

The Failure of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia's Strategy in Establishing *Khilafah*: Advice for the Government Policies

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to analyze the shortcomings of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia's strategy in establishing an Islamic caliphate within the country. This research employs a qualitative approach through content analysis and field studies, which include interviews with prominent figures associated with Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) activities. The findings indicate that while HTI executed all phases of their strategy, they ultimately failed to establish a caliphate in Indonesia, concomitant with their decline in presence within the nation. This failure can be attributed to the significant rejection of the caliphate concept by the majority of Islamic community organizations in Indonesia. Furthermore, HTI's strategy exhibited a lack of depth, as evidenced by a conceptual inconsistency between their approach and divine promises. This research opens avenues for future inquiries into HTI's physical political movements and their systemic implications. Additionally, it elucidates the manner in which HTI implemented each stage of their strategy and provides insights into the reasons behind their inability to establish the caliphate. The study aims to enhance public awareness regarding the strategies employed by Islamic political groups operating in Indonesia. From a social perspective, the findings serve as reference material for political policies in Indonesia, particularly concerning transnational ideologies that have gained traction in recent decades. Previous studies have failed to adequately explore the execution and outcomes associated with HTI's strategic implementation; this study specifically addresses the deficiencies in HTI's strategy execution.

Keywords: HTI, Hizbut Tahrir, caliphate, Indonesia, strategy

Introduction

Hizbut Tahrir (HT) was established by Taqiyuddin an-Nabhani in al-Quds Palestine in 1953. An-Nabhani was formerly an activist of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) but then quit because he thought that MB was "too moderate and too accommodating of the West".¹ HT uses Islam as their organizational label and claims them as being on the right path in awakening the Muslim community (*ummah*). HT also offers a critique of existing Islamic organizations, asserting that their presence has not yielded any advantages for the *ummah*. According to HT, these so-called 'Islamic' organizations were deliberately established by colonial powers.²

In Indonesia, the Indonesian Hizb ut-Tahrir (HTI) is an organization that shares similarities with the National Islamic Army (NII), which has been banned in the country.³ HTI not only critiques existing Islamic organizations but also expresses disapproval of Indonesian political parties. The organization posits that these parties engage in pragmatic politics, which it attributes to the influences of capitalism. Within the context of Indonesian politics, several Islamic political parties have formed coalitions with secular parties; an example of this is the alliance between the Partai Bulan Bintang and Partai Demokrat. Consequently, the performance of Indonesian Islamic political parties appears to parallel that of their secular counterparts. It is noteworthy that HTI has garnered support from various Islamic parties.⁴

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¹ Ihsan Yilmaz (2010), "The Varied Performance of Hizb ut-Tahrir: Success in Britain and Uzbekistan and Stalemate in Egypt and Turkey," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 30, no. 4 (2020): 501-06.

² Taqiyuddin an-Nabhani, *Al-Takattul al-Hizbi*, (No place of publication: Hizb al-Tahrir, 2001), 17-18. Taqiyuddin an-Nabhani, *Pembentukan Partai Politik Islam* transl. Zakaria, Labib, (Bogor: Pustaka Thariqul Izzah, (2002), 20-21.

³ Azizah, et al, "Pursuing Ideological Passion in Islamic Radical Group's Insurgency: a case study of Negara Islam Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 13, no. 1 (2023): 14.

⁴ Ali Maksum et al, "Islamic Movements in Indonesia: A Critical Study of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia and Jaringan Islam Liberal," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun*, 17, no. 2 (2022): 74.

Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) positions itself as a premier option for Indonesian Muslims due to its commitment to advocating for the establishment of Islamic law and a caliphate, distinguishing itself from other Islamic parties (Al-Waie, 2008). HTI asserts that it embodies the authentic Islamic party capable of mobilizing the Muslim community and effectuating positive change in Indonesia. However, on 19 July 2017, the Indonesian government dissolved HTI by revoking the organization's legal entity status through the Ministry of Law and Human Rights. Despite this official dissolution, there are ongoing indications that former HTI activists are actively working to disseminate their ideology within Islamic communities, despite government prohibitions against such activities.⁵

In their endeavor to establish a caliphate, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) has devised several strategic plans for implementation. However, existing research concerning these strategies and their execution in Indonesia remains limited and lacking in depth. Generally, the available studies are predominantly brief, descriptive in nature, and devoid of critical analysis, providing only a superficial account of HTI's strategic approach. For instance, a study titled "Reviving the Caliphate in the Nusantara: Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia's Mobilization Strategy and Its Impact in Indonesia" merely offers a cursory overview of the three phases of HTI's strategy, conveyed succinctly within a single page.⁶ The text highlights that the process comprises three distinct stages: the culturing stage, the interaction stage, and the implementation of rules and power. Additionally, various studies have addressed the three-stage strategy but have not provided a comprehensive examination of its execution at each stage.⁷

The *halaqah*, or Islamic study circle, functions as a component of the strategic framework employed by HTI. It is important to note that HTI engages in covert operations to further its agenda.⁸ The *halaqah* serves a significant function in reinforcing An-Nabhani's doctrines. Through this process, educated young Muslims often experience a sense of 'rebirth', discovering their identity as adherents of Islam-kaffah and attaining religious certainty within Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI). In another study, HTI's strategic approach is summarized, yet it lacks a detailed explanation of the various stages of this strategy and the specific actions undertaken at each stage. This omission arises from the study's primary focus on the process of joining the organization, encompassing cognitive openness, religious seeking, and socialization.

Moreover, certain studies have exhibited inaccuracies and misplacements regarding the stages within the strategy. The stage of *kifāh siyāsī* distinguishes between ideology and strategy. The ideology, or *mabda'*, is subdivided into two components: thought (*fikrah*) and strategy (*thariqah*). Additionally, inaccuracies are also evident in Salim's analysis, further highlighting the need for clarity in these discussions.⁹ Salim contended that the final phase of the HTI strategy, referred to as the third phase, is characterized by escalation, which encompasses mass demonstrations and other forms of collective action. However, it is important to note that this phase is, in fact, representative of the second stage of the strategy.

The existing literature has not adequately addressed the implementation processes and the outcomes associated with this strategy. Additionally, there has been a lack of analysis regarding the reasons for the strategy's failure, which will be the focal point of the current study. This study elucidates how HTI executed each phase of the strategy and provides an explanation for their inability to establish the caliphate. This article further supports prior research that examines extremist movements in Indonesia.¹⁰

Methodology

This study employed qualitative research methodologies, primarily focusing on library-based investigations complemented by expert interviews. The categorization of library data was delineated

⁵ Zulkifli, "Struggling For Islamic Caliphate in a Changing Malay Society", *Ulumuna* 28, no. 1 (2024): 225.

⁶ Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman, *Reviving the Caliphate in the Nusantara: Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia's Mobilization Strategy and Its Impact in Indonesia*, (Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2009), 2.

⁷ Ken Ward, "Non-violent extremists? Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia", *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 63, no. 2 (2009):155-157. Masdar Hilmy, "Akar-Akar Transnasionalisme Islam Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI)", *Islamica* 6, no. 1 (2011), 10. Burhanuddin Muhtadi, "The Quest for Hizbut Tahrir in Indonesia", *Asian Journal of Social Science* 37, (2009), 630.

⁸ Syamsul Rijal, (2022). The Origins of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia: Global and Local Interactions. *Islamic Studies Review* 1, no. 1 (2022): 111.

⁹ Masdar Hilmy, *Islamism and Democracy in Indonesia, Piety and Pragmatism* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asia Studies, 2010), 110.

¹⁰ Alviaan. How Extremist Movements Delegitimise Religious Moderation Campaigns: A Case of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (2018-2022). *Perspectives on Terrorism* 17. No. 3(2023): 24. In this article shows that HTI's narrative against religious moderation campaigns seems to have two functions, attacking confidence in democracy and provoking the public to oppose the moderation.

into primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained from various materials, including books, magazines, booklets, and online resources published by HTI, as well as insights garnered from interviews with prominent national figures associated with HTI. In contrast, secondary data were derived from external writings on the subject.

Following data collection, thorough analysis was conducted to elucidate HTI's strategies, their modes of implementation, and the reasons behind their failure to establish a caliphate. The findings of the data classification and analysis specifically concentrated on the strategic approach, implementation efforts, and the unsuccessful outcomes experienced by HTI in their quest for establishing a caliphate. This analysis drew upon principles of critical analysis and was further contextualized through the perspectives of esteemed Muslim scholars, including Thomas Carlyle, Azyumardi Azra, Jalaluddin Rahmat, and Graham E. Fuller, with respect to Islamic systems and political frameworks.

Result and Discussion

The Implementation of the Strategy in Establishing Caliphate in Indonesia

According to HTI, Islamic teachings are divided into two: *fikrah* and *tarîqah*. *Fikrah* is an Islamic *aqîdah* (creed) that serves to solve human problems. *Tarîqah* is Islamic law that describes how the solutions for human problems shall be implemented, how *aqîdah* shall be maintained, and how *da'wah* shall be performed.¹¹ HT then concludes that it is not permissible for Muslims to focus only on the aspect of *fikrah* because belief (*iman*) in *tarîqah* has equal value with the belief in *fikrah*.¹²

In terms of *tarîqah*, HT concludes that there are three stages (*marhalah*) to undertake to establish a caliphate. The first is the stage of *thaqafah* (education); the second is the stage of *tafaul* (interacting with *ummah*); and the third is the stage of *istilamul hukmi* (taking over the government through the support of the *ummah*).¹³

The initial stage of the movement can be traced back to 1953, when it was founded by An-Nabhani. He engaged with individuals on a personal level to articulate his views concerning *fikrah* and *tarîqah*. A similar approach was subsequently adopted by Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI). Individuals expressing interest in HTI were invited to participate in regular small-group discussions, referred to as *halaqah*. Trained participants in these discussions were then tasked with conducting *dawah* to the *ummah*.¹⁴

The objective of the initial stage is to identify potential recruits to join Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), referred to as *halaqah amm* (beginner participants of the *halaqah*). Following a period of several months, or as recommended by the *mushrif* (teacher of the *halaqah*), participants may advance to the status of *dârisîn* (intermediate participants of the *halaqah*). Upon completion of a probationary period of approximately three years, during which they demonstrate their loyalty and mastery of the relevant aspects of *thaqafah*, these individuals may either voluntarily apply or be considered for membership as *hizbiyyin*.

To become *hizbiyyin* (official members of HT), individuals are required to make a pledge known as *qasam*, rather than an oath called *baiat*. HT differentiates between these two concepts; *baiat* pertains to the pledge of allegiance from the Muslim community to the caliph, while *qasam* refers specifically to the allegiance pledge made by new official members of HT to the leaders of HT (referred to as *qiyadah*).

This stage seeks to emulate the methodology of the Prophet Muhammad, who, for approximately three years, individually invited his close companions to convert to Islam in a discreet manner, providing teachings in private settings. The subsequent stage, known as *marhalah*, involves engaging with a broader audience (*tafaul*) to enhance awareness and disseminate HT's principles regarding the establishment of a caliphate. This phase encompasses several essential activities as part of *tarîqah*, including *al-thaqâfah al-murakkazah* (intensive training), *al-thaqâfah al-jamâiyyah* (introducing and publicly promoting the HT ideology), *al-sirâ al-fikrî* (upheaval of thoughts), *al-kifâh al-siyâsî* (political

¹¹ Taqiyuddin an-Nabhani, *Mafahim Hizbut Tahrir* (mu'tamadah, ed), terj. Abdullah (Jakarta: Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, 2004), 98-100. Taqiyuddin an-Nabhani, *Mafahim Hizb al-Tahrir* (Tt: Hizb al-Tahrir, 2001), 57-58.

¹² Taqiyuddin an-Nabhani, *Al-Ta'fîr* (Tt: Hizb al-Tahrir, 1973), pp.90-94. Taqiyuddin an-Nabhani, *Mafahim Hizb al-Tahrir* (2001), 55-57.

¹³ Taqiyuddin an-Nabhani, *Pembentukan Partai Politik Islam*, 48-49. Taqiyuddin an-Nabhani, *al-Takattul al-Hizbi*, (Tt: Hizb al-Tahrir, 2001), 37-55.

¹⁴ Hizbut Tahrir, *Mengenal Hizbut Tahrir, Partai Politik Islam Ideologis*, terj. Abu Afif (Bogor: Pustaka Thariqul Izzah, 2002), 34-35.

struggle), *tabannî masâlih al-ummah* (identifying benefits for the community), and *talab al-nusrah* (seeking support).¹⁵

Al-Thaqâfah al-Murakkazah refers to a comprehensive training program designed for members of Hizbiyyin and Dârisîn. This program aims to ensure the continued presence of the HT party and to cultivate dedicated followers who are prepared to engage actively in both ideological and political struggles. This stage involves training personnel to cultivate both militancy and persistence. Recognizing that they are ordinary human beings, HT also offers teachings that provide encouragement for cadres experiencing feelings of depression or stress. In addition, HT emphasizes the importance of instilling values of sincerity and patience among its cadres.¹⁶ Such training fosters resilience and loyalty to HTI among the personnel.

Al-thaqâfah al-jamâiyyah refers to the dissemination of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia's (HTI) ideology to the wider public. While discussion serves as one medium for spreading the concept of a caliphate, HTI also engages in the distribution of literature, including books and leaflets. These materials are disseminated in various venues such as mosques, university campuses, and other public locations (Hizbut Tahrir, 2009). In relation to *al-thaqâfah al-jamâiyyah*, HTI frequently organizes seminars aimed at promoting their ideological perspectives. Prominent figures within HTI, including Ismail Yusanto, M. Al Khatthath, and Hary Moekti, are often invited to serve as keynote speakers.

Al-sirâal-fikrî denotes the agitation of thoughts, a form of propaganda intended to challenge and undermine beliefs that conflict with HTI's ideology. This concept aligns with Gramsci's notion of a counter-hegemonic project which seeks to contest bourgeois ideologies.¹⁷ In the context of Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), the concept of *al-sirâal-fikrî* is of paramount importance, as it effectively delineates the relationship between the ummah and the rulers by positing that the rulers lack moral integrity. HT appears to draw upon Rosa Luxemburg's theory of spontaneity, asserting that in order to instigate a revolution, it is sufficient to instill in the public the understanding that the existing situation is fundamentally flawed. Through this awareness, individuals will naturally be inspired to awaken and take action.¹⁸ In a similar manner, HT employed the theory of revolution by establishing a disparity between public expectations and actual outcomes to catalyze revolutionary change. The larger the discrepancy between what the populace anticipates and the prevailing reality, the more imminent the likelihood of revolution becomes.¹⁹

In *al-sirâ 'al-fikrî*, it is posited that erroneous, deceitful, and inappropriate beliefs, thoughts, regulations, and constitutions are prevalent within the ummah.²⁰ This type of exposure seeks to liberate the ummah. Activists affiliated with Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) have engaged in extensive propaganda efforts through diverse mediums, including newspapers, bulletins, magazines, books, and social media. Common themes that are highlighted and fundamentally rejected by HTI encompass capitalism, secularism, democracy, human rights, liberalism, and nationalism. Illustrative examples of their propaganda are evident in the cover stories of Al-Wa'ie Magazine, such as "Capitalism Has Fallen" (August 2008), "Caliphate is One Step Away" (November 2008), "Choosing a Secular Leader is Haram!" (April 2009), and "Democracy is a Kufr System" (June 2009).

In terms of *al-kifâh al-siyâsî* (the political struggle), HTI has endeavored to resist the colonization of the economy, politics, military, and culture by foreign powers in Muslim nations. To support this strategy, HTI activists have engaged with the House of Representatives (DPR) and other governmental institutions, utilizing both formal correspondence and direct visits. This engagement is evidenced by the back cover of Al-Wa'ie Magazine (September 2008), which depicted the visit of HTI leaders to the Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs and the House of Representatives Commission I. Additionally, Al-Wa'ie (November 2011) documented a visit by an HTI delegation to

¹⁵ Hizb ut-Tahrir, *Manhaj Hizb al-Tahrir fi al-Taghyir*, (2009), 58.

¹⁶ Hizb ut-Tahrir, *Manhaj Hizb al-Tahrir fi al-Taghyir*, (2009), 43. Delegasi Hizbut Tahrir, *Strategi Dakwah Hizbut Tahrir*, pp58-59. Hizbut Tahrir, *Mengenal Hizbut Tahrir: Partai Politik Islam Ideologis*, 36-37. Mahmud 'Abd al-Latif 'Uwaydah, *Haml al-Da'wah al-Islamiyyah, Wajibat wa Sifat* (Dar al-Ummah, 1996), 92-100. Hizb ut-Tahrir, *Min Muqawwamat al-nafsiyyah al-Islamiyyah* (Dar al-Ummah, 1998), 188.

¹⁷ Patrick Dunleavy dan Brendan O'Leary, *Theories of the State, The Politics of Liberal Democracy*, (Sage Publishing, 1987), 233.

¹⁸ Al-Chaidar, *Pemilu 1999 Pertarungan Ideologis Partai-Partai Islam Versus Partai-Partai Sekuler* (Darul Falah, 1999), p.201.

¹⁹ Rod Hague & Martin Harrop, *Comparative Government and Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 138.

²⁰ Hizb ut-Tahrir, *Manhaj Hizb al-Tahrir fi al-Taghyir* (2009), 43. Delegasi Hizbut Tahrir, *Strategi Dakwah Hizbut Tahrir*, 59. Hizbut Tahrir, *Mengenal Hizbut Tahrir: Partai Politik Islam Ideologis*, 37.

the Commissioner of the National Commission on Human Rights, while Al-Wa'ie (November 2007) reported their participation at the invitation of significant political figures, including the Chairman of the People's Consultative Assembly, the head of the Constitutional Court, the State Secretary, and the Minister of Industry.

Al-kifâh al-siyâsî has also manifested through tahrîk jamâhirî (mass mobilization), exemplified by various mass demonstrations conducted across Indonesian cities. These events have been extensively documented in the Al-Islam bulletin, Al-Wa'ie Magazine, and social media platforms. For instance, the back cover of Al-Wa'ie Magazine (April 2006) featured images of demonstrations calling for the withdrawal of American forces from Iraq, Afghanistan, and other Muslim territories while advocating for the restoration of the Islamic caliphate. Similarly, Al-Wa'ie (December 2010) highlighted protests opposing President Obama's visit to Indonesia.

HTI has not only pursued political engagement with leaders of the Constitutional Court, ministers, and members of the House of Representatives but also issued an open letter to President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in 2005, urging him to establish a caliphate. In the same year, a pocketbook was published to encourage Muslims, particularly military personnel, to work toward the establishment of a caliphate (Hizbut Tahrir, 2005). In 2011, Al-Wa'ie Magazine (2011) called upon influential figures, including Muslim generals and military officers, to collaborate with HTI in the pursuit of establishing a caliphate.

Within the framework of *al-kifâh al-siyâsî*, an activity known as *tabannî masâlih al-ummah*, or establishing the benefit of the ummah, is undertaken. The objective of this initiative is to raise public awareness regarding the rights of the ummah that should be secured but have been denied by those in power. The topics addressed are often specific and focused, including areas such as fuel, electricity, pornography, food, and others. Illustrative examples of *tabannî masâlih al-ummah* can be found in the cover stories of Al-Wa'ie Magazine, such as "Crisis in Oil Field" (April 2006), "Questioning Expensive Electricity" (March 2008), and "The Robbery of State Property" (April 2008).

The activities associated with *al-kifâh al-siyâsî* are characterized by a critical approach toward the existing authorities, aimed at undermining their core functions and diminishing their influence. This strategy seeks to enlighten the populace, encouraging them to question established power structures, ultimately striving toward their deconstruction.²¹ Indeed, opposition to rulers, imperialist *kafir* countries, and other political groups must be done openly, not just play-acting, not licking the boots, but attacking and challenging.²² HT maintains a firm stance against accommodating the prevailing regimes, asserting that the systems they implement represent a *kufr* framework that must be replaced with an Islamic governance model.²³ This harsh and open criticism model was evidenced when Gus Dur became the President. HTI bulletin "Al-Islam" edition 31, wrote, "Thus Gus Dur's greatest deviation was not meeting Tommy Soeharto..... The greatest sin is not applying the Islamic legal system in all aspects of public life."

According to HT, all such activities are confined to nonviolent political endeavors that do not involve the use of weapons. This perspective aligns with Gramsci's assertion that revolution does not necessarily entail direct confrontation; rather, it can be understood as an intellectual maneuver. This model of intellectual warfare has also been observed to bear similarities to the Bolshevik approach.²⁴

There appears to be a deviation from the previously established nonviolent approach. The conflict in Syria demonstrated that numerous activists associated with HT engaged in direct combat against Bashar al-Assad's forces. This acknowledgment was made by the spokesman for HTI during a press conference at the Caliphate Congress held at the Gelora Bung Karno stadium, albeit accompanied by a rationale, "Personally, HT members are involved in *jihad* in Syria because it is *fardhu ain* (mandatory) to do *jihad* for a person when attacked".²⁵

²¹ Taqiyuddin an-Nabhani, *Terjun ke Masyarakat* translated by Abu Falah. (Pustaka Thariqul Izah, 2009), 24.

²² Hizbut Tahrir, *Mengenal Hizbut Tahrir: Partai Politik Islam Ideologis*, (Pustaka Thariqul Izzah, 2009), 39.

²³ Hizb ut-Tahrir, *Manhaj Hizb al-Tahrir fi al-Taghyir*, (2009), 38.

²⁴ Zeyno Baran, *Hizb ut-Tahrir: Islam's Political Insurgency* (Washington: The Nixon Center, 2004), 24

²⁵ Yusanto, Global Muslim. March 3, 2018. <http://www.globalmuslim.web.id/2013/06/ismail-yusanto-an2ggota-hizbut-tahrir.html>

From the perspective of the Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), achieving comprehensive change through parliamentary elections is deemed unfeasible. The members of the parliament in Indonesia are perceived to be entrenched in secularism and capitalism; thus, it is believed that such elections cannot facilitate fundamental transformations. When inquired about their potential participation in the electoral process, HTI activists are likely to respond that they do not intend to engage in elections. However, they may also convey a somewhat ambiguous stance by indicating that HTI is, in fact, a political entity with the objective of perpetuating the tenets of Islam through the establishment of a caliphate. Nonetheless, HTI has yet to reach a definitive conclusion regarding its participation in electoral processes.

The final strategy within the second phase (*marhalah*) involves the pursuit of assistance and protection (*talab al-nusrah*). Should the populace demonstrate a lack of receptiveness to HTI's call for the establishment of a caliphate, the organization must seek support from influential figures. The overarching aims of *talab al-nusrah* are to safeguard the activists, ensuring their safety as they continue their *da'wah* (Islamic missionary work), and to position these individuals as intermediaries in the quest to establish the caliphate.²⁶

In the case of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), the absence of actions such as arrest, torture, or execution by the Indonesian government eliminated the necessity for HTI to seek protection from external groups for their physical security. Nevertheless, HTI engaged in the practice of *talab al-nusrah* as a strategic measure to preserve its organization from potential dissolution. Notably, HTI made an outreach to the Deputy Chairman of the House of Representatives, Fadli Zon, who subsequently articulated his support for the organization, "HTI has played an important role in saving the Indonesian people". Furthermore, HTI engaged with Muslim clerics in an effort to gain their support in opposing the disbandment of the organization. The final stage of HTI's strategic approach, referred to as the third phase, involves the establishment of a caliphate with comprehensive implementation of Islamic law.²⁷ This phase is characterized by HTI's management of the caliphate rather than the struggle for its establishment, a distinction articulated by Agus Salim as referenced by Masdar Hilmy.

The Failure of Establishing the Caliphate

The activities outlined in the strategy were executed successfully by HTI. However, despite this successful execution, HTI ultimately did not achieve its objective of establishing a caliphate in Indonesia. Moreover, the influence of HTI has diminished significantly, as the Indonesian government has enacted a ban on the organization. This prohibition has rendered HTI's operations illegal, with the potential for legal action against its activists. Additionally, HTI faces increasing marginalization due to the opposition from the two largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, which have publicly rejected HTI's presence.²⁸ Similarly, Muslim scholars, such as Azyumardi Azra, asserted that the idea of a caliphate is dangerous for the existence of Pancasila and the unity of the Republic of Indonesia.²⁹

The failure to establish a caliphate was also experienced by HT in other countries. HT had made a *coup d'état* in several Middle Eastern countries. However, all of the coups failed.³⁰ The failure of the HTI can be attributed to several factors, particularly concerning the composition of its members. Most HTI participants, including key figures, are individuals of ordinary background. This absence of "great men" or "holders of exceptional positions," essential for acquiring and wielding power, is noteworthy. Individuals can be categorized into three distinct types. The first category comprises "ordinary people," who often establish social networks. The second category includes "exceptional actors," exemplified by significant historical figures such as the Prophet. The third category encompasses those who fall between the first and second types. Individuals in this third group may lack the extensive knowledge characteristic of "exceptional actors," yet they occupy strategic positions within society. These individuals are frequently referred to as "holders of exceptional positions," wherein they may possess

²⁶ Delegasi Hizbut Tahrir, *Strategi Dakwah Hizbut Tahrir*, 64-68. Hizbut Tahrir, *Mengenal Hizbut Tahrir: Partai Politik Islam Ideologis*, 43.

²⁷ Masdar Hilmy, *Islamism and Democracy in Indonesia, Piety and Pragmatism* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asia Studies, 2010), 120. See Masdar Hilmy, *Islam Sebagai Realitas Terkonstruksi* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2009), 141.

²⁸ Arifianto, "Moderate Islamic Organisations and Contestation Over Political Theology: The Responses by Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Towards Islamism in Indonesia" in *The Palgrave Handbook of Political Norms in Southeast Asia* (Springer Nature, 2024), 337-355

²⁹ <https://www.tempo.co/hukum/azyumardi-azra-hti-berbahaya-bagi-eksistensi-pancasila-946602> (accessed 16 Desember 2024).

³⁰ Heriansyah, Muhammad Syaroni Rofii, Muhammad Imdadun 2022, Relasi Sosial Hizbut Tahrir Militer di Indonesia, *Jurnal Pemikiran Sosiologi*, 9. no 1: 67.

limited wisdom but are still appointed to influential roles, such as that of a president. Such individuals can significantly shape historical processes and impact social and political transformations.³¹

In this perspective, members and activists of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) are representative of the general populace in Indonesia. However, it is noteworthy that HTI comprises a minority segment, numbering in the hundreds of thousands, in contrast to the hundreds of millions that constitute Indonesia's overall population. Historical analyses often emphasize the significance of influential figures, as articulated by Thomas Carlyle, who posited that "the great man always acts like thunder; he storms the skies while others await the storm." According to Carlyle, those leaders who wield considerable influence are characterized by divine inspiration and possess exceptional qualities (Cherry, 2020).

Regarding the concept of "holders of exceptional positions," it is important to note that HTI does not have any activists in positions of political power within the Republic of Indonesia. This absence is attributed to HTI's prohibition against its members assuming high-ranking political roles, including regents, governors, ministers, prosecutors, judges, or even the presidency. HTI permits its adherents to serve only as civil servants in roles that do not involve political responsibilities within the Indonesian government. Consequently, this limitation poses challenges for HTI in cultivating individuals who might be regarded as "holders of exceptional positions."

Furthermore, An-Nabhani articulated that the methodology (*tarîqah*) for establishing a caliphate should be pursued through revolutionary means rather than conventional methods.³² Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) has criticized other Islamist factions that advocate for the gradual establishment of a caliphate. It is almost universally acknowledged that revolutionary and ideological transformations necessitate the presence of prominent figures to guide the movement. As previously noted, HTI lacks identifiable leaders who can be regarded as remarkable figures within the Indonesian context. For instance, the central leader of Hizbut Tahrir, Atha Abu Rushtah, cannot be characterized as such due to his relatively obscure residence and the fact that he is not an Indonesian citizen, which distances him from the populace. Historical great leaders have typically been those who maintain close connections with their communities and possess the charisma necessary to inspire obedience and support.

Furthermore, the "candidate" for the HTI caliphate is often associated with a divine aspect, perceived as an individual who emerges in accordance with a divine promise.³³ Therefore, it is logical to conclude that Hizb al-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) ought to await the fulfillment of divine promise rather than actively design a strategy (*tarîqah*) aimed at establishing a caliphate in Indonesia. Paradoxically, both Hizb al-Tahrir (HT) and HTI, as delineated in the publication entitled *Manhaj Hizb al-Tahrir fi al-Taghyir*, seem to neglect the concept of divine promise. When their attempts to implement their strategy falter in various nations, they tend to remind their followers that such failures occur because Allah has willed it.

HTI should critically assess the inherent contradiction within their teachings regarding the establishment of a caliphate and the notion of divine promise. Logically speaking, if one genuinely believes in the divine promise, there should be no reliance on a strategic framework. Instead, the appropriate course of action would be to await the realization of this promise. The pursuit of a strategy for establishing a caliphate may be interpreted as a manifestation of skepticism toward divine assurance.

Consequently, radical groups are likely to perpetually encounter failures in their endeavors to establish a caliphate; however, they will remain vocal and prominent, particularly on social media platforms. A notable characteristic of both conservative and radical factions is their propensity to amplify their voices, despite being a minority in terms of numbers.³⁴ Furthermore, radical groups often operate clandestinely, engaging in actions that can pose significant risks to public safety, including incidents of 'religious extremism,' suicide bombings, and involvement in political unrest. Historically, extreme and militant organizations have been largely unsuccessful in achieving their objectives, which invites skepticism regarding the viability of radical and fundamentalist movements in the future. Despite their considerable influence within the Muslim community today, Islamist groups are confronted with a

³¹ Jalaluddin Rahmat. *Rekayasa Sosial: Reformasi atau Revolusi?* (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 1999), 56

³² Taqiyuddin an-Nabhani, *Mafahim Hizb al-Tahrir* (Hizb al-Tahrir: Ttp, 1953), 52

³³ Ainur Rofiq Al-Amin, *Mematahkan Argumen Hizbut Tahrir*, (Wahid Foundation, 2019), 26

³⁴ Al Makin. "Homogenizing Indonesian Islam: Persecution of the Shia group in Yogyakarta". *Jurnal Studia Islamika* 24, no. 1(2017) : 22.

critical question: ‘Will they be equipped to address the challenges presented by the shortcomings of contemporary leadership and the emerging leaders of tomorrow?’ While these groups demonstrate proficiency in recognizing and articulating societal grievances, to effectively address the needs of their communities, they must transcend their current roles.

The failure to establish a caliphate in Indonesia is particularly noteworthy, given that the predominant religion among Indonesians is Islam. One contributing factor to this failure is the ongoing decline of religion-based political engagement and a growing disinterest among the populace.³⁵ The existing Islamic political parties in Indonesia have struggled to garner significant support from the populace, which may explain their limited appeal relative to nationalist parties such as the PDIP, Golkar, and Gerindra. Specifically, organizations like the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), the United Development Party (PBB), and the National Mandate Party (PAN) have found it challenging to compete effectively within the political landscape. This phenomenon is further illustrated by the experience of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), which, despite identifying itself as an Islamic political party, encountered similar shortcomings, notably its rejection of democratic principles.³⁶

In fact, the majority of Muslims in Indonesia did not opt for a religion-based political party. Although a significant portion of Indonesian voters identify as Muslim, this demographic reality does not correlate directly with the electoral success of Islamic parties. In contrast, secular and nationalist parties have experienced a consistent increase in voter support. The factors contributing to the decline of Islamic political parties can largely be attributed to the failure of Hizb al-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) to establish a caliphate. Despite positioning themselves as an “Islamic” political party, many Indonesians demonstrated a lack of interest in both the party and its ideological proposals.

Furthermore, internal factors have also played a significant role in HTI’s inability to realize its aspirations for a caliphate. Two primary internal factors deserve attention. First, HTI’s philosophical frameworks of fikrah and thariqah appear ill-suited to the Indonesian context, indicating a disconnect between HTI’s understanding of its political ideology and the socio-cultural realities of Indonesia, which differ markedly from those of Arab nations. Additionally, the fatwas issued by the Amir (the central leader’s religious directives) often diverged from the practical realities faced within Indonesia. Second, the organizational structure of HTI is characterized by a semi-military and semi-intelligence model. The emphasis on doctrines of obedience and trustworthiness serves as a fundamental aspect of HTI’s identity. However, the information technology revolution at the beginning of the third millennium has fundamentally altered access to information. Individuals, including HTI activists (referred to as syabab), can now obtain unfiltered and limitless access to information, undermining the previously exclusive control exercised by HTI leaders over the flow of information. Consequently, HTI activists have become more critical and less aligned with the organization.

In summary, both external and internal factors elucidate the reasons behind HTI’s failure to establish a caliphate, despite their implementation of numerous strategies intended to achieve this goal. However, Despite HTI’s institutional failure and dissolution, the seeds of its ideas are still present in various strategies. The government must understand this. The persistence of corruption, the use of money politics in elections, and the continued use of drugs and gambling have all served as fodder for HTI’s evolving ideas.

Conclusion

HTI sought to replace the Republic of Indonesia with a caliphate and has undertaken various stages as part of its *tariqah* or strategy. This process began with *tathqif* and *tafâul*, leading to manifestations such as *thaqafah murakkazah*, *thaqafah jamaiyyah*, *sir â fikrî*, *kifâh siyâsî*, *tabanni masâlih al-ummah*, and *talab al-nusrah*. Despite the execution of this strategy, the establishment of a caliphate in Indonesia has not yet materialized, indicating that HTI has not succeeded in its objectives.

³⁵ Akmaliah, W. *Menguatnya politik Islam, bukan partai Islam*. December 17, 2019. Detik. from <https://news.detik.com/kolom/d-4148049/menguatnya-politik-islam-bukan-partai-islam>

³⁶ Munhanif, Ali & A. Bakir Hasan. “Ideas, Politics, and The Making of Muslim Democracy: An Historical Trajectory in Indonesia”. *Studia Islamika* 30, no.3 (2023): 554

The failure can be attributed to both external and internal factors. Externally, there is a notable absence of influential leaders and key figures within HTI, coupled with a continuous decline in religion-based political movements in Indonesia. Internally, the incompatibility of HTI's ideologies with the socio-political realities of Indonesia, along with a decrease in loyalty among HTI activists, has contributed to its lack of success.

This situation presents implications for the government, which should aim to identify the underlying issues that radical groups commonly exploit, such as social injustice, economic inequality, and political disillusionment. For future research, it is essential to examine the roles and strategies of various community organizations in countering HTI's efforts to disseminate its ideology within the community.

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