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## The real face of Hizbul Tehrir

By Amir Mir  
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The shadow of militant group Hizbul Tehrir (HuT) looms large in the interrogations of Pakistan army Brigadier Ali Khan and four majors who have revealed senior military officers planned to lead a coup against the government in Islamabad in an attempt to convert the country into a pure Islamic state by reviving the *Khilafat* (caliphate) system envisaged by the al-Qaeda-linked organization.

The officers are being interrogated in the garrison town of Rawalpindi by the Special Investigation Branch of the Military Intelligence (MI) after their arrest for suspected ties to militant organizations, reinforcing fears that the Pakistan's armed forces have been infiltrated at all levels by al-Qaeda and Taliban-linked Islamic extremists.

The detained officers have conceded that they were in touch with the HuT, which had incited them to launch a rebellion against the country's military and political leadership over what they see as pro-American policies. Investigators have concluded that HuT has the same objectives as al-Qaeda - the enforcement of Islamic rule in accordance with *sharia* (Islamic laws) in Muslim-majority countries and the restoration of an Islamic caliphate.

A group of junior army officers linked to HuT had previously tried to stage a military coup against the regime of Pervez Musharraf regime in 2003 with the help of their moles in uniform. However, the plan was foiled and the plotters were court-martialed, followed by a government ban on the activities of the HuT in Pakistan. The authorities had also arrested Omar Khan, a

British-born Pakistani who was identified as the person enlisting and indoctrinating the men in uniform on behalf of the HuT.

Islamic groups and parties have been striving since the inception of Pakistan to Islamize the country in accordance with the Objective Resolution, adopted by the Constituent Assembly in 1949, which stated that Muslims living in Pakistan would be enabled to mould their lives in line with the teachings of Islam. HuT is one such Islamic group and presents itself as a global revolutionary movement with branches in over 50 countries across the globe, including the United Kingdom and the United States.

HuT claims to be a political party with Islam as its ideology. It was actually established in Jerusalem in 1953 by Shaikh Taqiul Deen al-Nabahani (1909-1977), a cleric and a judge in the sharia court. The stated goal of the HuT at that time was to establish an expansionist super-state called the *Khilafah*, initially consisting of Muslim-majority states and finally expanding to the rest of the world.

Following the May 2 killing of Osama bin Laden in an American military raid in Abbottabad, Pakistan, HuT activists had been distributing leaflets, urging army officers to rise up in revolt against their leadership.

"It is a slap in the respected officers' faces that American helicopters intruded in the dark of night and barged into a house like thieves. Remember, it could not have been possible without the acquiescence of your high officials," one such the pamphlet read.

The contention of the Pakistan chapter of the HuT is that the current rulers of Pakistan, civilian as well as military, are agents of the United States and their only agenda is to protect American interests.

The group propagates that the American and the Pakistani governments are responsible for the killing of innocent men, women and children in drone attacks and military operations which are being conducted in the tribal areas in the name of the "war on terror".

According to the manifesto of the Pakistan branch of the HuT, following the establishment of *Khilafah*, part of the second phase will be to spread the borders of the state through offensive jihad or aggressive warfare.

The HuT's focus on Pakistan was motivated by the nuclear tests carried out by the country in 1998, as the group wanted to facilitate the acquisition of nuclear technology for the *Khilafah* state. Secondly, the HuT considers Pakistan's strategic location, particularly its proximity with Muslim-majority countries including Central Asian states, suitable for implementing its agenda.

Being a proscribed organization, the HuT does not have any offices in Pakistan and its organizational affairs are mainly looked after by its office bearers from their homes. However, the problem for Pakistani agencies is that the actual leadership of the group in Pakistan remains undisclosed, even to members, due to security fears.

The Pakistan chapter of HuT was established in December 2000 when a group of British youth of Pakistani descent (headed by Imtiaz Malik and guided by British-Pakistanis Dr Abdul Wajid in Lahore and Dr Abdul Basit Shaikh in Karachi among others) decided to use Pakistan as the base camp for their movement to re-establish an Islamic caliphate.

While Imtiaz is considered the underground leader of the HuT in Pakistan, his deputy, Naveed Butt, a graduate of University of Illinois in the United States, remains the most vocal group leader in Pakistan who is assisted by two youngsters, Imran Yousafzai and Shahzad Sheikh, both British nationals of Pakistani origin.

The first national-level conference of HuT was organized in Lahore in November 2003, two-and-a-half years after it was formally launched in Pakistan. The conference was attended by over 2,000 members. Hardly three days later, the group had been banned by the Musharraf regime.

HuT's challenge to the ban in the Lahore High Court was dismissed. Another petition filed in 2006 is still pending before the Rawalpindi bench of the Lahore High Court. Since its inception in Pakistan in 2000, however, the HuT has been able to make considerable progress in recruiting dedicated members in the civil society as well as the armed forces of Pakistan.

Those investigating Brigadier Ali Khan and several other senior officers of the Pakistan army for their HuT links say despite claiming to be a non-violent political party, the HuT had a violent jihadi agenda to overthrow the government and remove the military top brass.

Investigators say the HuT leadership had actually marked Pakistan as a base from which it wanted to spread Islamic rule across the world. Pakistani intelligence sleuths responsible for monitoring HuT activities say the group is working in tandem with al-Qaeda under the garb of pan-Islamism.

They reminded that 35 HuT members were arrested in June 2009 from an Islamabad residence that was allegedly being used as a base to plan a coup. A few weeks before these arrests were made public, the Pakistan chapter of the HuT had talked about spilling blood to stage an Islamic revolution.

At the same time, Tayyab Muqem, a London-based key HuT leader, declared in July 2009 that many HuT activists had been sent to Pakistan to bring about Islamic sharia by force. He claimed that HuT had successfully converted four senior officers of Pakistan army during their training at Sandhurst elite military training academy in the United Kingdom.

According to an October 2010 report by the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies, far from being deterred, the HuT has continued efforts to infiltrate the high echelons of the Pakistan army and Pakistani social elite.

The report titled "Hizbul Tehrir in Pakistan: Discourse and Impact", quoted Shahzad Sheikh, a Karachi-based HuT leader, as saying that the group had been persuading the Pakistan army to stage a bloodless coup to overthrow the government in Islamabad.

The report observed that apart from the failure of the Pakistani intelligence establishment to weed out pro-jihadi elements in the military and intelligence establishment, another cause of concern was the continuing failure of agencies to identify the current leaders of the highly secretive HuT and its "supporters in uniform".

According to Maajid Nawaz, a former HuT member now serving as director of the United Kingdom-based think-tank Quilliam, the menace of the HuT infiltrating the Pakistani armed forces was exported from Britain: Hizbul Tehrir advocates violent overthrow of democratic states through military coups in order to enforce a single interpretation of Islam. Recruiting from the world's Muslim-majority armies is a fundamental tenet of their call. Groups such as HuT do not seek to launch a mass movement; rather they specifically target the intellectual elite and the military apparatus of the countries in which they operate.

For years, leading journalists and the intellectual elite of Pakistan have been targeted by highly educated English-speaking Islamists from Hizbul Tehrir. They have been seeking to convert prominent opinion shapers to their supremacist ideology. Once this sector is taken, a military coup can be staged by key officers sympathetic to the cause, who would in turn face minimal resistance from society. After the coup, the military would be capable of establishing the authority of Islam. Hence a coup d'état would be the manifestation of a political change, as per the HuT dream.

But the HuT's tactics to achieve its objectives differ from place to place. For instance, the group had for some time followed the "keep your ideology in your heart" strategy in the United Kingdom, without vocally or tacitly supporting any of the violent acts being carried out by militants.

But in Pakistan, the group not only accuses Pakistani and Western governments of involvement in acts of terrorism but also extends its sympathies and support to militant groups that, according to HuT, are sincerely fighting to establish Islamic rule and strongly resisting the "nefarious designs of the infidels against the Muslims of Pakistan and Afghanistan".

The HuT approach to such issues in the UK will be totally different. There, after the July 2005 London suicide attacks that killed 55 people, it increasingly disguises its support for jihad, anti-Semitic beliefs and intolerant ideologies. The London bombings were carried out by four British nationals of the Pakistani origin who were indoctrinated in the British capital by extremists belonging to al-Mohajiroun and HuT.

Still, despite being a banned organization in Pakistan, HuT members can be seen at key mosques on Fridays in Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi, openly distributing volatile literature propagating the revival of the caliphate.

Apart from organizing secretive meetings and seminars, the HuT has used text messages on cell phones and social networking sites to spread its message. An open letter dated June 3, 2011, addressed to the "sincere officers" of the Pakistani armed forces, and posted on the website of the Pakistan chapter of the HuT ([www.hizb-pakistan.com](http://www.hizb-pakistan.com)), called for removal of the "traitors"

among the civilian and military leadership of the country for their alliance with the United States.

The letter, titled "O Muslims! Deliver this letter to all the sincere ones whom you know in Pakistan's armed forces", accused Pakistani rulers of bowing before the US and India. The letter was published simultaneously in English and Urdu on the HuT website. It read:

You are currently leading the largest and most capable Muslim armed forces in the world. The Muslim armed forces alone have the material strength to establish the *Khilafah*. As such, you are duty bound to establish an Islamic state in Madinah [the Saudi city]. You must move now to uproot Pakistan's traitor rulers. For even though the weaknesses of America and India are more evident than ever before, Pakistan's traitor rulers are racing to extend support to them, using the considerable resources of the Muslims to do so ...

The traitor rulers are allying with the infidels, as if this was the source of strength and well-being for the Muslims. In reality, their alliance with the infidels is a source of fragility, weakness, despair and humiliation. Allah said, "The tale of those who seek allies other than Allah is that of a spider who builds a house; but indeed, the weakest of houses is the spider's house - if they but knew." (Surah al-Ankaboot 29:41).