tahrir have their parallels around the Islamic world in groups like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, FIS in Algeria, and Islah in Yemen. Thus, a broader concern that the HT encapsulates is how to maintain the conditions under which such Islamist parties stay non-violent. Hizb-ut-Tahrir and other radical Islamic movements could go either way, either turning to support for terrorism or becoming involved in peaceful political process. The key aspect appears to be how the local government can bring these parties into the fold, while ensuring that all sides will respect the "rules of the game." The U.S. has a vested interest in supporting such processes.

For Central Asian governments who hope to combat Islamic radical groups, it therefore appears that the best option is to do so indirectly, by pursuing economic reforms and political liberalization vigorously. Assistance from the United States in this task will be crucial, not only in supporting reform programs but also by helping to open the political space and channels of communication for legitimate dialogue. This also offers a possible, broader model for how the United States will win the wider war against terrorism,

by undercutting the popular support and recruitment for violently radical groups like Al-Qaida.

The new American presence in Central Asia remains a potentially significant lever for an international antiterrorism coalition. The hope is that the United States will use it to guide its allies toward broader democracy and a commitment to the rule of law.

THE BROOKINGS PROJECT ON U.S. POLICY TOWARDS THE ISLAMIC WORLD

The *Brookings Project on U.S. Policy Towards the Islamic World* is a major research program, housed in the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution. It is designed to respond to some of the profound questions that the terrorist attacks of September 11th have raised for U.S. policy. The project seeks to develop an understanding of the forces that led to the attacks, the varied reactions in the Islamic world, and the long-term policy responses that the U.S. can make. In particular, it will examine how the United States can reconcile its need to eliminate terrorism and reduce the appeal of extremist movements with its need to build more positive relations with the wider Islamic world.

The Project has several interlocking components:

- A Task Force made up of specialists in Islamic, regional, and foreign policy issues (emphasizing diversity in viewpoint and geographic expertise), as well as government policymakers, who meet on a monthly basis to discuss, analyze, and share information on relevant trends and issues;
- A Visiting Fellows program that brings distinguished experts from the Islamic world to spend time in Washington D.C., both assisting them in their own research, as well as informing the wider work ongoing in the project;

- A series of Brookings Analysis Papers and Monographs that provide needed analysis of the vital issues of joint concern between the U.S. and the Islamic world;
- A series of Regional Conferences, which will bring together local experts in the Middle East and South Asia with their American counterparts. This component will not only provide an opportunity for scholars to discuss their own diagnoses of current trends and possible responses, but also promote a much-needed exchange of ideas and information;
- An Education and Economic Outreach Initiative, which will explore the issues of education reform and economic development towards the Islamic world, in particular the potential role of the private sector;
- A culminating Brookings Institution Press book, which will explore U.S. policy options towards the Islamic World. The aim of the book is to synthesize the project's findings for public dissemination.

The Project Convenors are Professor Stephen Philip Cohen, Brookings Institution Senior Fellow; Ambassador Martin Indyk, Director of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy; and Professor Shibley Telhami, Professor of Government at the University of Maryland and Brookings Senior Fellow. Dr. P.W. Singer, Brookings Olin Fellow, serves as the Project Coordinator.

THE BROOKINGS TASK FORCE ON U.S. POLICY TOWARDS THE ISLAMIC WORLD

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THE SABAN CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST POLICY

The Saban Center for Middle East Policy was established on May 13th, 2002 with an Inaugural Address by His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan. The establishment of the Saban Center reflects The Brookings Institution's commitment to expand dramatically its research and analysis of Middle East policy issues at a time when the region has come to dominate the U.S. foreign policy agenda.

The Saban Center's purpose is to provide Washington policymakers with balanced, objective, in-depth, and timely research and policy analysis from experienced and knowledgeable people who can bring fresh perspectives to bear on the critical problems of the Middle East. The Center upholds the Brookings tradition of being open to a broad range of views. Its central objective is to advance understanding of developments in the Middle East through policy-relevant scholarship and debate.

The Center's establishment has been made possible by a generous founding grant from Mr. Haim Saban of Los Angeles. Ambassador Martin S. Indyk, Senior Fellow in Foreign Policy Studies, is the Director of the Saban Center. Dr. Kenneth M. Pollack is the Center's Director of Research. Joining Ambassador Indyk and Dr. Pollack in the work of the Center is a core group of Middle East experts, who conduct original research and develop innovative programs to promote a better understanding of the policy choices facing American decision makers in the Middle East. They include Professor Shibley Telhami, who holds the Sadat Chair at the University of Maryland; Professor Shaul

Bakhash, an expert on Iranian politics from George Mason University; Professor Daniel Byman from Georgetown University, a Middle East terrorism expert; Dr. Flynt Leverett, a former senior CIA analyst and Senior Director at the National Security Council who is a specialist on Syria and Lebanon; and Dr. Philip Gordon, a Senior Fellow in Foreign Policy Studies at Brookings who specializes in Europe's and Turkey's relations with the Middle East. The Center is located in the Foreign Policy Studies Program at Brookings, led by Vice President and Director, James B. Steinberg.

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