



PERSPECTIVES

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Hizb ut-Tahrir in Turkey Calls for Restoring the Caliphate

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Violence is not the only means by which Islamist groups and individuals hope to expand Islamic influence, establish Islamic governments, and eventually restore the caliphate. In addition to the Islamic State (ISIS) and al-Qaeda, many non-violent, legal groups either overtly or covertly share those aims. “Are they violent or not?” should not be the main question while analyzing Islamist groups or governments. “What is their aim?” is the better question if we are to understand them and take effective precautions. Methods might vary, but the establishment of Islamic rule is the ultimate goal of Islamist ideology.

Recent discussions of jihad or political Islam (or Islamism as it is commonly known) have most often focused on ISIS. But jihad and other efforts towards establishing an Islamic political order are not the exclusive province of ISIS. The expansion and institutionalization of Islam by violent (and non-violent) means is a millenarian tradition and a fundamental goal of Islam from its earliest days. ISIS is just one Islamist organization seeking to re-establish the caliphate.

Dating back to the Prophet Muhammad’s immediate successors, the [caliphate](#) (Khilafah) is a form of government, ruled by Islamic sharia law, that represents the political unity of the worldwide Muslim community (*Umma*). The last caliphate of the Ottoman Empire was abolished in 1924 by republican Turkey, but Islamist groups and organizations around the world have never ceased attempting to re-establish the venerable institution.

The Islamist group Hizb ut-Tahrir, for example, an international and pan-Islamic political organization, is quite active in Turkey, with conferences, publications,

and marches. According to its [official website](#), “Hizb ut-Tahrir is a political party whose ideology is Islam, so politics is its work and Islam is its ideology. It works within the Umma and together with her, so that she adopts Islam as her cause and is led to restore the Khilafah and the ruling by what Allah revealed.”

The group also publishes the monthly magazine *Koklu Degisim* (Radical Change), wherein it promotes the idea that “violence and all other problems in the Middle East are caused by Western states.” It opposes the Geneva talks to end the Syrian civil war and calls for the fall of Russia, Israel, the UN, and the “infidel” West. An article published in its June 2016 edition [said](#): “Islam as an ideological and a political idea is permanent, and it will win.”

On March 3, 2017, Mahmut Kar, the head of the media bureau of “the Turkey Province of Hizbut Tahrir”, and Osman Yildiz, the Istanbul representative of its magazine “*Koklu Degisim*” (Radical Change), were taken into police custody when they went to the Bayrampasa police station in Istanbul to receive a letter of notification about a ban on their planned conference, “Why does the world need the caliphate?” due to be held three days later. They were [released](#) a week later.

This detention must have come as a surprise to the group given that, for quite some time, it had been holding annual conferences advocating the restoration of the caliphate. On March 3, 2015, on the 91st anniversary of the abolition of the caliphate, Hizb ut-Tahrir held a conference titled “The Democratic Presidency Model or the Rashidun Caliphate?” at the AKP-governed Uskudar Municipality. The same month, thousands of supporters marched in Istanbul, chanting: “From Turkey to Egypt, from Indonesia to Morocco, from Lebanon to Kurdistan, caliphate, caliphate!”

The following year, on March 3, 2016, the group organized another “international caliphate conference” in Istanbul’s Barcelo Eresin Hotel, which was attended by about 1,000 people with speakers from many countries. “I can assure you of the disbandment of the United Nations and its so-called Security Council, the IMF and all these criminal organizations,” Muhammad Ismail Yusanto, the president of Sharia Economy and Administration Institute and head of the media bureau of Hizb ut-Tahrir of Indonesia, told the conference. “I can assure you of the collapse of the superpower and its allies.” Kar, also in attendance, argued that “Turkey, Iraq, Syria or Pakistan could be the center of the caliphate.”

According to Kar, his recent detention stemmed from Ankara’s eagerness to give the impression that it was at war with ISIS. He wrote: “Turkey, in order to say ‘I struggle against ISIS’ and to prove this to the West and the USA with concrete statistics, arbitrarily detains many Muslims without doing a detailed investigation.” This, in his view, was totally unnecessary, since “Hizb-ut Tahrir

absolutely opposes the use of force and violence and armed struggle ... The real issue is reminding Muslims of the caliphate that was abolished 93 years ago. It is about, without prevaricating or beating around the bush, screaming the fact that the caliphate is the administrative system of Islam.”

That this prognosis was apparently misconceived was evidenced by the fact that the planned caliphate conference was eventually held (on March 6, 2016), in the sports hall of the AKP-ruled Ankara municipality with the participation of over 5,000 people (according to a Hizb ut-Tahrir press release). “We want the Rashidun Caliphate,” said theologian and author Abdullah Imamoglu. “When we say this, are there those who say ‘What is the caliphate when there is kafir [infidel] America?’ We reply to them that a second caliphate is not a dream.”

This desire is hardly limited to Hizb ut-Tahrir. The yearning for the imposition of sharia law and the restoration of the caliphate is a central element of political Islam. The open expression of this desire and the means for its pursuit are simply a matter of timing and tactics. ISIS and al-Qaeda strive to attain these goals through violent means. Hizb ut-Tahrir, like other Islamist organizations and governments, does not engage in violence – or at least will refrain from violence until “the right time” comes.

So before rushing to whitewash Islamist efforts to re-establish the caliphate by attributing them to poverty, “Muslim grievances,” or Western foreign policy, one ought to consider the historical continuity and universality of these efforts as well as their doctrinal foundations.

From Turkey to Indonesia, from Pakistan to Canada, from Egypt to Sweden, millions of Muslims – regardless of economic, social, or ethnic background – yearn to re-establish a caliphate ruled by sharia. Their common trait is their religious piety. Much of the history of Islam is a history of conquest of non-Muslim lands and the establishment of Islamic rule in them. In fact, that is Islamism’s ultimate goal.

Before one defends sharia law in the name of “diversity” or “multiculturalism”, one would therefore be well advised to investigate what happens to human rights – particularly women’s rights and religious liberty – once political Islam becomes the ruling ideology.

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