

Full Text of the Shargh Daily Interview with Osman Bakhach

The Iranian journalist, Nozhan Etezadosaltaneh, on behalf of Tehran newspaper, Shargh Daily, conducted an interview with Osman Bakhach, the Director of Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir; the interview was published on 21 May 2016. (http://www.sharghdaily.ir/Default.aspx?NPN_Id=1017&pageno=9)

The newspaper, whether due to limited space or other unspecified reason, edited some of the answers (most important question & answer 9, 13), and omitted some questions entirely (Q 10, 11, 15-17, 20). Any observer cannot but wonder why question 20 was omitted entirely. We publish hereby the full text of the interview. [The Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir]

Nozhan Etezadosaltaneh:

1- Do you think the rise of ISIS is a sign of an existing crisis in political Islam particularly in Sunni Islam? Do you think Baghdadi announcing a caliphate is a sign of crisis in the caliphate model that Hizb ut Tahrir supports?

Answer:

The idea of Khilafah (Caliphate) stems from the Islamic Aqeedah (belief) i.e. it is not dependent on what x,y,z of people think or do not think. The Khilafah state is the form of a political regime devised by Islam; its function is to implement the Islamic Shariah fully within its domain, and to convey the Message of Islam to the world.

The fact that different groups, scholars, thinkers and activists call for the resumption of the Khilafah state is simply a normal reflection of Muslims aspiring to fulfill their duty ordained by Allah SWT in living the Deen of Islam. Rather the secular regimes imposed by the western colonial powers across the Muslim Ummah are abhorrent and strangulate. These police-state regimes survive through brutal force over their populations. None of the regimes reflects the Islamic way of life, and all are subservient to the western colonial masters and policies.

2- ISIS emphasized on the global caliphate idea. They are pan-Islamists, too. Al-Qaeda also believed in the same worldview. As with Sayyid Qutb, they claim that all corrupt and illegitimate regimes must be overthrown in the region. What is the real difference between Hizb ut Tahrir and ISIS and al-Qaeda? It seems that you believe to hold the same ideas as well. Do you think that all of the groups include a framework of Islamic fundamentalism?

Bakhash Answer:

Hizb ut Tahrir (HT) started to work to reestablish the Khilafah state back in 1953; back then there was no Al-Qaeda or ISIS. HT from day one has clearly defined its methodology in bringing about the radical change in pursuing the intellectual/political struggle; HT has firmly rejected the use of violence as means to rebuild the Khilafah;

this is a matter of Deen, and political expediency: i.e. the methodology adopted by HT is derived from the work of the Prophet Mohammad PBUH, as such it is not a choice that we could or could not follow. Other groups may think that 'jihad' is the method needed to build the Islamic state and society. This is their opinion and we do not agree with it, as it violates the methodology of the Prophet who strictly refused to use violence when engaging in dawah in Makkah.

On a side note the term 'Islamic fundamentalism' is loaded with colonial connotation which we completely reject. Muslims worldwide are required to fully practice their Deen, and this can only be done in remaining faithful to the Islamic Shariah, irrespective of adhering to different Ijtihad.

3- Hizb ut Tahrir is believed to right and wrong duality that you believe you are in the right camp against wrong camps. However, some Muslim thinkers such as Rachid Ghannouchi disagree with the approach and say the third way is cooperation between Islamists and secularists by establishing a democratic secular regime. Do you think the idea is effective for the Middle East?

Answer:

Rachid Ghannouchi, or other similar thinkers, may think there is a compromise or a 'third way' as you put it; we maintain that Islam and Kufr can not be mixed, much like water and fire can not mix, i.e. the inherent nature of Islam- a Deen based upon the monotheist belief in the Oneness of the Creator, wholly contradicts and collides with any man-made system (secular capitalism, Marxism or any other -ism).

Those who seek a 'third way' have failed to fully grasp both the true nature of Islam and the true nature of any other man-made ideology as they are contradicting to one another and cannot be inherently implemented together or side-by-side.

4- Some reports show that Salafist groups such as Hizb ut Tahrir in Lebanon are recruiting from refugee camps in northern parts of the country. Do you think the situation is an abuse of refugees for political interests of Salafi groups?

Answer:

Obviously you are referring to false reports: HT has never defined itself as 'Salafist' in any way, form or shape. HT is a political party aiming at engaging with the Muslim Ummah at large to remind Muslims worldwide of their duty to work for the full implementation of the Islamic way of life. HT aims at dissolving any and all factors leading to disunity among Muslims; as such HT does not recognize the artificial geopolitical order imposed by colonial powers, and maintains that all Muslims are one body, irrespective of any label: Sunni or Shia, Shafei or Hanafi or Jaafari or Zaidi, etc... Hajj/Ramadan/prayers are reminders of this unity of Muslims only that this unity

needs to be manifested politically via the Khilafah state upon the method of the Prophethood.

5- Some Salafist groups support Al-Mustaqbal while the Western and US backed coalition and Salafists oppose the US and West. Do you think this is a contradictory approach? What is Hizb ut Tahir's approach toward Al-Mustaqbal? Do you think the coalition is a Sunni force and do you accept cooperation with the force?

Answer:

HT opposes any and all secular movements and parties, Al-Mustaqbal or otherwise secular-capitalist or socialist and so on. Al-Mustaqbal movement is no more than a cheap tool to serve the personal ambitions of Hariri and cronies benefiting from him; the fact that it is supported by the Saudi regime is another non-starter.

Hizb ut Tahrir has published numerous leaflets and press releases which clearly express and define our view regarding the coalition forces and their aims which are accessible through our official websites. In short, HT not only rejects the coalition and its forces but fully condemns it.

6- You have publicly stated your opposition with secular democracy whilst the political regime in Lebanon is a secular democracy. Do you think the government has a right to perceive your community as a security threat against the regime? In other countries such as Germany and Russia, the activity of Hizb ut Tahir is prohibited. Don't you think the problem is with your party?

Answer:

A secular democracy constantly barrages so-called rights such as freedom of speech and belief; however the stark reality is that there is austere censorship in ideas and beliefs. As HT follows a strictly intellectual political discourse method and has repeatedly denied all claims of material-based methods, yet harsh measures against our members and supporters from imprisonment and abuse including media blackouts and slander are carried out. We see that shaky authoritarian regimes, who lack any intellectual grounding, resort to the label of "terrorism" to justify banning HT; yet they fail to present their legitimate case when their lies are exposed. And thus are being severely limited in their public activities, yet this does not deter HT's members or its activities world-wide due to adherence to Allah's commands thus strengthening our resolve to remain steadfast on the path we started. So the problem is not with our party, but with the fallacy of democracy and freedom of expression and belief.

7- AKP in Turkey has tried to introduce a consolidated model of Islam, democracy and secularism. What is your opinion about the model? Do you think the model will succeed in throughout the Muslim world and Turkey?

Answer:

I mentioned earlier that Islam and Kufr cannot mix. Period. All these attempts at producing pseudo-Islam will simply melt away in no time. Furthermore AKP has publicly and clearly announced itself as being loyal to secular democracy. Therefore, it does not contain any trace of adhering to Islam or its Rulings.

8- Your members are not allowed to participate in elections and political activities in Lebanon. How is your relationship with Lebanese politicians and political parties? Don't you think the radical ideas of Hizb ut Tahrir is the main reason that marginalized the community? Some reports claim Salafist groups (as your group) are working closely with security apparatuses in Lebanon. What is your opinion about the claims?

Answer:

Well the one who presents the "claim" shall be asked to validate and prove it.

I am confident that these claims are baseless and unsubstantiated. The nature of our political work - it is important to emphasize that we do not have neither military nor a para-military wing - negates the need for any connection with the security apparatus. In Lebanon our contact with the government is regulated via the Interior Ministry in charge of regulating political parties.

Also to correct the wrong question: it is not true that we consider elections illegal; we consider it useless and farcical, i.e. it will not bring about the needed change as seen in fraudulent election processes worldwide with skewed and tainted results leaving. No elections anywhere in the world have brought about a complete regime change.

9- Hizb ut Tahrir's opinion about Hezbollah is a bit paradoxical. In one of your interviews, you defended the Hezbollah resistance against Israel on the other hand you said that you don't agree with the sectarian views of the group. What do you think about the group? Don't you think Hezbollah is a common enemy of all Salafist and Sunni groups such Al-Mustaqbal, too? What is your opinion about Hezbollah's presence in Syria?

Answer:

Hezbollah may be an enemy of secular movements, this is not our problem, and I am not here talking on behalf of Al-Mustaqbal. HT has supported any and all jihad against foreign occupation of Muslim lands; but also HT has rejected the narrow agenda of Hezbollah in serving the secular/nationalist plans of Iran; worse yet, they have fallen deep under in committing mass crimes against the Syrian people and for what? To protect the secular Baath regime in Syria, with the full consent of the US. The issue at stake is bigger than Hezbollah, it has to do with the role assigned by the US to the Iranian regime all the way from Yemen to Syria and Iraq and Lebanon. Sadly the Iranian regime is fully complacent in executing US policies in the region,

even triggering a wide sectarian Sunni-Shia conflict, a policy which we fully denounce and reject. (will you publish this, I wonder)

10- Sayyid Hassan Nasrullah the leader of Hezbollah had said earlier that establishment of an Islamic state based on Sharia in Lebanon due to ethnic diversity is not possible. Don't you think this view is realistic?

Answer:

The problem with this view is that it accepts and regards the geopolitical order imposed by the colonial powers (the infamous Sykes-Pico agreement) as sacred and permanent. We adamantly believe that Islam mandates the destruction of this colonial order and for Muslim Ummah to return as one Ummah to lead humankind from the darkness of Kufr into the light of Islam; this is not Hezbollah Agenda neither the Iranian regime.

At the same time, historical facts demonstrates clearly that non-Muslims have been welcomed to live and have lived within the Islamic society with the full protection and dignity as Muslims.

11- In a survey for cause of the rise of Salafist parties, some analysts say charitable activities and social welfare of the groups towards the poor are the main reason of the rise. What do you think about the idea? Don't you think social exclusion and poverty is the best condition for growth of Salafist groups?

Answer:

This question should be addressed to the concerned Salafist groups.

12- What is the role and situation of the people for Hizb ut Tahrir's idea for the caliphate? Hizb ut Tahrir announced that it doesn't believe in political tyranny and emphasised selection of caliphate; on the other side you are against democracy and against people on people governance. Don't you think it is a contradiction? Don't you think in a globalized world reaching to a caliphate system is an unattainable idea?

Answer:

When you adopt the Eurocentric secular worldview as the criteria to judge and evaluate ideas and concepts then you could reach to that conclusion. But when one has good understanding of Islam as a way of life built upon the Islamic belief (Aqeedah) then the answer is different. Secularism puts man in the position of God; in any man-made system you see a handful of persons enslaving the rest of society to serve their whims, desires and personal interests. Islam means the submission of all men/women to the Creator. And the Sharia/legislature is derived from the Quranic

message and Revelation. Thus it is not designed to serve any person's personal ambition or interest at the expense of the population.

The recent deepening crisis engulfing humankind is a stark evidence and reminder that not only has socialism/Marxism been buried, but it is also high time to bury the rotten bankrupt secular capitalism.

13- In an interview you said that the March 8 and March 14 and Iran have a common interest with one another. You also said that Iran and Syria with the US have a common interest. However, if they have a common interest why are they fighting against each other on Syria? It seems Hizb ut Tahrir believes in some form of conspiracy theory. What is your opinion about the issue?

Answer:

The so-called March 8 and March 14 political polarization in Lebanon have a shared interest in that both adopt secularism as their reference point. Yet they follow different political agendas. Recently Saudi Arabia has announced the freezing of the military aid given to the Lebanese army (\$3 billion meant to procure French military equipment and weaponry), also the Saudi Ahli Bank has closed all its operations in Lebanon, in protest against Iranian control over political power in Lebanon. It is no secret that the US has long allowed Iran to expand its influence, more so after the nuclear deal which has officially reversed the axis of evil-Great Satan into open friendship. Several top Iranian officials have long acknowledged the great service done by Iran for the American occupation of both Iraq and Afghanistan.

14- Could I know the sort of Hizb ut Tahrir relation with Jemaah Islamiyah and the Islamic Action Front? Why not establish a coalition? What is the main reason of divergence among Lebanese Salafist groups?

Answer:

As for the Lebanese Salafist group, you should ask them. Hizb ut Tahrir's position regarding other Islamic movements is based upon sincere advice; we call upon them to work to bury the colonial order; they think this is too ambitious and too radical. We maintain that the Islamic way of life cannot be implemented within the colonial order imposed by western powers. Others think that a gradual approach may be feasible, despite all proven experience in both Algeria and Egypt and elsewhere.

15- Critics said that the branch of Hizb ut Tahrir in Afghanistan cooperated with ISIS and in Pakistan with Taliban. Critics say that Hizb ut Tahrir is helping Ahrar al-Sham and Jabhat al-Nusrah in Syria that many governments perceived them as terrorists groups. What is your opinion about the comments? Do you have specific financial and military relations with Salafist groups in Syria?

Answer:

Those “critics” must be on the moon or agents of secret services. **Hizb ut Tahrir** never had , and never will have a military wing in any shape or form. Their claims again have yet to be backed by solid credible evidences, and thus serve as fierce and vile propaganda against Hizb ut Tahrir .

16- Western democracies allow all groups such as Hizb ut Tahrir to deliver their message to the public. You have license as long as you don't use violence tactics. Don't you think while Hizb ut Tahrir opposes democracy, the party uses the benefits of free speech capacity in democracies? Do you think in your model (caliphate) the freedom is more than in liberal democracies?

Answer:

Again I touched upon this above, HT unlike other groups do not have the alleged democratic right to free speech and free belief, this is evident in the tactics used by governments' policies of labeling us under “terrorism” and measures carried out. We carry out our work in areas whether in democracies or authoritarian regimes whether they approve or not. The sword of tyranny cannot prevail over the word of Truth.

17- Critics say that Salafist groups such as Hizb ut Tahrir don't like to recognize “others”. For example, they say Salafists reject feminists, liberals and communists and say they are expelled from the religion. Don't you think your party and other Salafists lack potential for interaction with others? What do you think about the argument? Don't you think the Salafi worldview caused permanent conflict among individuals and groups?

Bakhash Answer:

Go back and take a long in-depth view of the global events in the 20th and 21st century and tell me how many wars, famines, and economic, social crisis and calamities can you count? Who is to blame for this abysmal record? Islam? Or secular ideologies?

18- Do you consider a mechanism for selecting a caliphate? Do you consider any role for Ulemah in your ideal model? How do you provide financial needs for Hizb ut Tahrir? Do you have relations with Saudi Arabian princes or the government because of Salafist ideology?

Answer:

The process to select the Khaleefah is by popular vote. Khilafah is a contract between the Muslims and the Khaleefah to-be, this contract is called Bayaah (pledge of obedience); both parties (the ruler and the Muslims) must abide by the terms of this contract: the full implementation of the Sharia. If or when the Khaleefah breaches this

contract, he should be removed via the Diwan Mazhalem (judicial court in charge of validating the breach).

Islam does not approve of any notion of “special clergy” as all Muslims are responsible for implementing the Islamic rulings. Ulemah are highly respected in so long as they offer sincere guidance to the state and society and hold them to account when there is a misapplication in the Shariah rulings; but are not entitled to any special powers or privileges.

Regarding the financial needs of the party, it is solely dependent upon internal resources. Any member of HT not only is willing to share his wealth but also his life if/when needed for the Deen.

Our view of the Saudi Arabian regime is the same for the other corrupt regimes across the Muslim world - we consider them illegitimate as they serve the colonial powers and fight the resumption of the Islamic way of life.

19- What do you think about the Muslim Brotherhood? Some analysts say that Hizb ut Tahrir is a branch of the international network Muslim Brotherhood? What is the main reason of the Muslim Brotherhood defeat in Egypt in your opinion? What is your opinion about viewpoint of the group?

Answer:

MB are group of Muslims working to spread Islam according to their understanding; sadly they have adopted a secular approach as means to implement a Islamic solution; so it is not surprising that they mismanaged the power in Egypt leading to their demise. We sincerely pray and hope they learn from their mistakes, Hizb ut Tahrir is an independent stand-alone party with its unique ideology based upon the methodology of the Prophethood and their claims of links with the MB are false.

20- You always emphasize on Sunni-Shiite solidarity. Don't you think the aim is impossible in Lebanon and other parts of Middle East? In fact, we see charges of Hezbollah and Al-Mustaqbal and other Sunni groups against each other. In the region we see conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia, two Shiites and Sunni peoples. How do you think the solidarity is possible? What is the main reason of conflict between them in your opinion?

Bakhash Answer:

All Muslims believe in the Oneness of Allah SWT, in the Prophethood of Mohammad PBUH, in the Quran as the last eternal divine Revelation. So yes the factors needed for Muslim unity is an integral part of the Deen. What prevents this is the corrupt political regimes who serve the colonial interests. Look at Iraq: intermarriage was very common until the American occupation and the policy pursued by Iran and Saudi Arabia which inflamed the sectarian divide threatening unity of the

Ummah. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia use “Sunni-Shia” as a smokescreen to reflect the political rivalry between them; at the time of King Faisal he was a very close ally of Shah Iran against Jamal Abdunnasser (supposedly a “Sunni”). So it is the politics that divide or unite this ruler with that one.

21- What do you think about prospective Lebanon’s presidentials? Among Samir Geagea, Frangieh and Aoun which one is better and have more of a chance? Do you like any option? What is the main reason of impasse in the presidential election and what is Hizb ut Tahrir’s solution?

Answer:

Anyone who rules by Kufr system cannot be better than the other also ruling by Kufr. The solution for the Muslim Ummah is to liberate itself from the colonial policies and subjugation. These policies have only meant miseries and calamities for the whole regions, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. To continue on this path means only further disasters and calamities for all. We have a historic opportunity to rebuild our state and society and then to lead mankind out of the darkness and injustices of secular ideology into the light and justice of Islam. And we trust that the bright future for humanity is soon.