РЕЛІГІЇ СХОДУ В СИСТЕМІ ДЕРЖАВНО-КОНФЕСІЙНИХ ВІДНОСИН

ISSN 1682-5268 (on-line); ISSN 1608-0599 (print)
Shìdnij svìt, 2022, No. 3, pp. 118–137
doi: https://doi.org/10.15407/orientw2022.03.118

UDC 94(477.75):28

RADICAL ISLAM AND THE STATE IN CRIMEA PRIOR TO 2014: THE CASE OF *HIZB UT-TAHRIR AL-ISLAMI*

Denys Shestopalets
PhD (History)
A. Yu. Krymskyi Institute of Oriental Studies, NAS of Ukraine
4, Hrushevskoho Str., Kyiv, 01001, Ukraine
adfontes83@gmail.com

The looming danger of radical Islamism and religious struggles for hegemony effectively converged in the local Ukrainian context in the case of *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* (HTI), or the Islamic Party of Liberation. For want of a more notorious Islamist group in Ukraine, this organization became treated in various media as the main local embodiment of extremist and terrorist threat. Likewise, despite the fact that the actual number of HTI's followers or sympathizers in Crimea remained uncertain, due to its high public visibility, in the pre-2014 period the movement often stepped into the spotlight as the number-one rival for the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea and the Mejlis, the chief representative bodies of Crimean Tatars. Thus, although the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in March 2014 completely derailed the dynamic of HTI's development in the region, an analysis of its previous activities there can still become an important contribution to an in-depth understanding of the movement's dichotomous nature as a global phenomenon, as well as its relations with the state and its strategies of social accommodation in European settings. Hence, this article offers a more nuanced and comprehensive look at this HTI's development in the peninsula prior to the beginning of the Euromaidan protests (November 2013), focusing on its involvement in local politics and interactions with law enforcement agencies and the government authorities. Special attention is paid to the public discourses of HTI in the Ukrainian milieu and the key elements of its self-representation for the general public as posing no existential threat to Ukraine's socio-political and cultural order.

Keywords: Ukraine, Islam, state, Hizb ut-Tahrir, Crimea, Islamism, radicalism

From the early 2000s onwards, the development of Ukraine's Muslim community has been a subject of regular scrutiny in the media and academic communities alike. In the aftermath of the Russian military campaigns in Chechnya and the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the U.S., the main concern of many journalists and analysts was directed at the problem of global Islamism and the potential threat of religiously motivated violence from Muslim extremist groups for Ukrainian society. While the hot-button topic of political Islam was repeatedly raised in publications on the local situation in Ukraine, the primary focus of researchers' attention, nonetheless, has been on the competition between different centers of religious authority that steadfastly upheld their preferred versions of Islamic theology and practice among local Muslims of various ethnic backgrounds [Bogomolov, Danilov, Semivolos, Yavorskaya 2006; Yakubovych 2010; Yarosh, Brylov 2011]. The most prominent issue that has been igniting scholarly interest in this respect is the tension

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between the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine (SAMU) and the All-Ukrainian Association of Social Organisations "Alraid" as de facto front structures for two conflicting transnational Islamic movements that operated in mainland Ukraine, the *al-ahbash* group and the Muslim Brothers respectively. At the same time, in the Crimean region where the overwhelming majority of the country's Muslim population resided, the key controversies of the 2000s and the early 2010s revolved around the efforts of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea (SAMC) to secure its monopoly as the hegemonic religious body in the peninsula, fending off other Islamic actors that aspired to enroot their alternative perspectives on Islam and to establish competing spiritual centers for Crimean Tatars.

The aforementioned issues regarding the looming danger of radical Islamism and religious struggles for domination effectively converged in the local Ukrainian context in the case of *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* (HTI), or the Islamic Party of Liberation. Indeed, for want of more notorious Islamist groups, this organization became widely treated in various media as the main local embodiment of extremist and terrorist threat in Ukraine. Likewise, despite the fact that the actual number of HTI's followers and sympathizers in Crimea remained uncertain, due to its high public visibility, in the pre-2014 period the movement often stepped into the spotlight as the number-one rival for the SAMC. Thus, although the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in March 2014 completely derailed the dynamic of HTI's development in the region, an analysis of its previous activities there can still become an important contribution to an in-depth understanding of the movement's dichotomous nature as a global phenomenon, as well as its relations with the state and specific strategies of social accommodation in the European settings. Thus, the primary goal of this article is to take a more nuanced and comprehensive look at this organization's development in the peninsula prior to the Euromaidan protests (November 2013), focusing on its involvement in politics and interactions with law enforcement and the government authorities. Special attention will also be paid to the public discourses of HTI in the Ukrainian milieu and the key elements of its self-representation for the general public as posing no existential threat to Ukraine's socio-political and cultural order.

Literature review. As a political organization, HTI was founded in Jerusalem in 1953 by the Islamic jurist and activist Taqi ud-Din an-Nabhani (d. 1977)[1]. The pivotal idea put forward by him revolved around the absolute priority of re-establishing the Caliphate, a genuinely Islamic state that would comprehensively implement a *shariah*-based social order and unite all Muslims of the world into a single political entity. In contrast to many other Islamist groups that aspired to achieve similar goals by any means available, HTI made it a matter of principle to avoid armed struggle and violence, citing as a reason the need of strictly emulating the sacred example of Prophet Muhammad, who came to power in Medina solely by peaceful means. Although immediately facing strong persecution from Jordan's political regime, the new movement's clear-cut ideological agenda, strong hierarchical structure and sophisticated methodology of recruiting new members facilitated its spreading and further survival in the regions of the Near East and North Africa. However, apart from allegations about its involvement in minor coup attempts in Jordan, Iraq and Syria in the 1970s, HTI de facto failed to achieve in the Arab countries the same level of political prominence and popular support as its major Islamist rivals, the Muslim Brothers. Consequently, it is not surprising that in the first decades of its existence the party remained, with a few exceptions [Jansen 1979; Cohen 1982; Commins 1991], overlooked in academic literature.

It was the sudden actualization of HTI's presence in the West, i.e. far beyond the core designated territories of the planned caliphate, that drew more scholarly attention to this group in the mid-1990s. In particular, in 1996 Suha Taji-Farouki published a book that provided the first and most comprehensive to date overview of HTI's early institutional history, "idealist-vanguardist" ideology and Bolshevik-inspired methodology [Taji-Farouki

1996]. She argued that the emergence of this movement should be viewed as a response to "the break-up of the Ottoman empire, the fragmentation of its territories into nation-states, the creation of Israel and the impotence of Muslim societies in the face of neo-imperialism" [Taji-Farouki 1996, *x*]. On the most general level, she categorized HTI as a cohort that offered "a strategic alternative to both the gradualist and the radicalist camps in Islamist circles" [Taji-Farouki 1996, *xi*]. At the same time, though, she asserted that this position in the middle between the mainstream Muslim Brothers and the fringe radicalists in fact "immobilized" HTI and strongly restricted its opportunities for constructive action in establishing an intellectual leadership in the Muslim communities throughout the world [Taji-Farouki 1996, *112*]. While noting that for much of the time the movement's history appeared rather "uneventful," Taji-Farouki pointed out that the survival of HTI in the situation of universal proscription was remarkable [Taji-Farouki 1996, *xi*].

In the first half of the 2000s, various observations on HTI were offered in the framework of general studies on Islamism and fundamentalism. For example, asserting that HTI had nothing to do with al-Qaida, Olivier Roy critically assessed the former as a type of "millenarian movement" with an imaginary, utopian agenda which was far removed from concrete politics [Roy 2004, *177*]. Developing his classification of Islamist groups, Roy ironically referred to HTI as a "UFO," or "Unidentified Fundamentalist Object" [Roy 2004, *237*]. Likewise, he asserted that HTI used "pseudo-Koranic terminology, taken out of context, with no consideration of history and social circumstances" [Roy 2004, *238*]. In this latter respect, according to Roy's point of view, in HTI's agenda the Caliphate appears as a "dream," a "model of a virtual world" or "deterritorialised fancy" which had no geographical or national roots and thus could not be considered "a reenactment of a historical institution" [Roy 2004, *275, 288*]. Hence, due to this, the movement itself became as "uprooted and deterritorialised," i.e. "with no thought of taking power in a given country" [Roy 2004, *238*]. Another important consequence of HTI's categorization as part of the neofundamentalist trend is that, for Roy, HTI's position against deployment of political violence was "purely tactical" because "the organisation believes that the time has not yet come for jihad, but that it is a compulsory duty for any Muslim" [Roy 2004, *256*]. In other words, the choice between violence and nonviolence for HTI was merely a temporary decision taken for political reasons, albeit couched in a religious language [Roy 2004, *257*].

In the mid-2000s, the scholarly interest in HTI as a religio-political movement shifted to concrete regional contexts, namely to its rapid proliferation and extensive activities in Central Asia. This interest to a large degree was informed by several policy papers which appeared in 2003–2004 against the backdrop of the U.S.'s military campaign in Afghanistan and offered conflicting accounts concerning the status of HTI as a security threat, its relationship to terrorism and the possibility of it turning to armed struggle in the observable future [ICG 2003; Khamidov 2003; Cohen 2003; Baran 2004; Mayer 2004]. In particular, although the majority of analysts generally have agreed that HTI cannot be regarded as a *terrorist* organization per se, some of them, like Zeyno Baran, still emphatically argue that its propaganda leads to the radicalization of ordinary Muslims and thus creates a vast pool of potential candidates for recruitment by Islamist organizations directly engaged in terrorism [Baran 2004, *48–49*, *52–53*]. Put differently, HTI was viewed by Baran as an ideological "conveyor belt for terrorists" and a participant in the "distribution of labor" between different groups in the global Islamist movement, remaining nonviolent only because its "assigned" mission required this [Baran 2004, *11*]. Others, like Mayer, asserted that the threat of HTI's turning to violence was strongly overstated due to the desire of some analysts to provide support to U.S.'s strategic allies among Central Asian political regimes and to "manufacture" a new major enemy for the U.S. government after al-Qaida's defeat as an effective way to legitimate military policies in the Muslim regions [Mayer 2004].

In the aftermath of this policy debate, a number of studies appeared which in much detail treated the proliferation of HTI and its relationship with other Islamist movements in Central Asia [Naumkin 2005; Chaudet 2006; Sukhov 2006; Burgio 2008]. In particular, basing on extensive field research and various facets of the new social movement theory, Karagiannis analyzed HTI's status in the local contexts of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, as well the specifics of their state policies towards this movement [Karagiannis 2005; Karagiannis 2006a; Karagiannis 2006b; Karagiannis 2007; Karagiannis 2009]. As a result of his inquiries, he came to the conclusion that although the possibility of HTI's turning to violence could not be completely discarded, this scenario would be highly unlikely due to a wide range of factors, such as the strong dogmatism of HTI's ideology, its focus on the deep indoctrination of potential members during the prolonged recruitment process, as well as the promotion of nonviolence as a distinct identity feature of the organization [Karagiannis, McCauley 2006]. In this light, Karagiannis opposed the practice of preemptive labeling of HTI as a terrorist group employed by some governments as a radical measure for undermining the organization's public image, legal standing and funding sources on the global scale [Karagiannis, McCauley 2006, *329*].

Finally, while HTI's public activities in Western societies were to a certain degree analyzed in the works of earlier scholars [Taji-Farouki 1996; Mandaville 2001; Wiktorowicz 2005], this subject truly came to the fore only in the 2010s, following the publication of a policy paper by Ahmed and Stuart [Ahmed, Stuart 2009; Stuart, Ahmed 2010]. Using field research methods, Wali focused on the methods of radicalization of Muslims by HTI in Great Britain [Wali 2016; Wali 2017]. Orofino's research offered a range of insights regarding the appeal of HTI as a "radical vocal Islamist group" among British and Australian Muslims of different backgrounds [Orofino 2020; Orofino 2021a]. While the bulk of research concerning HTI in Europe has been focused on the UK as the main hub of the movement's global media activity, there were also studies that looked into the movement's development in Denmark and Germany [Sinclair 2010; Simonsen 2014]. In the Ukrainian context, some aspects of HTI's activities and ideology were cursorily analyzed by the researchers of the Center for Near Eastern Studies [Bogomolov, Danilov, Semivolos, Yavorskaya 2006; Bohomolov, Danylov, Semyvolos 2006] as well as Kyryushko [Kyryushko 2008; 2009], Bulatov [Bulatov 2011] and Aulin [Aulin 2016]. In these studies, HTI was mostly treated as a youth phenomenon, or an ideological and organizational outlet for young Crimean Tatar Muslims in pursuit of a steady social status. In this regard, the relative success of HTI on the Ukrainian soil was ascribed by researchers to such factors as an intergenerational conflict in the Crimean Tatar communities and a lack of decisive action in the sphere of Islamic religious education and management of local communities on the part of the SAMC.

Overall, there is a substantial body of literature on both global and regional manifestations of HTI which reveals a number of inherent ambiguities and dilemmas, obstructing the categorization of the movement as a religio-political phenomenon and creating an aura of perpetual controversy around it in many contemporary social contexts. For one thing, HTI consistently represents itself as a political party which transcends theological or legal differences between Muslims for the sake of establishing a true Islamic state. At the same time, despite this self-ascribed identification, HTI for the most part has refused to participate in the political systems of both Muslim and non-Muslim countries, choosing instead to focus on building a network of committed followers and promulgating its ideological agendas through various media. Due to this, while HTI claims that its ideology is fully derived from Islam (i.e., from religious sources), it has often been referred to as a *religious sect* with a distinctly geopolitical theology, rather than a sui generis political entity [Commins 1991; ICG 2003]. A closely related issue is that while HTI carries out a range of wide-scale public events and readily engages with the media through designated spokespersons, its core activities are conducted in a clandestine manner, rendering the

organization semi-conspiratorial. Finally, the key dilemma of HTI discussed in academic literature concerns its inherent ambivalence vis-à-vis violence: on the one hand, the organization has showcased a distinctly nonviolent strategy and declared commitment to fomenting an "intellectual revolution" through peaceful propaganda only; on the other hand, its ideology and public statements have often been viewed as extremist and thus inherently conducive to violence in the long run. In other words, its current nonviolence appears merely *conditional* – a transitory stance that can be discarded under the right circumstances. As will be demonstrated further, these dilemmas in one way or another manifested themselves in Ukraine as well, rendering HTI a permanent subject of public controversy and attention from the state and media.

HTI in the pre-2014 period: public activities and discourses. According to HTI's own reports, the organization started to build its cadres in Ukraine in 1995 with a tandem of envoys from Uzbekistan referred to as "Muhammadain", or "two Muhammads" [Pankhurst 2016, *212*][2]. However, in the public arena of the country it emerged only in the mid-2000s. In this respect, its sudden coming to prominence in Crimea closely followed or coincided in time with a number of other events that drew attention to the movement in 2003–2004, such as its proscription in Germany, its inclusion in the list of terrorist groups by the Supreme Court and the subsequent wave of criminal cases against it in Russia, the controversy about anti-Semitic statements of an HTI's member in Denmark, as well as an acute policy debate on the nature and the potential threat from HTI's activities in the Central Asian region. These issues constituted a general backdrop for HTI's development as a public actor in Ukraine in the 2000s and the early 2010s.

The first move that put the Ukrainian division of HTI on the religio-political map was the distribution of a strongly worded leaflet against the U.S.'s military campaign in Iraq in March 2003 that, among other things, condemned Muslim political leaders that provided assistance to the American army and called upon the Muslim population of these countries to remove their rulers from power[3]. This leaflet was issued as an immediate response to the official statement of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People on March 23, 2003, expressing its complete endorsement for the U.S.'s policies. This polemical attack prompted the Mejlis leadership to start paying attention to HTI and refer to it as an inherently dangerous group that used anti-war protests merely as a means to undermine the authority of the Crimean Tatar social structures[4].

The incident with the Iraq war set the tone for further tensions between the Mejlis and HTI as two officially unregistered organizations competing in the political field of Crimea. Although the former refrained from straightforwardly designating HTI as a violent threat to society or a terrorist group per se, its representatives consistently framed the movement as a foreign actor that threatened to destroy the fundamental unity and cultural heritage of Crimean Tatars as an ethnic group[5]. Moreover, HTI was represented as *deliberately* introduced and supported from outside with a view to undermining the national revival of Crimean Tatars after their repatriation from exile[6]. In making claims about HTI as merely a divisive instrument of a third party with vested interests, the leadership of the Mejlis, in particular its Deputy Head Refat Chubarov, initially referred to the local Crimean security services[7]. However, after the victory of the 2004 Orange revolution and coming to power of the pro-Western political forces, Chubarov started to claim that HTI was in fact manipulated by Russia for the sake of derailing the progress of democratization, European integration and NATO membership of Ukraine[8]. In 2010 Mejlis issued a special statement against HTI in which the latter was characterized as a foreign destructive sect that targeted the "traditional Islam" of Crimean Tatars and hence their national interests and security[9].

Another incident that clearly manifested HTI's entering the Ukrainian public sphere happened in August 2004 when the SAMC's leadership made an attempt to remove from the post the 23-year-old imam of the central mosque of Simferopol "Kebir Jami" Ruslan

Mustafaev due to his alleged affiliation with HTI[10]. According to media reports, HTI members from various regions of the peninsula gathered in the mosque on the day for a Friday prayer and managed, at least temporarily, to prevent Mufti Emirali Ablaev from making this change official[11]. In the wake of this confrontation that directly cast doubt on the Mufti's ability to exercise control over his communities, the SAMC issued a special statement against radical groups claiming that HTI abused Islamic ideas for introducing a chasm among the Crimean Tatar population and that imams that sympathized with this movement had no right to occupy such positions[12]. Following this strategy, in mid-October 2004 the SAMC dismissed eight more imams in various mosques of Crimea (Belogorsk, Dzhankoi, Alushta, etc.) on the same grounds. This drastic move in fact revealed the effectiveness of HTI propaganda in recruiting not just rank-and-file Muslims but also figures of religious authority that controlled the spiritual and administrative life of local religious communities[13]. While three of the fired imams were swiftly reinstated after giving a written pledge not to collaborate with HTI in the future, the community "Yukary jami" in Alushta rejected the SAMC's decision about their imam's replacement, becoming one of the strongholds of HTI[14]. Nonetheless, Mufti Ablaev stated at the time that the process of exposing imams with ties to HTI would continue, pointing at the significant scale of infiltration of the movement in the SAMC's ranks[15].

These incidents manifesting HTI's acute conflict with the tandem of the Mejlis and the SAMC in 2003–2004 drew significant attention to the former from various media and from certain political forces that made vigilance against "wahhabis" and other kinds of Islamists a special point on their agenda in Crimea. In particular, in October and November 2004 several analytical articles concerning the nature and potential danger of HTI appeared both in local and national Ukrainian newspapers (such as "Dzerkalo tyzhnia" and the Crimean news bulletin of the Communist Party "Kommunist Kryma"). At the same time, in addition to their first fully fledged media interview for the web resource "Krymskaia linia," hizbis were invited to participate in political TV shows on Crimean TV channels ("Krym" and "Chernomorskaia teleradiokompania"). Thus, HTI received a number of opportunities to speak for itself and justify the need of its activities in the Crimean milieu vis-à-vis its overarching goal of building a caliphate and the popular anxiety about radical Islamism. Simultaneously, though, the emergence of HTI in the public arena in the mid-2000s caused a significant debate and as such was strongly challenged in the media by government officials, intellectuals and journalists.

After the controversial beginning of its public activity in 2004, the Crimean chapter of HTI made an attempt to capitalize on the attention and to become the most vocal Muslim group in the local public discourses by organizing media events on various occasions. In April 2005, the spokesperson of the group Abduseliam Seliametov gathered a press conference to explain his group's core ideological precepts and aims and, more importantly, to announce the organization's intention to register officially with the authorities in Crimea either as a political party proper or a civic organization[16]. In June 2005, Seliametov yet again called a press conference in response to a report on the TV show "Spetskor" which was devoted to the potential threat of radical Islamism in Ukraine[17]. Criticizing various claims and factual inconsistencies made by the authors, he argued that the report's general tone aimed to fuel confessional strife in Crimea, to disrupt the tourist season and to intimidate the population by evoking a "sense of danger emanating from Islamic organizations" prior to the upcoming Parliamentary elections[18].

However, given the mounting tensions around the movement and the growing attention of Ukrainian law enforcement agencies to these media events, HTI apparently decided to roll back its public presence in the following months. The movement came back to prominence yet again in August 2007 after organizing the conference "Islam. Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow" – an event that marked a significant change in its strategy of seeking public platforms for promulgating its ideology and drawing media attention. In

the subsequent period prior to the 2014 annexation, HTI organized at least eight similar events. Although their titles were worded in a rather general way, the presentations at these conferences were for the most part geared towards issues reflecting HTI's political agenda. In this respect, it is important to note that while HTI itself could not register with the authorities as a legal person, the conferences were formally organized by independent religious communities, the most notable of them being "Davet" (headed by Ruslan Ramazanov). Hence, despite the self-ascribed label of a political party, the primary form of the local institutionalization of HTI in Ukraine (i.e. its "front structures") became *religious* communities, independent from the hegemonic SAMC or other major centers of Islamic authority. According to some reports, as of March 2008, there were at least ten entities across Crimea unofficially controlled by HTI members[19]. Although this number paled in significance compared to more than 300 communities affiliated with the SAMC, the process of "autonomization," i.e. the growing number of independent Muslim units, became a major point of discussion and a primary cause of concern for the SAMC as a trend threatening its hegemony in the peninsula in the long run.

While the actual number of HTI followers in Crimea remained uncertain (with the estimates varying dramatically from several hundreds to dozens of thousands), in the early 2010s HTI felt confident enough to launch public street action on various politically relevant occasions. For example, in August 2012 the independent religious community "Davet" initiated a protest in Simferopol under the banners of HTI against the Syrian political regime of Bashar Asad[20]. In September of the same year, another HTI-driven protest devoted to the scandalous short film "Innocence of Muslims" was attended by up to a thousand people[21]. In November 2012, HTI supporters gathered in front of the Consulate of the Russian Federation in Simferopol to protest a wave of criminal persecution against HTI members in Russia – an action strongly criticized by the Russian Consul Andreev as a "terrorist threat"[22]. Finally, the following year, HTI organized a public rally in support of the caliphate cause "One Umma – One Flag" (June 2013) and a spur-of-the-moment march along the streets of Simferopol in October 2013, after its major conference event planned on the day was unexpectedly disrupted due to the last-minute venue cancellation[23].

HTI's discourse and ideology. On the discursive level, in media interviews and public statements of its official representatives, HTI consistently put forward several standard messages that for the most part aimed to respond to the movement's critics and to desecuritize the organization in the local Crimean context. First and foremost, stressing its complete lack of power ambitions, HTI repeatedly asserted that Ukraine – and Crimea in particular – was not part of HTI's *majal* (Arabic, "place, region"), or the core cluster of predominantly Muslim countries where it aimed to restore the caliphate by replacing the current political regimes[24]. In this respect, during his press conference in June 2005, Seliametov explicitly stated that HTI's local activity was not political but solely *religious* in nature, i.e. that lessons for Muslims conducted by HTI offered only studying the "basics of Islam" and did not contain calls to "subversive activity or overthrowing of the existing political order"[25]. Hence, the ultimate goal of HTI's activity in Crimea was described by him as "education and preventing of assimilation of Muslims in the Western values" and teaching Islam "as a way of life and worldview"[26]. It must be noted, however, that the organization's literature and media publications (such as the newspaper "Vozrozhdenie") also contained other ideological elements that foregrounded the links of Crimea to the caliphate both in the past and the present[27]. In this respect, as was noted by researchers, the founder of HTI an-Nabhani considered Crimea to be a part of *Dar al-Harb*, i.e. one of the "occupied" and "colonized" Muslim lands that need to be liberated by the future caliphate in the first place [Orofino 2021b, *1286*].

Secondly, while trying to distance itself from the stereotypical popular image of Islamist groups as invariably linked to armed struggle, HTI actively promoted its absolute

commitment to nonviolence, stating that the true caliphate can be restored through ideological propaganda and peaceful political action *only*. In this regard, HTI consistently denied involvement in any terrorist activity throughout the whole period of its existence since the early 1950s, including the 1999 Tashkent attacks in Uzbekistan[28]. At the same time, though, it is noteworthy that in their public discourses HTI representatives in Ukraine avoided straightforward condemnation of terrorism per se; instead, they cast doubt on the validity of this concept as discredited by U.S. politicians who purposefully introduced, defined and deployed "terrorism" as a derogatory label for justifying their policies vis-à-vis Muslim countries[29]. It is noteworthy that HTI promoted this critical stance even despite the fact that their organization did not fit the U.S.'s definition of terrorism as "employment of violence for achieving political purposes" and also was not recognized as "terrorist" by the U.S. Department of State, regardless of the efforts of Uzbekistan's leader Islam Karimov to achieve this goal in the 2000s. Likewise, in their 2004 interview for "Krymskaia liniia", HTI spokespersons argued that extremism and radicalism should not be regarded as *derogatory* terms. For one thing, "radicalism" for HTI has an "innocent but firm" meaning of "being decisive in action and aspiring for fundamental changes"[30]. For its part, "extremism" – understood as "commitment to extreme views and measures" – was relativized as artificially imposing on Muslims the terms and boundaries of normality whereas their sole criteria for determining this should be the Quran and the Sunna[31]. These statements, however, fell short of the earlier attempts of HTI to frame some terrorist attacks as a form of "defensive jihad", or a legitimate struggle against the "occupier" or "foreign invader" [Ahmed, Stuart 2009]. However, HTI representatives in Crimea argued that violence remained the sole prerogative of the state authorities and confirmed their commitment to "offensive jihad" as a legitimate method of spreading Islam by the future caliphate[32].

Discussing the local discourses of hizbis in Crimea, it is also important to note that while receiving much criticism from the Mejlis and the SAMC, HTI refrained from direct attacks of these organizations and put forward pacifying messages. In particular, in their 2004 interview, HTI spokespersons insisted that their organization was not opposed either to the Mejlis or to the SAMC in principle and as such did not try to take their places as pillars of the Crimean Tatar national movement[33]. At the same time, HTI asserted its right to speak up publicly if some representatives of these organizations made "mistakes" as Muslims or failed to properly execute their duties vis-à-vis Crimean Tatars[34].

HTI and the state in the pre-2014 period. The first clear reaction of Crimea's local state authorities to the emergence of HTI in the public sphere came in October 2004, in the aftermath of the SAMC's firing eight of their imams, and simultaneously with the eruption of media attention to the movement. In particular, the Prime Minister of Crimea Serhii Kunitsyn expressed concern over the activities of Islamic groups that "aim to build a caliphate" and suggested adoption of legislative changes to the procedures of registering new religious communities which would prevent the proliferation of such groups[35]. In the subsequent years, similar initiatives were fruitlessly put forward by other political actors as well. For example, in October 2005, the need of passing special legislation for proscribing radical organizations in Ukraine was raised by the Head of the SBU in Crimea Vladimir Pshenichnyi[36]. He argued that this issue was especially topical in the Crimean context in connection to the spread of HTI as an organization banned in many countries[37]. Special anti-extremist legislation against "destructive sects" emulating Russia's legislation and the proscription of HTI on the grounds of it being banned in "forty countries" was yet again proposed in April 2008 by the Speaker of the Crimean Parliament Anatolii Hritsenko[38].

A more practical attempt to curtail the growing confidence of HTI as a public actor was undertaken in March 2005 by the security service of Ukraine ("SBU") which initiated a court case against several HTI members in Sevastopol for distributing ideological

leaflets[39]. As a result, on March 31 these individuals were issued a fine for engaging in illegal political action. Moreover, on April 5, 2005 the regional spokesperson of HTI in Ukraine at the time, Abduseliam Seliametov, was detained by the police immediately after his press conference in a Simferopol's information centre and later on charged with violating Article 186-5 of the Code of Administrative Violations which concerns transgressions related to the political unions of citizens[40]. According to the police interpretation, Seliametov organized this event as a representative of a political party which was not registered officially and hence had no right to conduct any public activities[41]. Despite this, already in June 2005 Seliametov gathered another press conference in response to a media report on TV Channel "Inter"[42]. Although he similarly used it as a platform for speaking about HTI's goals and strategies, this time no public reaction from law enforcement followed[43].

Nonetheless, after its June 2005 press conference, HTI apparently went on a two year hiatus, re-emerging again in August 2007 with another type of public activity, namely the conference "Islam. Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow". This conference was planned as open to the public, with invitations sent to journalists, government officials and representatives of other Islamic organizations, including the SAMC. It is noteworthy that in the aftermath of this event that revolved around the topic of building the caliphate and drew significant media attention, the SBU was forced to make statements countering the claims about the presence of extremist and terrorist threats in Ukraine. For instance, in his interview for *Radio Svoboda* on August 30, 2007, the Acting Head of the SBU Valentyn Nalyvaichenko stated that there were no terrorist groups in the country[44]. In the same vein, in December 2007 he called upon the public and the media to stop considering Crimean Tatar Muslims as "potential terrorists"[45]. In September 2007 the same messages were strongly conveyed by the press secretary of the SBU Maryna Ostapenko in response to the claims by the Mufti of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine Ahmad Tamim about the rampant activities of extremists in Crimea – a direct reference to HTI's conference in August as well as its main publication, the newspaper "Vozrozhdenie"[46].

It must be noted that the 2007 conference also brought to the fore the Committee for Religious Affairs in the Crimean government as the key actor expected to stem the tide of HTI's spreading by using administrative measures and bureaucratic instruments. However, the strategy of this government body vis-à-vis HTI remained inconsistent. For one thing, already during the initial debate concerning the perils of the organization's activities in 2004, the Head of the Committee Vladimir Maliborskii explicitly criticized the group's ideology of building a global caliphate as a potential long-term threat to the territorial integrity of Ukraine[47]. In 2006, Maliborskii stated that as a public official he regularly came into contact with "athletic young people" who were carriers of radical Islamic ideas; yet he denied that HTI and similar movements presented a threat to the population because they were merely involved in propaganda by word[48]. Commenting on the HTI conference in August 2007, Maliborskii explicitly asserted that the state authorities were "powerless" to prevent the official registration of independent Muslim communities controlled by HTI (such as "Davet," the official organizer of public events for HTI) because their statutory documents contained nothing that contradicted the current law[49]. In this respect, he also repeatedly asserted that HTI was forced to act through religious communities because it could not be legally registered in Ukraine as a political party due to its headquarters being located in a foreign country[50].

The first occurrence that drew attention to HTI in Ukraine in relation to terrorism was reported in May 2009 when the SBU claimed to foil an attempt to create the "first HTI terrorist cell" in Ukraine undertaken by a group of foreign citizens from the Near East and Central Asia[51]. According to the statement by the SBU's media spokesperson Maryna Ostapenko, the clandestine group (designated by her with typically HTI nomenclature as "khalki") had a clear hierarchical structure and division of duties between its nine members, who underwent special training for conducting subversive activities in boot camps

in Near Eastern countries[52]. She also asserted that the planned cell included several Ukrainian converts to Islam[53]. The goal of the group, according to Ostapenko, was "creating a primary network of terrorist cells, propaganda of the ideology of Hizb ut-Tahrir as well as recruiting and training potential terrorists"[54]. She also stated that everyday routine of the cell members was guided by strict behavior rules and included four hour lessons about the works of the founder and chief ideologue of HTI Taqi ud-Din an-Nabahani[55]. Thus, the initial explanation provided by the SBU unequivocally painted the picture of HTI as a clandestine terrorist group using the Russian and Uzbekistani law enforcement framings – an approach that could have been employed for showcasing the SBU's counter-terrorism vigilance.

According to the later account of event provided by the SBU's Head Nalivaichenko in June 2009, the suspects' potential links to the movement were discovered only in the very end of the special operation, when HTI literature was found on the premises during the searches[56]. It is highly noteworthy that, as Nalivaichenko stated, this discovery actually prompted the secret service to take a less severe, "preventive" course of action regarding the group: "Being aware that this movement [HTI] has been in Crimea for a long time and has not engaged in illegal activities, we decided not to pursue criminal prosecution"[57]. As a result, the alleged HTI literature was confiscated while the foreign individuals were merely deported from Ukraine and put on various terrorist watch lists. Nalivaichenko also intimated in his interviews that the incident was treated by the SBU more as a provocation attempt coming from abroad than an actual terrorist threat[58].

In light of Nalivaichenko's explanations, it appears understandable why the incident was not used by the state authorities as a suitable pretext for clamping down on HTI in Crimea[59]. In its press release, the movement itself cited a standard set of arguments about its nonviolent methodology, discarding the SBU's allegations as "absurd" and reminiscent of the policies undertaken by the authoritarian regimes, such as Uzbekistan[60]. It also stated that such allegations from high public officials undermine national security, create instability and a sense of fear in society which are used by "third forces" in its political games[61]. For its part, reacting to the event, the SAMC went on the offensive and decided to put the blame for the spreading of HTI in Crimea on the local authorities which allowed HTI to found and register their own independent religious communities competing with the SAMC[62]. Moreover, the SAMC claimed that the Crimean authorities *deliberately* facilitated the development of HTI because it helped in dividing the local umma and making it more controllable or less dangerous to the state worried about the Crimean Tatar revival[63]. In this light, Crimea's prime minister yet again expressed concern about the proliferation of HTI as a factor stirring the competition of Islamic organizations[64]. Against this backdrop, in July 2009 HTI r**e**ported that the SBU blocked its websites for advertizing "illegal services"[65]. However, this ban turned out to be only temporary as HTI managed quickly to restore access to their web resources.

While the May 2009 incident, despite its terrorism connotations, did not have any major repercussions for HTI's status, a conflict in a small Crimean village Zhuravki in September of the same year (which involved a fight in the mosque between hizbis and some other local residents) yet again heightened tensions around HTI in the political public sphere. More importantly, it led to a deeper involvement of the police in the debate surrounding the movement and its attempt to initiate the restriction of its activities[66]. In particular, in the aftermath of the conflict the Head of the Crimean police Henadii Moskal, who was also a Member of the Ukrainian Parliament, called to introducing a complete ban of the movement in Ukraine[67]. Following the discursive strategy of the SAMC and the Mejlis, he also contributed to the "blame game" around HTI, accusing the local Crimean authorities of the lack of action against it or even of deliberately legalizing "dangerous sects" – a situation which yet again revealed tensions between the local government and law enforcement agencies[68].

In the wake of the Zhuravki conflict, Moskal called upon the SBU to initiate a criminal case against HTI due to its idea of building a global caliphate as tantamount to threatening the political order and territorial integrity of Ukraine[69]. Although charges of terrorism were never put forward by him, his approach de facto replicated the strategy of criminal persecution of HTI in Russia. As a Member of Parliament, on 26 October 2009, Moskal registered a special bill with a set of legislative changes for combating manifestations of "extremism and fundamentalism"[70]. Although the wording of the document was very broad and contained no actual definitions of extremism, the explanatory note substantiating it revolved around HTI as a major security threat and closely reproduced Zeyno Baran's "conveyor belt thesis", while citing the negative experiences of Russia and Uzbekistan[71]. The note also concluded that the bill was intended as a measure for handling the exacerbation of the conflict between HTI and representatives of "traditional Islam" in Crimea – a state of affairs which threaten the destabilization of the situation[72]. This bill, however, was never actually put to a vote in the Parliament.

It must be noted that in response to constant pressure and accusations of failure to act from the SAMC, the Mejlis and other political actors, in the end of 2009, the Committee on Religious Affairs finally decided to take action against the independent religious community "Davet," i.e. the most notable of HTI's front structures in Crimea. In particular, the community's registration was cancelled on the grounds of its involvement in political activity and promotion of HTI ideology under the guise of a religious organization[73]. However, the representatives of "Davet" – who organized a number of press conferences framing the situation as "religious persecution" – were able to defend their community in court – the outcome that yet again demonstrated the absence of concerted efforts or a general strategy of state actors in circumventing the proliferation of the movement in the Crimean context.

The aforementioned ambivalence of the local state authorities in Crimea vis-à-vis HTI also manifested itself in dealing with the street action organized by the movement in Simferopol in 2012–2013. In particular, as has been noted above, in September and November 2012 HTI's "Davet" consecutively gathered a massive protest against the film "Innocence of Muslims" and also a protest in front of the Russian Federation Consulate in Simferopol. It is highly noteworthy that in both cases the authorities obtained a court order prohibiting HTI's action[74]. Nevertheless, the police did not use force to disperse the crowds or other strong measures to prevent the action but merely subsequently issued fines for the organizers for conducting an unregistered public action. Likewise, commenting on HTI's massive rally in Simferopol in June 2013 in support of the Caliphate cause "One umma – one flag," the Prime Minister of Crimea Mohyliov eschewed to take a clear stance on the movement, merely stating that the Crimean authorities had no power to proscribe it[75].

Finally, in October 2013 HTI scheduled two major conferences in Simferopol that were supposed to become the pinnacle of its public activity in Ukraine since the early 2000s. In particular, the conference "Islamskii prizyv na post-sovetskom prostranstve" presupposed participation of major spokespersons of HTI from Europe and the Near East, including the heads of the information offices of HTI in Lebanon Osman Bahhash and in the UK Taji Mustafa. However, both events were derailed due to the last minute cancelations from the venue providers under the pretexts of an electric wiring malfunction in the building, anonymous phone calls about bomb threats or alleged violations of the lease contract's conditions on the part of the conference's organizers[76]. While designating these incidents as "suspicious" during the subsequent press conferences, HTI's spokespersons avoided assigning the blame to the local authorities or security services directly, stating instead that HTI's legal activity in Ukraine was highly inconvenient to other countries where HTI was banned and persecuted as an extremist or terrorist organization[77]. On October 7, 2013 after the participant of the planned conference were not allowed to enter the

venue, they organized a march through the streets and a rally in the center of Simferopol[78]. The head of HTI's local information office Fazyl Amzaev, thought of as the local leader of HTI, was issued a fine for organizing an illegal action[79]. In October and November 2013, HTI also announced that all Ukrainian printing houses refused to publish HTI's newspaper "Vozrozhdenie", even though it was officially registered in the government's registries.

Thus, the triumphant pinnacle of HTI's activity in Ukraine was substantially undermined by a chain of events that may have testified to unofficial involvement of the local authorities or law enforcement agencies, attempting to send a signal to HTI. In this light, it is interesting to note that in November 2013 the Head of the SBU Yakymenko, responding to a request from the Member of Parliament Leonov, explicitly stated that HTI could not be prohibited in Ukraine due to the absence of a definition of extremism in Ukrainian legislation[80].

Conclusion. As a highly controversial religio-political movement with a hybrid ideological agenda (mixing radical Islamist goals with ostensibly nonviolent methodology), in the past decades HTI has evoked vastly different responses from state authorities around the world. In different socio-political milieus, these responses have ranged from (albeit reluctant) permission to operate publicly with little formal control to complete proscription to brutal repression or criminal persecution on accusations of terrorism. Each of these cases involves a unique combination of circumstances and factors, such as the type of the political regime and the predominant security paradigm in a given country, its model of religion-politics relations, the demographic status of local Muslim communities, etc. [Hanif 2014]. For example, despite a number of significant controversies surrounding the UK chapter of HTI since the early 1990s (including the formation of a highly extremist offshoot "al-Muhajiroon" in 1996), the organization continues to operate freely in Great Britain [Hamid 2007; Maher 2016; McNeil-Willson 2021]. On the other hand, the uncompromising anti-Israeli standpoint of HTI led to its ban in Germany, although membership in the organization in the past twenty years has not been criminally prosecuted [Möller, Baron, Berg 2021]. In the case of Indonesia, the successful trajectory of HTI's legal activity and growth was brought to a grinding halt in 2017 when the movement was proscribed due to its alleged "negative effects" on the social cohesion of Indonesian society [Osman 2018]. Finally, in Russia and Uzbekistan, HTI was recognized as a terrorist group, resulting in strong criminal persecution and in giving exceptionally long sentences to HTI members by the courts even in cases where no violent activity by the accused was proven.

Taking this into account, this analysis demonstrates that the Ukrainian state's approach to dealing with the proliferation of HTI in Crimea prior to the 2014 annexation, although displaying significant ambiguity, can be placed on the more mild side of the policy spectrum. For one thing, while staying "under the radar" in the 1990s and the early 2000s, the organization was not treated by the Crimean authorities, law enforcement and competing Islamic groups as an obvious cause for concern. However, its sudden coming to public prominence in 2003–2004 due to clashes with the SAMC and the Mejlis presented the state with a policy dilemma on how to manage the growing tension within the Crimean Tatar community. As a result, in the period 2004–2013 there were a number of initiatives from various political actors to introduce special legislation against extremist organizations or to amend the procedures regulating the registration of religious communities with the view to stemming the tide of HTI's spreading. However, only one of these initiatives was turned into an actual bill which, however, was never put to a vote in the Ukrainian Parliament. In this regard, one can argue that HTI proliferation was not perceived by the political elites in Kyiv as an existential threat but as an essentially local Crimean issue. At the same time, though, there were numerous allegations that HTI as a small but highly vocal social actor in Crimea could be used by various external or internal political forces (e.g., the Party of Regions) to advance their agenda or maintain a beneficial status quo in the region.

It is noteworthy that, in terms of the security dimension, the issue of potential violence on the part of HTI did not figure prominently, if at all, in the public debates on Islamism in Ukraine, despite the fact that in other countries of the Commonwealth of Independent Countries (such as Russia or Uzbekistan) the movement was officially designated as a major extremist and terrorist threat. Nonetheless, by reporting the liquidation of the "first HTI terrorist cell in Ukraine" in May 2009, the SBU used a Russian framing of the group as a means of demonstrating its counter-terrorist efforts. This created a paradoxical situation where the local Crimean HTI chapter was allowed to operate and promote its ideology without any constrains since the mid-1990s, while the alleged attempt of some foreign actors to create an HTI cell in the Kyiv region were treated as potential terrorist activity. Hence, the incident did not result in immediate criminal prosecution or change of legal status either for the existing HTI groups in Crimea, or for the foreigners who might have tried to create an active HTI network in mainland Ukraine.

Overall, in the pre-annexation period there were a number of Ukrainian political actors that saw HTI as a threat for the local religious peace, security and stability and as a long-term problem for Ukraine's territorial integrity due to the movement's agenda of restoring the global caliphate. Hence, they advocated stricter policies of proscription and prosecution, similar to Russia's approach to handling the HTI phenomenon at the time. However, in practice the authorities and law enforcement for the most part avoided exacerbation of the situation and used more subtle means. In this respect, although issuing fines for illegal activities as a political party or for organizing rallies without proper permits, the police never used force to prevent or disperse HTI's events. This created a balancing act where HTI had no clear grounds to declare itself a persecuted group or radicalize its discourse while the authorities took some steps to keep HTI activities in check and make the movement mindful of the state's control. Yet, regular tensions between the government bodies and law enforcement agencies demonstrated a lack of concerted efforts and a clear vision on the part of the state concerning HTI's spreading in Crimea.

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[3] Интервью Фазыла Амзаева газете Возрождение об обвинениях в экстремизме, радикализме и терроризме // HIZB UT-TAHRIR UKRAINE. 2009. URL: https://hizb.org.ua/ru/in-ukraine/4743-office/interview/105211-interviu-hizb-ut-tahrir-fazil-amzaev-ru.html (дата звернення: 05.04.2021).

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[8] Самохвалов И. Хизб-ут-Тахрир выходит из подполья // События. 2008. URL: http://politika-crimea.ru/islam-radikaly/2592-khizb-ut-takhrir-vykhodit-iz-podpolya (дата звернення: 05.04.2021). As Chubarov put it: "If [HTI members] are against the integration of Ukraine in Euro-Atlantic and European structures, this can only be playing into the hand of our neighbours,

which do not want this course of development for Ukraine to happen. Moscow will use any opportunities to prevent Ukrainian society from taking the straight path of consistent democratic development" (Притула В. Чи заборонять в Україні всесвітню партію "Хізб ут-Тахрір" // Радіо Свобода. 2008. URL: https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/l 113917.html (дата звернення: 05.04.2021)).

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Д. В. Шестопалець

Радикальний іслам та державна влада в Криму до 2014 року: кейс Хізб ут-Тахрір

Очевидна небезпека радикального ісламізму та релігійна боротьба за гегемонію в місцевому українському контексті фактично зійшлися в кейсі Хізб ут-Тахрір аль-Ісламі (ХТІ), або Ісламської партії визволення. За відсутності більш гучних ісламістських угруповань в Україні ця організація стала розглядатися в різних ЗМІ як головне локальне втілення екстремістської загрози. Також, незважаючи на те що фактична кількість послідовників або симпатиків ХТІ в Криму залишалася невизначеною, у період до 2014 року рух часто потрапляв у центр уваги як головний суперник Духовного управління мусульман Криму. Тож, хоча анексія Криму Російською Федерацією в березні 2014 року повністю зруйнувала динаміку розвитку ХТІ в регіоні, аналіз його попередньої діяльності все ж може стати важливим внеском у поглиблене розуміння дихотомічної природи руху як глобального явища, а також його специфічної стратегії соціального пристосування в європейських умовах. Отже, ця стаття пропонує більш детальний та комплексний погляд на розвиток організації на півострові до початку Євромайдану (листопад 2013 року), зосередивши увагу на її участі в місцевій політиці та взаємодії з правоохоронними органами та державною владою. Особливу увагу в статті приділено публічним дискурсам ХТІ в українському середовищі та ключовим елементам його саморепрезентації для широкого загалу як таким, що не становлять загрози соціополітичному та культурному ладу України.

Ключові слова: Україна, іслам, держава, Крим, Хізб ут-Тахрір, ісламізм, радикалізм

Стаття надійшла до редакції 29.06.2022