

Ensuring Ideological Security against Hizb Al-Tahrir's Ideas: Foreign Experience

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Abstract:

This article presents an in-depth analysis of the foreign experiences in ensuring ideological security against the influence of the "Hizb al-Tahrir" organization. It examines the strategies and approaches implemented by countries such as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Turkey. These countries have undertaken various efforts to counteract the spread of extremist ideas, specifically those propagated by radical organizations. The study covers legal measures taken to restrict the activities of radical groups, educational and moral initiatives aimed at preventing radicalization, and cooperative efforts carried out on both local and international scales to strengthen ideological security. By analyzing these elements, the article provides a comprehensive overview of the multi-dimensional approach required to effectively combat radicalism. It reflects on the adaptability of these strategies within different cultural and legal frameworks, providing insights into the strengths and limitations of each approach.

Keywords: Hizb al-Tahrir, ideological security, counter-radicalism efforts, legal measures, educational initiatives, extremism, international cooperation, extremism prevention, radicalization, ideological resilience.

"Hizb al-Tahrir" organization's ideology is regarded as one of the ideological threats in the modern world. Its ideas, particularly the radical ideology aimed at restoring the Islamic Caliphate, have spread globally, increasing the likelihood of extremist actions and ideological radicalism within societies. Many states, recognizing the threat posed by this organization, have taken effective measures to ensure ideological security against such ideas. A number of strategies have been developed in these countries to counter radicalization, with the primary goal of strengthening ideological security.

In the experience of foreign states, various approaches to combating radicalization and terrorism are employed, including deradicalization programs, educational initiatives, legislative measures, and

community engagement strategies. Studying successful methods of ensuring ideological security in countries where such measures have been effectively implemented, and adapting these approaches to local contexts, is of significant importance. Therefore, studying and effectively utilizing foreign experiences in countering the ideas of "Hizb al-Tahrir" is a crucial step toward strengthening national security.

This comprehensive approach to analyzing and adapting international strategies offers valuable insights into the importance of ideological resilience. By examining different dimensions such as legal frameworks, educational campaigns, and preventive measures, this article emphasizes the need for a coordinated response in protecting society against extremist ideologies.

Kyrgyzstan - Despite Kyrgyzstan's liberal policies, they did not prevent the country from becoming susceptible to the influence of radical Islamic groups, especially "Hizb al-Tahrir." Despite the democratic reforms of the 1990s, insufficient measures were taken to counter the entry and spread of radical religious groups. The number of mosques in the country increased sharply, rising from 39 in 1991 to over 2000 by 2004. Many of these mosques were not registered by the state, making it challenging to monitor and control their activities.

Members of "Hizb al-Tahrir" first entered Kyrgyzstan in 1996, initially spreading in the southern regions before moving northward. After arrests began in Uzbekistan in 1999, members of the group actively migrated to Kyrgyzstan. Their leaflets were initially published in Uzbek and later in Kyrgyz, yet the country's leadership did not fully grasp the significance of these materials and failed to take effective measures to prevent their spread.

In the early 2000s, the Kyrgyz government recognized "Hizb al-Tahrir" as an extremist organization. However, due to legislative gaps, there were no legal measures in place to effectively counter the radicals. In 2004, the government adopted a new national program aimed at combating religious extremism, focusing on eliminating Islamic radicalism and promoting dialogue among religious communities.

Kyrgyzstan's struggle against "Hizb al-Tahrir" highlighted how liberal policies influenced the activities of radical groups in the country and revealed ideological and legislative vulnerabilities.

Tajikistan - after the 1997 civil war in Tajikistan, the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) was integrated into the political system. This decision stemmed from the IRP's renunciation of wartime radicalism and its acceptance of a secular and democratic government. However, this integration diminished the IRP's legitimacy, creating a political vacuum that "Hizb al-Tahrir" exploited to expand its influence in Tajikistan.

In 2000, the government and the IRP began to jointly oppose "Hizb al-Tahrir," but their cooperation proved ineffective. "Hizb al-Tahrir" managed to portray the IRP as a political structure under the control of the state. The government's efforts to counter radical groups focused on addressing local issues, which "Hizb al-Tahrir" capitalized on, broadening its appeal by raising these issues in its materials.

From 2000-2001, arrests of "Hizb al-Tahrir" members increased, with prison sentences ranging from 12 to 18 years. However, due to the group's cell-based structure and its infiltration into state organs, the fight against it was largely unsuccessful. The Tajik government recognized the challenges in combating radical groups, such as the lack of adequate training among local imams and their low influence among the youth, and sought to address these issues.

In conclusion, despite various ideological and legal measures, Tajikistan's efforts to counter radical groups have not fully resolved the existing challenges. Efforts aimed at ensuring political cooperation and social stability were leveraged by radical groups to fill the ideological void.

Kazakhstan's ethnic and religious diversity was initially seen as a factor that would protect the country from the spread of radical Islam. However, following independence, the unrestricted construction of new mosques and the rise in the number of religious institutions, combined with a lack of qualified religious personnel, allowed radical groups like “Hizb al-Tahrir” to expand their influence. By 2004, radical movements had intensified their activities across the country.

The government recognized the need to counter the spread of radical religious ideas by improving social conditions, restoring national traditions, and promoting interethnic harmony. In 2004, the government took steps against “Hizb al-Tahrir,” and in October of that year, parliament approved a draft law aimed at restricting the activities of religious extremist groups. These actions highlighted Kazakhstan as a distinct nation in Central Asia actively combating radicalism.

Azerbaijan - Like Central Asian states, Azerbaijan faced several challenges in transitioning from the Soviet era to independence. However, “Hizb al-Tahrir” did not spread in Azerbaijan to the same extent as in Central Asia. The country's leaders quickly suppressed attempts by the group to establish a foothold by confiscating their materials. Nevertheless, radical Islamic movements continued efforts to influence Azerbaijan's Sunni and Shia populations from countries like Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, Iran, and Turkey.

On June 21, 2001, former President Heydar Aliyev strengthened efforts against radicals by establishing the State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations. The committee's main tasks included registering all religious organizations and monitoring their activities. Twenty-six existing madrasas in the country were inspected, and those linked to Turkey and Iran that lacked official registration were promptly shut down.

Through efforts to regulate religious educational institutions and align them with state standards, the Azerbaijani government sought to prevent the spread of radical ideas. Conditions imposed included implementing a curriculum that met state requirements, conducting education in the Azerbaijani language, and ensuring financial transparency. As a result, many madrasas were closed, and currently only three Islamic schools operate in the country.

In combating radicalism, Azerbaijan drew from Turkey's experience. Turkish Islamic movements, especially those of a moderate direction, are more popular and influential than radical groups. Inspired by Turkey's practice of incorporating Islamic education into secondary schools, Rafiq Aliyev, head of the State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations, proposed introducing moderate Islamic courses in secondary schools to build immunity against radicalism.

While some high-ranking officials were not yet ready for this step, integrating religious education could be a vital move for Azerbaijan's future stability. Teaching fundamental Islamic knowledge and moral values is seen as one of the most effective ways to protect against radical ideologies.

Turkey - The experience of Turkey provides valuable insights into combating radical ideologies, as Turkey is the only Muslim-majority country globally that has successfully integrated democracy, Islam, secularism, and modern trends. This unique formation has enabled Turkey to prevent the influence of radical Islamic groups within the country. Many nations can draw lessons from Turkey's approach.

However, some experts caution against directly adopting the Turkish model, noting that Turkey's formation as a secular republic is tied to its unique history, making it challenging to apply this model elsewhere.

Turkey and Central Asian states share several commonalities. The majority of Turkey's population and Central Asian Muslims adhere to the Hanafi school of thought. Both regions have Turkish ethnic and cultural traditions that are intertwined with Islamic values based on Sufi principles, fostering a culture of tolerance. Wahhabism and extremist groups emerged specifically in opposition to this tolerance.

One lesson from Turkey's experience is the emphasis on quality education. Every child in Turkey has the right to eight years of education, which includes secular subjects as well as Islamic history and moral values. These subjects play a role in shielding youth from radical ideologies.

Since 1924, religious affairs in Turkey have been regulated by the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), which oversees all religious activities and plays a crucial role in preventing the spread of extremist ideas in society. Diyanet ensures that all imams promote a moderate approach, and discussions inciting hatred or political agendas are not permitted in mosques.

Guided by democracy and good governance, Turkey has developed a democratic culture grounded in tolerance and moderation. By integrating Islamic parties into the democratic system, Turkey has effectively eliminated the radical path for groups like "Hizb al-Tahrir."

The broad promotion of national identity and patriotism also contributes to resilience against radical ideologies. Atatürk aimed to develop Turkey as a nation rather than an ummah (religious community), and this sense of nationalism has prevented the spread of "Hizb al-Tahrir" ideologies within Turkish society. Other countries can also combat extremist ideas by fostering a sense of nationalism and preserving their cultural heritage.

In conclusion, Turkey's experience can serve as a model in the fight against radicalism. However, each country should adapt this model to its historical, cultural, and political contexts.

Bangladesh - The experience of Bangladesh holds significant importance in ensuring ideological security against the ideas of "Hizb al-Tahrir." The spread and structure of "Hizb al-Tahrir" in Bangladesh has been a complex process, deeply influencing the country's political and social environment. "Hizb al-Tahrir" officially began its activities in Bangladesh in 2001, primarily targeting youth and students in both private and public universities.

The leaders of "Hizb al-Tahrir" in Bangladesh were mostly specialists who had returned from the United Kingdom, actively promoting Islamic political ideas among university students and the youth. They found particular resonance in private universities, especially among the elite class. These students, often educated in Western systems, showed interest in "Hizb al-Tahrir's" ideas, as discussions about "Westernization" and its perceived flaws held great significance for them.

"Hizb al-Tahrir" focused on discussing topics that were of particular interest to university students, hosting debates on issues like "The Existence of God," "Pre-Marital Relationships," "Alcohol and Drugs," and "Communism." Although these topics were considered taboo by traditional Islamic organizations, "Hizb al-Tahrir" approached them openly, creating a sense of closeness with the youth.

The Bangladesh experience reveals that "Hizb al-Tahrir" gained substantial influence among young people by opposing government corruption and close ties with foreign states. Its strategy of engaging with elite youth proved effective in filling an ideological gap among students. However, while government efforts to ban and monitor radicals yielded short-term results, the long-term impact and spread of radical ideas remain pressing issues in the country.

Indonesia's strategy against "Hizb al-Tahrir" has been grounded in the country's constitutional and democratic principles. This group, active since the 1980s, faced decisive action in 2017 when the Indonesian government officially banned the organization, declaring its activities illegal. This decision was supported by legal documentation and policies aimed at restricting the spread of extremist ideologies.

The government also emphasized raising public awareness about the dangers of radicalization through mass media and dedicated anti-extremist campaigns. These efforts involved explaining the harms of radical ideas and enhancing public awareness and understanding.

Through international collaboration, Indonesia implemented programs against radicalization, strengthening national security. By exchanging knowledge and experience on an international scale, the country's internal security system has been enhanced.

Indonesia's successful policies against "Hizb al-Tahrir" can serve as a model for other countries in combating radical ideologies. This experience demonstrates the importance of strengthening legal foundations, collaborating with religious organizations, disseminating information through education and media, and integrating international cooperation to ensure ideological security.

The United Kingdom - The experience of the United Kingdom in combating "Hizb al-Tahrir" is notable in the field of ensuring ideological security. Active in the UK since the 1980s, "Hizb al-Tahrir" has sparked numerous discussions between security services and the government regarding its threat to national security. Unlike many other countries, the UK has taken a unique approach by not directly banning the organization but rather managing it in a controlled way.

The main strategy behind not banning "Hizb al-Tahrir" is based on the Home Office's stance that, despite its radical ideas, the organization does not endorse violence. The Home Office has argued that there is no need to ban the group, instead focusing on ensuring that its activities do not escalate into violence. This approach allows the government to monitor "Hizb al-Tahrir" within legal boundaries, with the goal of preventing extremism among the youth. As part of the counter-radicalization strategy, the government emphasized monitoring rather than outright banning the organization.

UK political leaders have faced challenges in addressing the issue of "securitization" in their stance against "Hizb al-Tahrir." For instance, after the July 7, 2005, London bombings, Prime Minister Tony Blair's government considered banning the organization. However, the lack of a violent agenda led to a decision against the ban. Similarly, in 2010, David Cameron proposed the ban, but the Home Office argued that prohibiting "Hizb al-Tahrir" was not legally justifiable, leading to a reconsideration.

"Hizb al-Tahrir" has carefully operated within the UK's legal framework. Many controversial statements and materials from the organization have been removed from websites, allowing "Hizb al-Tahrir" to present itself as a non-violent entity. Media coverage portraying the organization as non-violent has made it difficult for the government to justify a ban.

By presenting itself as a non-violent yet radical movement, "Hizb al-Tahrir" has garnered approval among youth interested in joining Islamic movements. The organization has retained its standing among radical groups by opposing the UK's foreign policies. It has also engaged with civil society, enabling it to maintain influence among radicalized youth.

However, on January 15, 2024, the UK Parliament issued a decision formally banning "Hizb al-Tahrir" as a terrorist organization. According to this ruling, membership or support for the organization is now a criminal offense, punishable by up to 14 years in prison or fines. This marks a significant shift in the UK's policy towards "Hizb al-Tahrir," reflecting a stricter stance on ideological security.

Saudi Arabia's strategy against "Hizb al-Tahrir" incorporates legal, ideological, and security measures. The organization is deemed illegal in the country, with strict penalties for membership, participation, and promotion of its activities.

Saudi security services regularly monitor and arrest members of "Hizb al-Tahrir," with mass arrests in the 1980s significantly curbing the group's operations within the country. Saudi religious scholars have countered "Hizb al-Tahrir's" ideology from a Salafi perspective, aiming to undermine its religious foundations. In ideological battles, moral and scholarly debates have been held against the organization's ideas, reducing its influence.

Extensive public education and awareness campaigns through media promote a correct understanding of Islam in line with traditional religious values. These preventive measures emphasize religious traditions and correct interpretations of Islam among the population. Saudi Arabia has also collaborated internationally, working with other states and organizations to counter radical ideologies. The government's anti-radicalization policy is a crucial step in restricting the spread of radical ideas in society.

Since 2004, the Ministry of Interior has operated the Muhammad bin Nayef Rehabilitation Center, a facility dedicated to rehabilitating individuals influenced by radical ideologies. Before release, detainees undergo an 8 to 12-week social rehabilitation program, which includes education, medical, psychological, financial, legal, and social support, as well as vocational training and job placement.

Additionally, the Kingdom successfully reintegrated 147 minors who participated in combat activities in Yemen, helping them abandon radical ideologies and adapt to society.

In conclusion, the experiences of foreign countries in combating the ideology of "Hizb al-Tahrir" are based on various strategies and approaches. These experiences highlight the importance of legal measures, educational and moral propaganda, and the use of media to prevent the spread of radical ideas. Although countries like Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan have faced numerous challenges and vulnerabilities in their fight against "Hizb al-Tahrir," their responses underscore the need to learn from neighboring countries' experiences. The experiences of Indonesia and Bangladesh demonstrate success in combating radicalism through education, legal foundations, and cooperation with Islamic organizations. Meanwhile, countries like Saudi Arabia and Turkey have implemented effective measures against radical groups through their legal and ideological approaches.

It is evident that adapting strategies to combat radical ideologies according to each country's unique conditions is essential, and international experience plays a crucial role in developing these strategies.

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