Ḥizb Al-Taḥrīr's Radicalization Strategy and Countermeasures

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Abstract: This article analyzes the concept of radicalization and its impact on socio-political life. Using the example of the Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr organization, it examines the characteristics of the radicalization process, its initial stages, the indoctrination process, and the methods used to incline group members toward new ways of thinking. The article emphasizes the importance of counter-radicalization measures in the Republic of Uzbekistan and other countries, contributing to a deeper understanding of the radicalization process within terrorist organizations like Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr.

Keywords: radicalization, Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr, indoctrination, cell system, extremism, youth radicalization, religious fundamentalism.

Today, extremist and international terrorist organizations, under the guise of religious beliefs, continue to incite youth toward violence and encourage them to abandon their national identity, cultural, educational, and family values. This approach aims to spread violence and radical views within society. Radicalization refers to an individual's desire to fundamentally and completely change the current state within a specific area of socio-political life [1].

This term has been defined differently across various countries and sectors. For example, the Russian Federation's strategy against extremism defines radicalization as "a strong commitment to extremist ideology that facilitates actions aimed at forcibly changing the constitutional order and undermining state integrity." In the U.S. correctional system, radicalization is described as "the process by which individuals adopt extremist views, coming to believe that violent methods are necessary to achieve military, religious, or political objectives."

Religious radicalism is understood as the process in which an individual's religious beliefs shift from moderation toward extremism under the influence of fundamentalist ideas. Consequently, in recent years, "counter-radicalization" programs aimed at disengaging individuals and groups from extremism have become a significant focus for the international community.

In his work "Indoctrination and Rationality – Philosophical Essays," John Wilson demonstrates an intriguing difference between belief and behavior in the context of radicalization. He argues that radicalization is associated with beliefs, whereas coercion is linked to behavior. This conclusion is particularly relevant to Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr's radicalization process, as new members freely join and actively agree to participate in the radicalization process.

Radicalization as a process is not easily understood. There are numerous ways to describe the topic of radicalization, with social psychology often serving as the starting point. As Lewis Rambo, author of the Encyclopedia of Religions, points out, the process of radicalization brings about two major changes in an individual: a fundamental transformation in all aspects of life and a new sense of understanding regarding the well-being of others. The process of religious fundamentalism can also lead to similar results — namely, a profound change within the individual. However, there is a distinction between these two processes, as radicalization and religious fundamentalism reshape individuals in different ways [2, p. 116].

This article presents research aimed at explaining the process of radicalization and identifying the influence of the Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr group on this process. The article defines radicalization as a process of fundamentally transforming an individual's socio-political views and analyzes the various factors that

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contribute to it. It outlines how extremist groups like Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr use specific materials and beliefs to reshape the perspectives of young people.

The research methods primarily include social psychology, cognitive theories, and an analysis of indoctrination processes. To understand the impact of Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr's ideology on individuals, attention is given to the teaching and indoctrination processes within small groups known as "Ḥalaqahs." The article describes the different stages of radicalization (i.e., absorbing new ideas, aligning individuals with a general ideological worldview, and forming a "party identity").

Despite the wealth of new information gathered about Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr members and their activities, understanding exactly how radicalization occurs remains challenging, as it is a complex process that doesn't follow a straightforward path. Therefore, it is essential to first define the concept of radicalization, as understanding it is crucial before diving deeper into the subject.

Using the term " Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr radicalization" is appropriate, as this process is largely a collective phenomenon involving two main participants: the group and the new member. In this article, Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr radicalization is divided into three main stages:

Creating a New Perspective Based on Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr Ideology: This involves a profound transformation in thinking, deeply rooted in the radicalization process within Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr. This stage encourages individuals to adopt a new worldview aligned with the group's ideology. According to social cognitive theory, an individual's behavior is shaped by internal emotions and environmental influences. Social psychologists have long been interested in understanding how significant cognitive and motivational changes occur among group members [3, p. 39].

A conducive environment for developing a new way of thinking exists within radical groups, as members are willing to adapt to the group's demands. During this process, a strong bond forms between the individual and the group, which helps Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr shape the views of its members.

Internalizing the Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr Worldview: This involves integrating the group's concepts and behaviors into one's self-identity, embedding external ideas into the internal world. Under the influence of the group, this internal world becomes strong, placing constraints on behavior and actively reshaping one's view of the external world. In other words, as a new member joins Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr, their perception of others shifts to align with the organization's views, enabling them to absorb the collective ideology of Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr. This process of adopting ideas and beliefs is achieved actively through acculturation, reshaping character and fostering loyalty to the group.

Forming a "Ḥizbī Identity" (i.e., creating a collective identity unique to the group) is a critical stage in Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr's radicalization process. This stage ensures that the individual is fully integrated into the group and plays an essential role in developing a new cognitive and behavioral disposition, especially when the group is seen as the sole interpreter of radical ideology. Within the group environment, new members are indoctrinated to think in alignment with the group's viewpoint. This shift is expressed in a novel way of perceiving the social world, which may contradict existing conventions [4, pp. 17-18].

Creating radicals requires identifying discontented youth during their socialization process, as these individuals often exhibit greater motivation toward Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr's ideology [5, pp. 14-17]. If socialization is an integral part of personality development, what impact does problematic socialization have? According to Bakrī, the issue of racism is exploited to target young people who have experienced it during childhood; their psychological pain is then used as a tool for radicalization later in life.

The "Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr" organization attempts to attract young Muslims facing social issues. These youth, dealing with challenges such as racism and intercultural conflicts, often seek a strong and accepting community. "Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr" offers these young individuals a new identity and purpose. Through strict rules, control, and task assignments, the organization limits new members' ability to fully understand activities and think independently.

The "Ḥalaqah" method within the organization is designed for educating and instilling its ideas in new members. These groups are small and closed, with participants regularly studying the organization's ideology. The "Ḥalaqah" is considered the core of radicalization for the organization, as it provides an environment where new members, isolated from external influences, fully embrace the ideas of Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr.

Before joining the "Ḥalaqah," new members generally have their own views on society and life. However, once they are part of the Ḥalaqa and surrounded by other members, their previous perspectives begin to shift and adapt to Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr's ideological stance. As noted by J. Wilson in *"Concepts of Indoctrination: Philosophical Essays,"* beliefs instilled by high-ranking individuals can alter a person's cognitive processes, thereby intensifying the radicalization process.

In D. Winn's book, *"The Manipulated Mind: Manipulation, Conditioning, and Indoctrination,"* he points out that new members may be unaware of the actual objectives of the Ḥalaqah. Due to manipulation, they might lose their critical thinking abilities and may not fully comprehend the true goals and activities of the group. However, in practice, many new members voluntarily join the Ḥalaqa process, which highlights the complexity of indoctrination. Although they may sometimes lack full awareness of the group's objectives and methods, they willingly enter this process and eventually accept the group's ideas. This situation depends on the extent to which new members are deeply integrated into the group's goals and how these align with their personal beliefs [6, p. 4].

In R. Lifton's book, *"Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of Brainwashing in China,"* he suggests that manipulation is not a powerful method that achieves "complete control over the human mind" necessary for total transformation. This indicates that manipulation may not accurately describe the Ḥalaqa process; the goal of the Ḥalaqa is not to create "mindless automatons" but rather to cultivate individuals with strong, ideologically solid beliefs [7, pp. 38-39]. This means they aim to reshape new members according to Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr's ideology, aligning their thoughts and behaviors with this perspective. In this process, the goal is to develop individuals who are not mere executors of orders but can independently defend and develop these ideas [8, p. 4].

In the early 1980s, ʿUmar Bakrī established the first Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr "Ḥalaqas" in the United Kingdom. Through these Ḥalaqas, he aimed to ideologically transform new members, instilling in them the organization's ideas and behaviors and fostering deep, critical thinking. These Ḥalaqas served as a primary mechanism for reinforcing and spreading Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr's core ideas. ʿUmar Bakrī maintained strict oversight over the Ḥalaqa process, ensuring its effectiveness. The main objective of the Ḥalaqa was to align new members with Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr's ideology and indoctrinate them. As the chief instructor, ʿUmar Bakrī placed significant emphasis on developing the loyalty and character of new members, as the organization's activities depended on their dedication [9, pp. 102-117].

The Ḥalaqa is a vital element of Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr, as it is the primary means for shaping "Ḥizbī identities." According to ʿUmar Bakrī, if a Ḥalaqa is poorly organized, the acculturation process suffers. Consequently, he developed various preventative measures to safeguard the integrity of the Ḥalaqa process.

As the first stage of acceptance, new members are provided with a general understanding of the party's culture, which is accomplished through four main guidelines. These guidelines prepare new members for entry into the Ḥalaqah. It is essential to distinguish between understanding and belief, as belief is developed through long-term study and deep radicalization within the Ḥalaqah. A general understanding, however, refers to the initial auxiliary ideas that are accepted at the start [10, p. 43].

The initial guidelines required for entry into the Ḥalaqa include: The new member must accept Islam as a comprehensive way of life that addresses all temporal and spiritual issues.

The new member is required to follow Sharia law in all areas of life, especially in the establishment of the Caliphate. The new member must recognize the establishment of the Caliphate as a political movement.

The new member will not be accepted until they acknowledge Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr as the only party correctly organizing Islam. Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr views Islam as both a religious and political ideology, asserting that sovereignty belongs solely to God. ʿUmar Bakrī paid close attention to each Ḥalaqa and required mentors to adopt a "father figure" role with new members. The Ḥalaqa initiates the process of transforming members' ideological perspectives and shaping their "Ḥizbī identity" [10, p. 43]. New members, having grown up in a secular environment, have encountered various non-Islamic standards. Western ideological perspectives have often influenced their actions. These ideological perceptions from the West can affect the views and behaviors of new members in various ways. For example, these ideological perceptions may include:

Highlights intercultural differences: Western values such as freedom, individualism, and democracy may contrast with the new member's previous way of thinking. This can prompt them to reassess their perspectives on the Islamic ideological concepts covered in Ḥalaqa programs.

Alters social relations: The social and cultural environment of the West, with its distinct approaches to issues like gender equality and civil rights, presents new challenges. This may create a sense of internal conflict for the new member, who must choose between previously held values and the new teachings. Broadens worldview: Western concepts, especially in science and philosophy, can introduce the new member to a broader perspective. This, in turn, affects how they perceive the religious and ideological content studied in the Ḥalaqa [11, pp. 11-14].

These influences shape the cognitive and emotional responses of new members as they adapt to the ideological framework of Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr. Therefore, the first stage of the Ḥalaqa focuses on studying the book "The Islamic System." Specifically, the first chapter covers issues of faith, while the second chapter addresses the topics of fate and predestination. These two chapters serve to establish a new ideological foundation, thoroughly reshaping and motivating the new member.

The intellectual topics within the Ḥalaqa help foster a sense of collective radicalization. Unlike peer discussions, the Ḥalaqa deeply embeds ideological content into new members. As one member put it: "The Ḥalaqa is a construction process… incorrect ideas are eliminated, and correct ideas are built." This indicates that the purpose of the Ḥalaqa is to radicalize the individual. Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr activists I spoke with opposed my use of the term "radicalization," as they felt it implied doubt about their rationality [12, pp. 359-68].

In her book *The Psychology of Political Terrorism,* Martha Crenshaw suggests that both rational and non-rational methods can be applied to explain radicalization. This implies that radical transformations are not solely based on logical concepts but are also tied to human perceptions and emotions. Crenshaw notes that within the radicalization process, the Ḥalaqa leader (group leader or instructor) tightly controls the discussion. This control turns the Ḥalaqa into a highly regulated and unique social environment, creating an artificial, non-natural social atmosphere where radical ideas are internalized and reinforced [13, pp. 111-113].

In the "continuation" stage of the radicalization process, interactions outside the Ḥalaqa are required to deepen the influence on new members. In the 1980s, ʿUmar Bakrī realized the importance of observing new members outside the two-hour Ḥalaqa meetings to intensify their indoctrination. Instructors would engage with new members beyond the Ḥalaqah, monitoring how they were applying Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr's ideas in their lives. During this period, instructors were especially expected to spend more time with new members, as they needed to provide thorough explanations of religious beliefs and ideas. The primary focus of this stage was to turn the Ḥalaqa into a unified and cohesive community [14, p. 19].

Through social and ideological support, new members are encouraged to engage deeply in the socialization process within a peer group environment. In this process, new members gradually internalize Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr's ideas and remain loyal to them. Observations show that new members actively interact with their peer group, strengthening their ties within the group. A collective "spirit" is created within the group, which fosters a sense of community, ensuring that the radicalization process remains long-term and impactful. Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr's ideology becomes "significant in the individual's life," instilling a new cognitive worldview. This perspective cultivates loyalty to Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr, to the

extent that members can no longer envision life outside the organization. Radicalization is not solely an individual process but exists within the context of group influence [15, p. 216].

Through the Ḥalaqah, Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr educates new members with a specific ideological worldview, shaping how they perceive and respond to the social world. Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr presents this activity as an intellectual pursuit, but as a political movement, it aims to bring about social changes, which requires ideologically prepared activists. The Ḥalaqa serves as the central means of instilling Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr's ideology. As noted in Passmore's *Concepts of Indoctrination: Philosophical Essays,* radicalization is a form of "specialized instruction," which, in the case of Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr, means "embedding" the ideology in new members.

In conclusion, this research article provides a comprehensive analysis of the radicalization process and its influence on socio-political life. Through examining the Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr organization, the article sheds light on the early stages of radicalization, the indoctrination process, and the mechanisms by which group members are reshaped to adopt new ways of thinking aligned with the group's ideology.

The research findings outline the primary stages of radicalization: the development of new ideological perspectives, the embedding of group ideology within the individual, and the establishment of a "Ḥizbī identity." The process begins with exposing new members to ideas that fundamentally alter their view of society and religion. These ideas are then deeply internalized through a structured indoctrination process within the "Ḥalaqa," where individuals are gradually detached from previous beliefs and brought into alignment with the group's objectives. Over time, this creates a new identity rooted in loyalty to Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr, with members adopting a worldview that often isolates them from mainstream society and strengthens their commitment to the group's cause.

The article also emphasizes the pressing need for counter-radicalization efforts. Recognizing the long-term effects of radical ideologies on individuals and societies, it advocates for proactive measures to counteract extremist narratives. Strengthening preventive measures through education, awareness campaigns, and community engagement is essential to reducing the appeal of extremist ideologies. By fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the stages and mechanisms of radicalization, this research contributes to building a scientific foundation for developing strategies that protect youth from influences that can harm their social and psychological well-being. The findings underscore the importance of sustained efforts to safeguard young minds from ideological manipulation, providing insights that can support policy-makers, educators, and community leaders in crafting effective interventions.

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