

## Squeezed between Liberals and Hardliners: Status of Hizb ut Tahrir under Taliban rule

Hizb ut Tahrir, the nonviolent global Islamic movement has been active in Afghanistan since 2003 when the US backed Afghan regime was taking roots in the country. Since then, it has been doing Da'wa across the country to spread its message and align youth and influential people with its ideology through systematic use of social media and other means. Though it has always been against the use of violence until such time when a Khilafah (Caliphate) is established and then Jihad is waged against the designated Kufr (infidel) states under the leadership of the Caliph and the Amir al-Jihad and but it has also shared a narrative with the Taliban, that Afghanistan is occupied by the US and NATO and they need to be expelled.

The Taliban resumed the insurgency around 2006 and the Hizb continued its indoctrination process in the society. Having an Islamic ideology and the shared narrative of 'Afghanistan being occupied', created some level of sympathy among the two groups, however, both followed a completely different path on how an Islamic state should be. However, some still thought the two groups were two different faces of the same ideology.

Influenced by the Deobandi school, the Taliban sought to restore their tribal styled Afghan nation state with a prefix of 'Islamic Emirate' and with the backing of several Afghan clerics and based upon its history from 1994 to 2001. While the Hizb sought to make minds ready for a global Islamic nation. As it claims to install the second *Khilafah Rashidah* (rightly guided Caliphate), the Hizb considers the Rashidun Khilafah as the ideal state that Islam's political history has witnessed. The Hizb has been systematically preparing for this cause since 1953, and in this path, it appreciates the significance of all modern sciences and technologies and for example considers industrialization as the basis for its ideal future caliphate.

The Taliban's comeback to power in August 2021 after about 20 years of intense struggle put them and all other Islamic movements in the country in a difficult position of facing and adjusting to new realities. We can categorize the groups into three: the *Tablighis*, the *Islahis* (the *Afghan branch of Muslim Brotherhood*) and the *Tahriris* who managed to operate during the US invasion and occupation but came under harsh criticism of the Taliban for not participating in the armed confrontation against foreign troops. All these three groups have their own reasoning for not taking up arms against foreign troops mainly arguing that it would end up in bloodshed among Muslims themselves, but they also didn't explicitly criticize Taliban from doing so, respecting Taliban's *Ijtihad* in this regard. However, this didn't seem convincing to the Taliban. Now that the Taliban are back in power there was going to be tensions.

The *Tablighi's* continued their politically impartial Da'wa and assured that their Da'wa would not threaten Taliban power in any sense. *Jamiate Islah* (the *Afghan branch of Muslim Brotherhood*) was first optimistic of the Taliban rule and preferred it over the previous government. But they were soon divided on this stance and were disappointed by the harsh treatment of the Taliban. Some of the *Islah* leaders escaped Afghanistan and went to places like Turkey or Pakistan to survive, some to Europe and North America while others stayed in Afghanistan, preferring compromise or marginalization. *Jamiate Islah's* license was not renewed and is now operating marginally and informally.

The *Tahriris* were put in a very difficult position because they are the only worldwide Islamic movement that has documented raw material, such as draft constitution and policies of various disciplines and subjects, for an ideal Islamic state. They seem to have a well formulated prescription for everything the Taliban are struggling with, from foreign policy and global recognition to education and culture. The *Tahriris* decided to stay in Afghanistan at any cost and utilise the opportunity of inviting the masses to their ideology. They started doing Da'wa to the Taliban in power through various means. *Tahrir* continued its social media posts propagating an Islamic way of life with a focus on its political system and in the meantime invited the Taliban leaders to adopt the Hizb's constitution, its policies and ultimately proclaim Afghanistan as an Islamic Caliphate without necessarily expecting any benefit for Hizb ut tahrir or its members.

This stance of the Hizb towards the Taliban in power was welcomed by some, others reacted in different ways. Some of the Hizb's adversaries considered it too much of a compromise as they thought Taliban didn't deserve such advice. They even accused the Hizb of pledging allegiance to the Taliban.<sup>1</sup> They are mostly the ones who support an armed confrontation against the Taliban regime, the most prominent among them being the National Resistance Front (NRF). They were particularly outraged by the fact that Hizb still advocates a non-violent struggle to bring about positive change, thus discouraging potential youth from taking up arms against the Taliban and waning the Front's anti-Taliban narrative.

Another group of people, that included those within the Taliban, welcomed the ideas of Hizb and even accepted that this was 'exactly' what the Taliban should be doing. However, they were not anyone from the Taliban top leadership who could influence high level decision making. Others were those that accepted Hizb ut Tahrir's positions but believed they were too idealistic and not practical enough given the current situation in Afghanistan and the capabilities of the Taliban thereof. Among Taliban are also those who feel threatened by Hizb's ideas and see it as a potential contender for power that can attract its members to switch and thus paving the way for a probable coup from within. This is particularly important as the magnitude of internal dissent among the Taliban is quite high mainly due to the Taliban leaderships' soft stance against foreign pressures and harsh stance on internal issues such as banning women from education and work.

This has put the Hizb and its members in a difficult situation, but this party has global experience of about seven decades in coping with similar conditions. The Hizb is known for its no-compromise stance, and it is expected that it won't make any compromises in its criticism of the Taliban rule and inviting them to turn to the true way of Islamic sovereignty as understood and detailed by the Hizb. In practice, the Taliban have had scattered reactions towards the Hizb. On November 21, 2022 a provincial office of Taliban intelligence entity issued a letter to all government entities of that province, declaring a ban on Hizb-utt ahrir along with Jamiate Islah, and Najm (the youth wing of Jamiate Islah).<sup>2</sup> Shortly after, on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022 Taliban's controversial Minister of Higher Education, Mawlawi Nadeem was reported to have said, "*there is no place for members of Jamiate Islah, Hizbuttahrir and Democrats in universities.*"<sup>3</sup> This statement was made in the very days when he declared the unpopular ban on female higher education in university. The decision was widely criticized and condemned both locally and internationally.

This situation has put all Islamic movements in difficulty, as the Taliban do not seem to tolerate any other group or idea other than their own. This applies particularly to Hizb ut Tahrir, a group that has drafts of codified laws, policies, guides on how an Islamic system of government should work. The Hizb's members continued to be sacrificed for their cause. On August 9, 2022 a prominent member of Hizb ut Tahrir in Ghazni province of Afghanistan named Abdul Aziz Mohammadi was assassinated by unknown gunmen. The Taliban are considered among those responsible for the killing. There have been several instances of arrests and detentions of members of the Hizb across Afghanistan by Taliban authorities. The Taliban seem far from accepting the Hizb's call for the establishment of the Khilafah and the Hizb will have to seek actualization of its mega aim of establishing the second Khilafah Rashidah (rightly guided Caliphate) upon the method of the Prophethood, in another time and space.

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<sup>1</sup> News on accusing Hizbuttahrir pledging allegiance to the Taliban

<https://8am.media/eng/hizb-ut-tahrir-pledges-allegiance-to-the-taliban-in-panjshir-province/>

<sup>2</sup> News on the banning of Hizb on Sputnik: [www.shorturl.at/hyE02](http://www.shorturl.at/hyE02)

<sup>3</sup> Quote from Mawlawi Nadeem speech: [www.shorturl.at/uvJP2](http://www.shorturl.at/uvJP2)