

Islamic Discourse and Modern Political Methods: An Analysis of al Nabhānī's Reading of the Canonical Textual Sources of Islam

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On 17 November 1952, Tāqī al Dīn al Nabhānī submitted an application to the Jordanian Interior Ministry for permission to establish a new political party: *Ḥizb al Taḥrīr*.¹ This was in accordance with the new constitution, which permitted party organization provided that every party submitted to an official investigation. Soon after its promulgation, several ideologically-based opposition parties sought official permission to organize openly. Al Nabhānī's application was rejected on the grounds that the party's platform was incompatible with the constitution. This launched the new party on a collision course, which continues even until this day, with the Jordanian authorities.

The new party has, as its final goal, the reestablishment of the Islamic caliphate in one of the Arab countries. In its ideological formulations, program, and structure, it conformed to the patterns of similarity discernible among Jordan's new parties.² Like the other parties, it reflected

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¹Rachel Simon and Ella Landau, "Miflaget Hashihrur," in Amnon Cohen, *Miflagot Politiot begada Hama'aravit tahat Hashilton Hahashemi* (Jerusalem: The Truman Institute, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1972), 409 (unpublished). See also Munīb al Nādī and Sulaymān Mūsā, *Tā'rikh al Urdun fī al Qarn al 'Ishrīn* (Amman: al Maṭba'at al Waṭanīyah, 1959), 598; A. H. H. Abidi, *Jordan: A Political Study 1948-1957* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1965), 201.

²See Amnon Cohen, "Political Parties in the West Bank under the Hashemite Regime," in Moshe Ma'oz (ed.), *Palestinian Arab Politics* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Academic Press, 1975), 36-37, 39, 47; Avi Plascov, *The Palestinian Refugees in Jordan 1948-1957* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 131, 140, 142; Shaul Mishal, *The*

characteristics of the broader trend of modern revolutionary-cum-ideological parties that developed throughout the Arab Middle East from the 1930s onwards.

Broadly speaking, these parties were vehicles through which the new secular ideologies of nationalism and socialism, radiating from Europe and sweeping the region, were articulated. These ideologies were of growing appeal to an emerging interwar generation that was disillusioned with the old order of liberal democratic regimes. By participating in the new political fields that had developed under these regimes in relation to the newly established nation-states, this new generation sought to gain control of the state through a revolutionary program that had the creation of a utopian social and political order as its ultimate goal.

Unlike the traditional political groupings of the older generation, these parties displayed many of the characteristic features of what Duverger terms the "modern mass political party," distinguished in the context of the development of political parties in the West from the older cadre parties.³ Hizb al Tahrīr belonged to this first generation of modern mass political parties in the Arab world. Al Nabhānī was evidently convinced of the need to adopt modern political methods and strategies and to participate assertively in the new political fields that had emerged in the region. This was the only effective way to achieve genuine independence, to redeem Palestine, and to confront the continuing dangers of colonialism and neocolonialism. His rejection of the overwhelmingly secular nationalist orientation of the new trend of political parties prompted an attempt to articulate an ideological alternative to this, one that was based on Islam.

Al Nabhānī postulated a fundamental difference between his own endeavor, as embodied in Hizb al Tahrīr, and that embodied in the Muslim Brotherhood Association, its senior ideological counterpart and rival. He sought to fashion Islam into a clearly defined worldview, a coherent and consistently elaborated thought-system, and a mandate for action expressed in a carefully delineated political program (with the sole objective of establishing an Islamic state) and a well-organized political movement. The end product was a political party as thoroughly modern and political as its secular counterparts, but with an Islamic ideology. He would rely on the pull of this ideology to mobilize Muslims first to join the party and then to engage them, through it, in the new political field.

Palestinians in Jordan 1949-1967 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 40, 96.

³Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organisation and Activity in the Modern State*, 2d ed. (London: Methuen & Co., 1959), 427.

Thus, in contrast with the Muslim Brotherhood,⁴ the establishment of Hizb al Tahrīr represented a clear attempt to amalgamate the approach and methods of the new trend of modern parties with an Islamic ideology. A testament to its thoroughly modern political character can be found in the denunciations of it put out by other Islamist groups, whose suspicions have been aroused by this aspect of its nature. The following comment, for example, is by a critic with a Muslim Brotherhood background:

If you read Hizb al Tahrīr's books, you will have the impression that it is a political party that works to assume power, and not an association that confronts the battlefield of life with the goal of actualizing God's vicegerency on earth This has lost it considerable weight in the struggle.⁵

Main Thesis and Approach

This paper has as its starting point Hizb al Tahrīr's nature as a modern Islamic political party. It will analyze the case advanced by its founder for constructing such a party. Al Nabhānī claimed to develop this case within the parameters of authentic Islamic discourse exclusively. As a corollary of this claim, he was impelled to infuse the whole of Islam with a political ethos.

In elaborating his case, al Nabhānī endeavored to recast methods, organizational models, and conceptual patterns characteristic of the new trend of political parties in terms of ideological constructs drawn from traditional Islamic discourse. This required the manipulation of parts of the canonical textual sources of Islam. This paper will demonstrate that he subjected passages from these sources to a subtle reconstruction in the light of his conscious political objectives and general contextual realities. This will be achieved by analyzing his reading of selected passages from the Qur'an and *sīrah* on the basis of a careful contextualization of this reading. This informs our main thesis: that he employed constructs of traditional Islamic discourse to legitimize the adoption of modern modes of political organization.

⁴Clearly, al Bannā was the first Islamic reformist to stress the need to create a modern political party and to formulate a comprehensive program of action. At its inception, however, the Muslim Brotherhood could not be described as a fully-fledged modern political party.

⁵Ghāzī al Tawbā, *al Fikr al Islāmī al Mu'āssir: Dirāsah wa Taqwīm* (Beirut: n.p., 1969), 311.

The main text of the paper is divided into three sections. In order to contextualize al Nabhānī's reading of the Islamic textual sources, it is necessary to reconstruct his specific context. This is achieved through a review, in the first section, of his intellectual formation and political career up to and including the establishment of Hizb al Taḥrīr. The second section examines his argument that the creation of Hizb al Taḥrīr is a *farḍ* (religious duty), based on the contention that Muslims are required by Islam to establish a political party that will assume power and construct an Islamic state. Three themes are developed: a) his argument for establishing a political party formulated without reference to Islamic discourse; b) the establishment of an Islamic political party as a *farḍ*; and c) involvement in politics as a *farḍ*. The third section considers his claim that in its overall approach, broad divisions, and subsidiary strategies the program he elaborated for Hizb al Taḥrīr is a faithful emulation of the prophetic paradigm encapsulated in the *sīrah*. This comprises two main themes: a) relevant theoretical and interpretative issues, including an introduction to al Nabhānī's treatment of the *sīrah* in a selected text; and b) a textual analysis of passages from this.

Intellectual Formation and Political Career

Al Nabhānī was born in Ijzim in 1909 into a family distinguished by its tradition of scholarship in the Islamic sciences. He graduated from al Azhar in 1932. Returning to Palestine, he began work as a high school teacher of religion. In 1938, he transferred to the Islamic courts of law.⁶ After a series of minor posts, he was finally appointed *qāḍī* (judge) in Ramleh in 1945. After the Arab defeat of 1948, he fled to Syria.

The Ba'th Phase

On his return from Syria, al Nabhānī worked as a *qāḍī* in Jerusalem and later transferred to the Court of Appeals, where he remained until his resignation in early 1950. During these two years in Jerusalem, he associated himself with a group of Palestinian intellectuals who were emerging as leaders of their community's aspirations within the Jordanian context following the annexation. This chapter in al Nabhānī's political career reveals influences that were to shape his vision of Hizb al Taḥrīr.

⁶This sketch draws on Iḥsān 'Abd al Mun'im Samārah, *Mafhūm al 'Adālah al Ijtimā'īyah fī al Fikr al Islāmī al Mu'āṣir* (Jerusalem: Maṭba'at al Risālah, 1987), 140-46. Compare with David Commins, "Tāqī al Din al Nabhānī and the Islamic Liberation Party," *The Muslim World* 81 (1991): 194.

This group of intellectuals were "Western-educated, and modern in their thought on political organization and activity." They resented King Abdullah and were determined to reverse the situation in their homeland.⁷ Their sentiments won the support of the Jordanian Colonel Abdullah al Tall, Commander of the Arab Legion in Jerusalem. Al Tall strengthened their conviction that the king stood in the way of Palestine's liberation. Under his protection, the group pursued its activities freely, one of which was the publication of the daily newspaper *al Ba'th*, after which this phase in his life is generally named.⁸

The group's ideas resembled closely those of the Syrian Ba'th Party. Its central message was a call for revolutionary change in the Arab world and the unification of all Arab states. Al Tall encouraged the group to use *al Ba'th* to attack the regime and so to prepare the Palestinians in Jordan to accept the idea of a coup. The success of Ḥuṣnī al Za'īm's coup in Syria prompted the group to consider implementing its own joint coup plan: a promise of assistance was secured from Syria and Egypt.⁹ Al Tall commissioned al Nabhānī with bringing back a message from al Za'īm concerning the proposed coup, and so he travelled to Damascus in May 1949 for this purpose.¹⁰ This reveals his closeness to al Tall. He has also been described as one of the Colonel's closest associates in Jerusalem.¹¹ While at this point he was evidently committed to the coup plot and its underlying platform, one must ask whether this commitment survived the debacle of al Tall and the coup conspiracy. An answer arises in three works he published shortly after this¹²: a review of one of these reveals his intellectual orientation at this juncture.

⁷This characterization is based on Clinton Bailey, "The Participation of the Palestinians in the Politics of Jordan," Ph.D. diss., Columbia University (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966), 125-26, 1303-1; 'Abd Allāh al Tall, *Kārithat Filastīn: Mudhakkirāt 'Abd Allāh al Tall* (Cairo: Dār al Qalam, 1959), 587.

⁸See Bailey, "Participation," 127-30; al Tall, *Kārithat Filastīn*, 569, 587; J. Vatikiotis, *Politics and the Military in Jordan: A Study of the Arab Legion 1921-1957* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1967), 102.

⁹For further details about the coup plot, see Vatikiotis, *Politics and the Military*, 99-108.

¹⁰See al Tall, *Kārithat Filastīn*, 591.

¹¹Bailey, "Participation," 134.

¹²*Nizām al Mujtama'*; *Risālat al 'Arab; Inqādh Filastīn*.

*Inqādh Filastīn*¹³

This monograph reflects a nationalist orientation, based on the notion that the Arabs constitute a single nation (*ummah*), unique in its possession of an eternal mission, Islam, the fundamental principle of Arab nationalism and its "spirit." Although he insists that Islam must be restored to Arab nationalism in order to rehabilitate it, the author does not explicitly postulate Islam as a political system.

Inqādh Filastīn construes the redemption of Palestine as an Arab problem and proposes a two-pronged approach to its solution. It is the long-term approach, intended to address problems confronting the Arab nation at the root, that interests us here. The discussion reflects salient themes of early Ba'athist ideology, including the emphasis on Arab unity, and the notion of a revolutionary vanguard that regenerates the Arab nation by transforming society. The working out of this approach is outlined below in some detail, as the main notions later recur, *mutatis mutandis*, in the program al Nabhānī elaborated for his new party some two years later.

Inqādh Filastīn calls for a revolutionary restructuring of Arab society. To achieve this, the author urges Arab intellectuals to form an "elite band" (*fi'ah mukhtārah*), endowed with outstanding qualities. He refers repeatedly to this as "the first group" (*al kutlah al ūlā*). The elite band functions as a launching pad (*nuqṭat inṭilāq*) for their mission, enabling them to unify their ideas and define a course of action. As it forges through Arab society, it fuses with the people, developing first the form of a political party and finally that of a nation or state (*kutlah ḥizbīyah munazzamah tanzīm al ummah aw al dawlah*). Once it has matured into a healthy nation, a sound government emerges out of it. At this point, the Arab nation will ascend and Palestine will be redeemed.

The Break with the Ba'th: Establishing Ḥizb al Taḥrīr

Despite its closeness to early Ba'athist ideology, there are differences of emphasis in *Inqādh Filastīn*. For example, al Nabhānī makes no mention of the Ba'th's pivotal Arab socialism. There are other indications that, by the time *Inqādh Filastīn* appeared, our author was moving away from his Ba'athist colleagues. For example, he did not associate himself with the Ba'athist group in the first two Jordanian elections following the

¹³Tāqī al Dīn al Nabhānī, *Inqādh Filastīn* (Damascus: Maṭba'at Ibn Zaydūn, 1950), 213pp. See Commins, "Tāqī al Dīn al Nabhānī," 195-96.

annexation, but stood as an independent instead.¹⁴ Following his failure in both elections, he resumed teaching in Amman and then in Jerusalem. One biographer contends that since his transfer to the legal profession, he had lobbied prominent figures at home and in Cairo and sounding them out on his proposal to establish an Islamic party in order to restore Islam to its former glory.¹⁵ Although this is difficult to reconcile with his simultaneous involvement in the Ba'athist group, it is conceivable that the failure of the coup plot convinced him of the ineffectiveness of Arab nationalism in redressing the Arabs' ills and redeeming Palestine. Rather than any *volte face*, it would appear that he developed the emphasis on Islam in *Inqādh Filastīn*, which had set him apart from his secular nationalist colleagues, to its logical conclusion.

In Jerusalem, al Nabhānī won over As'ad and Rajab Bayyūḍ al Tamīmī and 'Abd al Qadīm Zallūm, who had broken away from the Muslim Brotherhood Association.¹⁶ Both the initial attempt by Hizb al Tahrīr to obtain a permit to organize (see above) and a subsequent attempt failed.¹⁷ Documentation submitted to the Ministry of the Interior described Hizb al Tahrīr as a political party with Islam as its ideology and having the goals of reviving the Islamic ummah,¹⁸ purging it of the legacy of colonialism, and restoring an Islamic way of life to it. This would be achieved by uniting it within a single Islamic state (the caliphate), erected on the ruins of existing regimes, that would implement Islam and export it worldwide.¹⁹

Al Nabhānī envisaged Hizb al Tahrīr as a vanguard that would transform the public way of thinking at its root. It would engender an intellectual revolution by supplanting the erroneous beliefs that have

¹⁴See Avi Plascov, *The Palestinian Refugees*, 105; Amnon Cohen, *Political Parties in the West Bank under the Jordanian Regime, 1949-1967* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 216; Samārah, *Maḥmūd al 'Adālah al Ijtīmā'īyah*, 144-46.

¹⁵Samārah, *Maḥmūd al 'Adālah al Ijtīmā'īyah*, 145-46.

¹⁶Simon and Landau, "Miflaget Hashihur," 408. The authors maintain that al Nabhānī had also quit the Brotherhood, as does Cohen, *Political Parties*, 187, 209, 218. In contrast, well-placed Jordanian sources deny that he had ever been a member.

¹⁷Simon and Landau, "Miflaget Hashihur," 410; Shaul Mishal, *West Bank/East Bank*, 36.

¹⁸The term *ummah* assumed a usage in Tahrīr publications different from that in *Inqādh Filastīn*. It now signified "an association of individuals united through the agency of a single doctrine, from which emanates a specific system." See, for example, Tāqī al Din al Nabhānī, *Sur'at al Bahīhah* (n.p., 1976), 111, 127.

¹⁹*Maḥmūd Hizb al Tahrīr*, 2d. ed. (Beirut: Maṭābi' al Istiqlāl, 1953), 73.

arisen due to the ummah's state of decline and colonialist "contaminations" with its own ideology. This ideology is construed as a correct representation of a "pristine" Islam that is cleansed of all distortions. The revolution in thought would underpin a political revolution, as an extensive fifth column is created that supports the idea of the caliphate. This column can be relied on to support the revolutionary state once it has been established by a coup executed with the help of power bases that have pledged their support to the party.²⁰

The conception of the party as vanguard and its role in transforming society is pivotal. Al Nabhānī used the metaphor of fusing in a "crucible"²¹ to describe how the party would purge the ummah's intellectual make-up and make it one with the party ideology. The early Leninist notion of the party as the elite, vanguard, educator of the masses and an organization of professional revolutionaries²² echoes throughout his discussions of the character and role of Ḥizb al Tahrīr. This was typical of several of the new political parties in the region. Al Nabhānī's familiarity with the ethos and approach of the Ba'th in particular is evident in the many parallels that arise between his conception of Ḥizb al Tahrīr and the approach of the early Ba'thists.²³

The Creation of Ḥizb al Tahrīr as a *Fard*

The Case for a Political Party: The Notion of Revival and How It Can Be Achieved

In 1953, al Nabhānī developed his conviction, apparent in a rudimentary form in *Ināqh Filasṭīn*, that the establishment of a *kutlah* is indispensable to an ummah's revival (*inna al ummah lā tanhaḍ illā bi al*

²⁰This and the following two paragraphs draw on Tāqī al Dīn al Nabhānī, *al Takattul al Hizbī*, 3d. edn. (n.p., 1953), 25-28; 303-3; 38-56; 65-66; Tāqī al Dīn al Nabhānī, *al Taḥkīm* (n.p., 1973), 102-9; *Mafāhīm Ḥizb al Tahrīr*, 53-54; 64-66; 73; *Ḥizb al Tahrīr* (n.p., 1985), 33-36.

²¹See al Nabhānī, *al Takattul al Hizbī*, 25-28; Ḥizb al Tahrīr leaflet "Jawāb Su'āl," (20/6/1969): 3 and "Qit'ah min Kitāb Ursila li aḥad al Mas'ūlīn min Shabāb al Hizb," (18/1/1962): 1.

²²Elaborated in "What is to be Done?," 1902. See Marcel Liebman, *Leninism under Lenin* (London: Merlin Press, 1985 reprint), 29-45.

²³See Kamel S. Abu Jaber, *The Arab Ba'th Socialist Party: History, Ideology, and Organization* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1966), 101, 107, 116-18, 130-32.

takattul).²⁴ This conviction is a corollary of his understanding of revival and of how it can be engendered in an ummah that is in a state of decline. Al Nabhānī defines revival as "an elevation in thought." For an ummah to achieve this, it must establish political power on the basis of a correct doctrine (*'aqīdah*), which must be rational and in harmony with human nature.²⁵ For al Nabhānī, only the Islamic doctrine fits this description. Hence "the only way to produce a revival is to resume an Islamic way of life, by establishing an Islamic state."²⁶ He concedes that only individuals are capable of the enlightened thought, clarity of vision, and heightened sensitivity that is required to discover the doctrine that will form the basis of an ummah's revival.²⁷ However, only a *group* can create and disseminate in society a series of concepts, criteria, and convictions based on this doctrine. Hence only a *group* can induce the ummah (or most important power-base within it) to accept these concepts, criteria, and convictions and to grasp the necessity for living on their basis. This is fundamental to the attempt to take over authority within the state so that it can be dismantled and a regime erected on the basis of the doctrine.²⁸

The individual can influence neither the ummah nor the state; only a group can achieve this. To be effective, the basis on which its members group together must meet specific criteria. For al Nabhānī, only a political party (*takattul hizbī*), as opposed to groups established on the basis of forming an association (*al takattul 'alā asās al jam'iyah*) and groups that resemble genuine political parties only in name (*al takattul 'alā asās hizbī isman*),²⁹ fit the bill. It is apparently the possession of a coherent organizational system that distinguishes a *takattul hizbī* from these other kinds of group:

²⁴Al Nabhānī, *al Takattul al Hizbī*, 21.

²⁵*Hadīth al Siyām* (Al Rām: Maṭba'at al Risālah, n.d.), 16; Hizb al Tahrīr leaflet "Tahlīlāt Siyāsīyah," (undated); *Hizb al Tahrīr*, 12; *Mafāhim Siyāsīyah Hizb al Tahrīr*, (n.p., 1969), 14.

²⁶Al Nabhānī, *Nizām al Islām*, 5th ed. (n.p., 1953), 53.

²⁷Al Nabhānī, *al Takattul al Hizbī*, 25; al Nabhānī, *al Tafkīr*, 98-99; 105-6. With regard to the Islamic ummah, the Islamic doctrine allegedly exists today as an "empty philosophy"—it must be *re-discovered* and implemented.

²⁸*Dukhūl al Mujtama'* (Jerusalem: 1958), 17.

²⁹See al Nabhānī, *al Takattul al Hizbī*, 4-6, 9-18, 20 for a critique of the failed attempts of earlier movements formed on such bases to engender a revival.

It is through its organizational systems (*tanzīmāt hizbīyah*) that (a group) is/becomes a party (*hizb*), proceeds to carry out its mission as such, and proceeds on its life as such.³⁰

Al Nabhānī argues that only a *takattul hizbi* has a "structured form" (*kiyān*), which enables it to challenge state and ummah, which also have such forms. A political party's structured form is, moreover, intellectual in nature (*kiyān fikrī*), which makes it supremely qualified to develop and protect the requisite series of concepts, criteria, and convictions on the basis of the doctrine. This contention derives from his understanding of how an idea is transformed into a concept, criterion, or conviction. This process, allegedly, requires the generation of faith in it through persuasion, repetition, and application, which can only be achieved in collective context. Further, within a group, the doctrine generates a specific intellectual climate that influences everyone placed in it. This generates a structured form specific to the party and distinct from those of ummah and state. Thus the party can act upon both of these and is uniquely qualified to reconstruct them on the basis of the adopted doctrine.³¹

These arguments have been developed without reference to Islamic discourse and derive from al Nabhānī's own notions concerning the inherent nature of a revival and how it can be engendered. His conviction that only a modern political party can produce a revival is clear. We will turn now to the main concern of this section: the arguments he develops for creating a modern political party in terms of the constructs of traditional Islamic discourse.

The Establishment of an Islamic Political Party as Farḍ

Al Nabhānī bases this argument on his exegesis of Qur'an 3:104: *wa litakun minkum ummah yad'ūna ilā al khayr wa ya'murūna bi al ma'rūf wa yanhawna 'an al munkar wa ulā'ika hum al muflihūn*. We will now examine his reading of this verse and the conclusions he draws from it. The heading of his discussion in this respect states the case he elaborates clearly: "Establishing political parties that work for Islam is a *farḍ*, just like that of prayer (*salah*)."³²

³⁰Hizb al Taḥrīr leaflet "Yaḳūmu Kull Mushrif bi Tafhīm Ḥalaqātihi al Qiṣṣah al Tālia'," (2/10/1963): 1.

³¹*Dukhūl al Mujtama'*, 17-20.

³²See *Ḥadīth al Ṣiyām*, 10-13. This is a collection of leaflets. Pages 10-13 were issued originally in Beirut in late 1960.

Al Nabhānī argues that this verse designates the specific means by which Muslims must fulfil their duty of conveying the call to good (which he identifies here with Islam) and "bidding to honor and forbidding dishonor." This is identified as the establishment of a specific group (*kutlah*) in which they group together (*yatakattalūna bihā*) on the basis of fulfilling these duties. Addressing the term "ummah," he thus maintains that it denotes

something more specific than an association (in the general sense) (*jamā'ah*): it is specifically an association made up of individuals who have a bond that unites them, through which they form a coherent grouping (*kutlah mutakattilah*) and a single unit, and (thanks to which) they continue thus.

This interpretation is substantiated by a quotation from *al Manār*, Muḥammad 'Abduh's exegesis, that, in the context of this verse, describes an ummah as "an association made up of individuals who have a bond that unites them and through which they become like the limbs of a person's body."

By applying the juristic principle that whatever is indispensable for the achievement of something obligatory is itself obligatory (*mā lā yatimmu al wājib illā bihi fahuwa wājib*),³³ our author argues that the verse provides textual evidence (*qarīnah*) that it is obligatory to establish this *kutlah*. To reinforce this point, he states that non-Islamic government by Muslims is one of the gravest examples of dishonor, while creating Islamic rule is one of the greatest acts of bidding to honor. Thus he argues that it is obligatory for Muslims to establish a *kutlah* "for the purpose of fighting the rule of unbelief and creating an Islamic government."

Al Nabhānī uses the terms *kutlah* and *hizb siyāsī* (political party) interchangeably in the discussion here. For example, he concludes that "Allah has made it a religious obligation for Muslims to be in political parties that propagate the message of Islam and work for the resumption of the Islamic way of life." According to our author, the verse is thus

evidence that a Muslim's presence in a political party that calls for Islam and works to destroy the rule of unbelief and create Islamic government is a religious obligation for him, exactly like (the obligatory) prayer: there is no difference between the two.³⁴

³³Al Nabhānī, *al Shakhṣīyah al Islāmīyah*, 3 vols., 2d ed., (n.p.: 1953), vol. 2, 36-38.

³⁴The *fard 'ayn* applies only when no such party exists. Once it has been established, the *fard* of involvement in it is one of *kifāyah*.

All he has to say with regard to the use of these terms, which represent his interpretation of the signification of the term "ummah" in this verse, is the following:

It is natural to call (this) group (*kutlah*) a party (*ḥizb*): Allah Himself called it this in the Qur'an. He thus called those who make Him their friend³⁵ (*yatawallūnahu*) a party. In the *sūrah* 'The Table,' He said: Whoso makes Allah his friend and His Messenger and the believers—the party of Allah, they are the victors.³⁶ And He said in the *sūrah* 'The Disputer': "These are Allah's party; why, surely Allah's party—they are the prosperers."³⁷

He thus implies that there is a direct correspondence between the signification of the term *ḥizb*, as he uses it, and its signification in Qur'anic usage. In the Qur'an and early traditional and historical narratives, the term is used most commonly with a rather negative connotation of a variety of ancient factions. In addition to references such as those cited above, where it is used in the Qur'an in an obviously favorable sense, there are also references to *ḥizb al shayṭān* (i.e., Qur'an 58:19). Finally, the term is employed, with neither favorable nor negative connotations, to refer to a group or faction (i.e., Qur'an 30:32).³⁸

In contrast, the use of *ḥizb* to signify a political party specifically, as in the case of our author, is quite recent: it dates only from the early part of this century. As contact and familiarity with European politics developed, there emerged during the last two decades of the nineteenth century and alongside the traditional sense of a general group or assembly, the concept of a political party specifically, in the modern western sense. By the first decade of this century, the term *ḥizb* had come to signify unambiguously a political party.

While, as Kedourie remarks, this modern usage was "in a way a natural and legitimate extension of the traditional and classical one,"³⁹ it

³⁵A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991, reprint).

³⁶Qur'an 5:57.

³⁷Qur'an 58:22.

³⁸Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988), 123, n. 25.

³⁹Elie Kedourie, "Hizb," *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2d ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979), 514.

is nevertheless clear that al Nabhānī has discounted the gulf between the signification of the term in Qur'anic usage and of the meaning that he intends. We would argue that his use of the term here underlines his concern to demonstrate, within what are ostensibly exclusively Islamic parameters, that Muslims are obligated religiously to establish a political party as a means towards erecting an Islamic state. To stress further that the term "ummah" in Qur'an 3:104 signifies a political party rather than any other kind of association, al Nabhānī argues that the most important expression of the duty to "bid to honor and to forbid dishonor" is seen in calling rulers to account for their actions (*muḥāsabāt al ḥukkām; ḥisbah*) and offering them advice. Observing that this is a political act, he infers that the "ummah" mentioned in the verse must possess a specifically and exclusively political character.⁴⁰

Although not directly relevant to the development of an argument for establishing an Islamic political party as a means to erect an Islamic state, al Nabhānī's views on the role of political parties within the hypothetical framework of this state are illuminating in this regard. He thus incorporates a provision for political parties in his proposed constitution for an Islamic state, upholding political parties and a multiparty system as the only means for achieving effective implementation of the obligatory process of *ḥisbah*. In fact, he holds political parties and animating an active opposition to be the ultimate guarantee for the implementation of Islam and an ongoing improvement in this area. Imposing modern categories on early Islamic history, he construes the Companions and the first generation of Muslims as the "Islamic party" (*al ḥizb al islāmī; al kutlah al islāmīyah*) left by the Prophet on his death. He attributes the increasing misapplication of Islam to the disappearance of this party and with the end of the generation of the successors to the Companions' successors.⁴¹

This treatment reinforces the impression that political parties have been an intrinsic part of Islamic history, which serves the broader endeavor of construing the modern political party as an authentically Islamic institution and, hence, furthering our author's own venture in launching *Ḥizb al Taḥrīr*. To succeed, this venture also required the elaboration of arguments treating involvement in such parties, and in politics in general, in terms of Islamic discourse.

⁴⁰*Ḥizb al Taḥrīr*, 7-8. The author maintains that it is forbidden for it to have any other character or function (spiritual, educational, or moral). See *Mafāhim Ḥizb al Taḥrīr*, 66-67.

⁴¹Al Nabhānī, *Nizām al Ḥukm fī al Islām*, 2d. ed. (Beirut: Dār al Kashshāf, 1953), 119-23, 36-40. See also al Nabhānī, *al Shakhṣīyah al Islāmīyah*, vol. 2, 123.

Involvement in Politics as Farḍ

Al Nabhānī defines politics as "managing people's affairs according to the ideas you hold and the systems you adopt."⁴² He holds that people are politicians by nature and that they relish politics. Of all people, he argues that Muslims should be highly politicized, as they possess the ultimate system for managing the affairs of humanity as a whole.⁴³ Subjects' participation in the domestic politics of the hypothetical Islamic state is construed as a *farḍ al kifāyah*, being essential to repelling any potential harm issuing from the head of state. On this basis, al Nabhānī envisages a state in which the Muslim populace is encouraged by the force of an Islamic legal rule to engage in domestic political life.⁴⁴ A parallel argument is advanced in relation to international politics: involvement in this arena repels potential harm to the ummah issuing from its enemies, who constantly hatch plots against it. Finally, politics is held to be crucial to the propagation of Islam, according to the precedent of the Prophet and the rightly-guided caliphs.⁴⁵

Al Nabhānī contends that "colonialist unbelievers and heretical hypocrites" have deliberately repelled Muslims from involvement in political parties, which is "tantamount to turning them away from the obligation imposed by Allah on Muslims in the Qur'an." Their aim is to keep all pious Muslims out of parties so that these remain the preserve of heretics, the corrupt, and colonialist agents.⁴⁶ Finally, he targets the 'ulama, accusing them of violating the Islamic legal rule by staying away from politics. He rejects their pretext for this—that their imprisonment will deprive the community of access to their learning—as a cover for their cowardice.⁴⁷

⁴²*Mafāhīm Siyāsīyah*, 3.

⁴³*Hadīth al Şiyām*, 14.

⁴⁴*Ḥizb al Tahrīr*, 102; *Mafāhīm Siyāsīyah*, 1. Channels for such participation on an organized basis are institutionalized in provisions for political parties and an elected state council in the proposed state constitution. See article 107 i (b) and (ii), for example, in al Nabhānī, *Nizām al Islām*.

⁴⁵*Hadīth al Şiyām*, 6-9, 14-22, 119-23.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 10-3.

⁴⁷*Ḥizb al Tahrīr* leaflet entitled "Qur'an 5:53," (19/3/1980): 4-5.

Ḥizb al Taḥrīr's Program as a Reenactment of the Prophetic Paradigm Encapsulated in the *Sīrah*

Interpretative Issues and Theoretical Discussion

In order to understand al Nabhānī's claims concerning the *sīrah* and the relationship he posits between it and Ḥizb al Taḥrīr's program, it is necessary to analyze his relationship as reader to the *sīrah* as text. This should not be confused with our own reading, either of the *sīrah* itself or of al Nabhānī's reading of this.

In this endeavor, Quentin Skinner's discussion of approaches to interpretation and understanding, the analysis of meaning, and the interpretation of historical texts in particular is helpful, as it suggests a framework for understanding the relationship between the reader and his text.⁴⁸ In particular, aspects of Skinner's critique of the "old" history of ideas, centering on the traditional, closely textual approach to the interpretation of texts and an undervaluation of historical context, can be applied to the contemporary Islamist ideologue's reading of the canonical textual Islamic sources, which function for him/her as a fount of authority and in which he/she consciously roots his/her perceptions and understanding of his/her world. Thus, certain of the failings and mythologies Skinner describes in this critique surface in such readings.

The following discussion is centered around two themes, and a loosely causal relationship is posited between them. The first is the general approach that al Nabhānī adopts to the *sīrah*, which can be described broadly as presentist. The second is what Skinner terms the "mythology of prolepsis," a mythological fault inherent in the traditional approach to the history of ideas. While Skinner does not single out presentism per se for explicit criticism in the work cited above, the ahistorical, even anticontextualist nature of the presentist approach places it clearly within the scope of his general critique. Most importantly for our purposes, we would argue that it is this ahistorical perspective that renders the present-minded approach to history and texts particularly prone to the incidence of the mythology of prolepsis.

Although from our external perspective the reader and the canonical text obviously do not share the same context, from a perspective internal

⁴⁸Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," in M. Tully, ed., *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 29-67.

to the religious tradition the text is held to be relevant to any context due to its transcendent nature. Through the present-minded hermeneutics of the internal perspective, the canonical text is thus rendered perpetually relevant and new. The presentist approach, which is widely evident in the thought of contemporary Islamist ideologues, abstracts things from their historical context and judges them apart from this by a system of direct references to the present. Through a presentist reading of the canonical text, timeless elements of universal relevancy are applied out of context and construed in the light of the reader's perceptions of his/her own reality. Wrenched from its context of historical, political, and social factors and resituated in the reader's context, the canonical text thus holds within it a meaningful explanation for every reality and a strategy for dealing with every circumstance. Furthermore, through its prophetic aspect, it also discloses the preordained outcome of history.

In his present-minded approach to the canonical text, the Islamist ideologue seeks out elements that appear analogous to contemporary developments and which are hence of particular value to his specific and immediate concerns. To paraphrase Chomsky, these elements evidently acquire part of their value as a result of the expectations with which the reader approaches them. Harlan describes Chomsky's approach to history in Cartesian linguistics as present-minded. He demonstrates Chomsky's clarity about his presentism with the following quote, which we repeat here in full, as it is a neat expression of the intentions of presentism:

I'm looking at history not as an antiquarian, who is interested in finding out and giving a precisely accurate account of what the thinking of the seventeenth century was . . . but rather from the point of view of, let's say, an art lover, who wants to look at the seventeenth century to find in it things that are of particular value, and that obtain part of their value in part because of the perspective with which he approaches them.⁴⁹

Over and above the "contextual baggage" that al Nabhānī brings unconsciously to bear upon his reading of the *sīrah*, as with Chomsky, there is also a conscious attempt to search out elements that are relevant to his own particular concerns, in what might be described as a deliberately anachronistic approach to the past. It is this endeavor that produces in al Nabhānī's reading of the *sīrah* what Skinner identifies in the traditional historians of ideas as an unacceptable "conflation of the necessary

⁴⁹Noam Chomsky, quoted in David Harlan, "Intellectual History and the Return of Literature," *The American Historical Review* 94, no. 3 (June 1989): 605.

asymmetry between the significance an observer may justifiably claim to find in a given statement or other action and the meaning of that action itself."⁵⁰ This is the characteristic of the mythology of prolepsis, which can be defined simply as the representation of a thing as existing before it actually did.

The reading of the *sīrah* analyzed here arises in al Nabhānī's book *al Dawlah al Islamiyah* (Jerusalem: 1953). While treatments of the *sīrah* arise in other Tahrīr texts, this is the most significant, because it is the earliest and functions as a basis for later treatments, which make explicit what is here implicit. The parallel posited between the prophetic paradigm and the party's program informs a cruder treatment in later discussions, comprising an exercise in "demonstrating" the alleged identity between the two in all their details.⁵¹ As the seminal treatment developed early on in al Nabhānī's new venture, *al Dawlah al Islamiyah* offers the most suitable material for analysis here.

Our examination of this text relies on content, conceptual, and terminological analysis. The canonical text, of which al Nabhānī's version represents a particular reading, is kept in mind throughout the analysis. This is Ibn Ishāq's *Sirāt Rasūl Allāh*, generally cited by reference to its editor as Ibn Hisham's *al Sīrah al Nabawīyah*.⁵² In overall content and approach, al Nabhānī's treatment of the Makkan chapter of the *sīrah* is faithful to this "original." Having said that, the analysis will focus on aspects of his treatment that distinguish it from the original.

A preliminary glance at the treatment in *al Dawlah al Islāmīyah* reveals one of these differences. In place of those in the original, al Nabhānī has substituted his own subtitles as a device for ordering the narrative. These tell us immediately something about his reading of the *sīrah*. They include: "The Starting Point" (*Nuqṭat al Ibtidā'*), "The Companions Group Together" (*Takattul al Ṣaḥābah*), "The *Da'wah* Takes Off" (*Intilāq al Da'wah*), "The *Da'wah* Interacts" (*Tafā'ul al Da'wah*), and "Two of the *Da'wah*'s Phases" (*Dawran min Adwār al Da'wah*). This list summarizes the evidence suggesting that al Nabhānī has reconstructed the *sīrah* in terms deriving from a new conceptual frame of reference. This is Hizb al Tahrīr's program, in which the above terms have a technical signification (see below).

⁵⁰Skinner in Tully (ed.), *Meaning and Context*, 44.

⁵¹*Hadīth al Ṣiyām* (early 1960s), 35ff; *Hizb al Tahrīr* (1985), 31-42.

⁵²We refer below to volumes I and II of the four-volume version of this work, which was edited by Muṣṭafā al Sayqā, Ibrāhīm al Abyārī, and 'Abd al Hafiz Shibli (Beirut: Dār Ihyā' al Turāth al 'Arabī, n.d.).

Dāwūd Ḥamdān describes the aim of *al Dawlah al Islāmīyah* in the book's preface as follows:

The aim of this book is not to produce a history of the Islamic state:⁵³ its aim is that people should see how the prophet established the Islamic state.⁵⁴

Assuming that this is an accurate representation of al Nabhānī's intentions, we are thus dealing in *al Dawlah al Islāmīyah* with a systematic exercise in hermeneutics conceived with the specific aim of presenting the *sīrah* in a particular light.

It is valuable, for the sake of clarity, to underline the particular political objectives that al Nabhānī has brought to bear on his reading of the *sīrah*. We have argued that he endeavored to articulate an ideological alternative to the dominant trend that would be relevant to the region's new political circumstances and could hence be promoted as a viable rival to the secular nationalist parties. Relevancy would be measured largely in terms of modernity. This would also render the new party potentially more attractive than the Muslim Brotherhood, with which it would compete for the same constituencies.

This constitutes the pivotal feature of al Nabhānī's present-minded approach to the *sīrah*. Fusing together his political experience and personal convictions, he launched a modern *Islamic* political party with a program already conceived in prototype within a national milieu and typical in ethos of the new revolutionary parties. Through his presentist reading of the *sīrah*, he sought to legitimate this political program in terms of traditional Islamic discourse. His approach to the *sīrah* revolves around this conscious political objective. This necessitated manipulation of the *sīrah* in an effort to present its Makkan chapter as the program of a political party centering on the efforts on a revolutionary vanguard. Hizb al Tahrīr's program could then be construed as a faithful reenactment of this prophetic paradigm. In its capacity as an account of the Prophet's precedents, the *sīrah* is a source of Shari'ah. Al Nabhānī could therefore maintain that the implementation of Hizb al Tahrīr's program is a *farḍ*, since emulation of the Prophet would thereby be achieved.⁵⁵

⁵³The account of the *sīrah* is followed by a lengthy account of the history of the Islamic state up to 1924.

⁵⁴Al Nabhānī, *al Dawlah al Islāmīyah*, 6.

⁵⁵In relation to certain aspects of his conduct, emulation is considered a *farḍ*. See al Nabhānī, *al Shakhshīyah*, vol. 3, 84-85.

Al Nabhānī elaborated his own interpretation of the Makkan chapter of the *sīrah* by maintaining that Muhammad transformed pre-Islamic society by supplanting its concepts, convictions, and criteria with those of Islam. Once the Madinans were largely united on the basis of Islam, thanks to Muṣ'ab ibn 'Umayr, and persuaded to live according to it, the Prophet assumed power and established an Islamic regime in Madinah.⁵⁶ Al Nabhānī insisted that Hizb al Tahrīr's program adhered to the prophetic paradigm "without deviating even a hair's breadth."⁵⁷

Three phases (*adwār*; sing: *dawr*) are specified in this program, each with its own activities and objectives: that of indoctrination (*dawr al tathqīf*), that of interaction (*dawr al tafā'ul*), and that of government (*dawr al hukm*). Two successive phases meet in an interface (*nuqṭah*).⁵⁸ The program is launched in the starting point (*nuqṭat al ibtida'*). The first interface or transitional stage is the take-off point (*nuqṭat al intilāq*), the second is the consolidation point (*nuqṭat al irtikāz*). While the program cannot be described fully here, key concepts and activities within it are referred to in the course of the textual analysis, and explanations are provided there as necessary. The two most important phases are those of indoctrination and interaction. A brief note on these must suffice.⁵⁹

During the phase of indoctrination, the body of the *kutlah* (secret at this stage) is built up, the Islamic doctrine (the basis of its ideology) is embodied in individuals through intensive indoctrination, and they group together on the basis of this doctrine. Gradually these individuals contact others, as the doctrine "cannot bear to remain imprisoned in them." The phase of interaction ushers in the first attempts to address people *en masse* with the party ideology, triggering an open confrontation with the ideas of unbelief that dominate society.

A Textual Analysis of Passages from al Dawlah al Islāmīyah: The Starting Point (Nuqṭat al Ibtidā')

Al Nabhānī's treatment of the first three years of Muhammad's mission⁶⁰ provides a clear illustration of his manipulation of the original text

⁵⁶ *Hadīth al Ṣiyām*, 4; *Hizb al Tahrīr*, 16.

⁵⁷ *Mafāhīm Hizb al Tahrīr*, 63; *Hadīth al Ṣiyām*, 35-38.

⁵⁸ Hizb al Tahrīr leaflet entitled "Jawāb Su'āl," 20/6/1969.

⁵⁹ Al Nabhānī, *al Takattul al Hizbī*, 25-28; 31-36; 45-55; *Hizb al Tahrīr*, 31-43.

⁶⁰ Al Nabhānī, *al Dawlah al Islāmīyah*, 7-8.

through the proleptic use of terms and concepts drawn from contemporary Arab political discourse that, during the 1950s, was dominated by a secular nationalist orientation, and the imposition of terms and concepts deriving from *Ḥizb al Tahrīr*'s program and ideology.

According to al Nabhānī, Muhammad "grouped" people around himself on the basis of the new faith (*kāna . . . yukattiluhum ḥawlahu*), gradually creating a "believing group" (*al kutlah al mu'minah*) out of them. Furthermore, he adopted al Arqam ibn Abī al Arqam's home (*dār al Arqam*)⁶¹ not only as a place in which to teach the new converts the faith, but also as the *kutlah*'s "headquarters" (*markaz*). In his account of 'Umar ibn al Khaṭṭāb's embracing Islam,⁶² al Nabhānī construes Khabbāb ibn al Aratt's visit to Fāṭimah⁶³ ('Umar's sister) in her husband Sa'īd's house in order to recite the Qur'an to her as a *ḥalqah*. This term is used to denote the study-circle that is a central feature of *Ḥizb al Tahrīr*'s activities, functioning as the vehicle through which the intensive indoctrination of new recruits in the party ideology is achieved under the guidance of senior members.⁶⁴ Thus: "'Umar embraced Islam at the hands of this *ḥalqah*."

He concludes this section with the observation that for the first three years of his mission, Muhammad devoted himself to the process of *tathqīf* exclusively. Thus, "He spent three years indoctrinating these Muslims . . . indoctrinating their minds with the meanings and expressions of the Qur'an and the concepts and ideas of Islam." The term *tathqīf*, translated here as indoctrination, also denotes a specific activity within *Ḥizb al Tahrīr*'s program: the first phase in it is actually named after it (see above). We will comment further on the use of this term and of the root *katala* below.

The Companions Group Together (Takattul al Sahabah)

In this section,⁶⁵ al Nabhānī describes the condition of the Companions after the end of three years, on the eve of Allah's command that Muhammad come out openly with his mission, in terms that derive either

⁶¹For details, see Ibn Hishām, *al Sirah al Nabawīyah*, vol. 1, 270, n. 1.

⁶²Ibid., 367-72.

⁶³Al Nabhānī refers erroneously to her as Zaynab.

⁶⁴For a detailed treatment, see *Ḥizb al Tahrīr* leaflet "Al-Ḥalaqāt," undated. See also *al Qānūn al Idārī li Ḥizb al Tahrīr*, 1953, 7.

⁶⁵Al Nabhānī, *al Dawlah al Islāmīyah*, 8-10.

from Ḥizb al Taḥrīr's program or from its wider thought-system or conceptual framework. The forty-odd Companions who had embraced Islam and joined the Prophet since the start of his mission thus "grouped together" (*takattalu*) and conveyed his *da'wah*. At the end of three years, Muhammad was convinced that they had "matured in their culture" (*naḍaja . . . al Ṣaḥābah fī thaqāfatihim*), that their "mentalities" had been transformed into Islamic mentalities (*takawwanat 'aqliyātuhum 'aqliyah islāmīyah*), that their "psycho-social make-up" had likewise become Islamic (*aṣbahat nafsiyātuhum nafsiyah islāmīyah*), and that they had clearly "grasped their relation to Allah" (*idrākukum ṣilatuhum bi Allāh*). Al Nabhānī concludes that Muhammad was encouraged greatly by this and that he was now certain that the "Muslim *kutlah*" (*kutlat al muslimīn*) was strong enough to confront society as a whole.

The terms introduced here require a brief clarification. '*Aqliyah* and *nafsiyah* denote specific concepts in al Nabhānī's notions of human personality, thought, and conduct.⁶⁶ The notion of "grasping one's relation to Allah (as His creature)" also denotes a specific concept in his thought-system: that of spirit (*rūḥ*). Thus, "the spirit consists in a person grasping his relation to Allah" (*al rūḥ idrāk al insān ṣilatahu bi Allāh*).⁶⁷ Finally, the comment that the Companions had "matured in their culture" resonates with a specific aspect of al Nabhānī's conceptualization of the new recruit's intellectual formation; "maturity in the party culture" (*al nudj fī al thaqāfah al ḥizbīyah*) thus qualifies the individual member to proceed to activities of interaction.⁶⁸

Note that al Nabhānī puts these expressions in Muhammad's mouth. This implies that Muhammad thought in terms of such categories and concepts and so, by extension, upheld Ḥizb al Taḥrīr specific thought-system and ideology, of which these categories and concepts are a part.

The Da'wah Takes Off (Intilaq al Da'wah):

The Da'wah Interacts (Tafa'ul al Da'wah)

The term *intilāq* here signifies the launch of the public aspect of Muhammad's mission.⁶⁹ Al Nabhānī stresses that while the *da'wah's*

⁶⁶See Muḥammad Muḥammad Ismā'īl, *al Fikr al Islāmī* (Beirut: Maktabat al Wa'ī, 1985), 48-51, 67-71; al Nabhānī, *al Shakhṣīyah al Islāmīyah*, vol. I, 5-12.

⁶⁷*Mafāhīm Hizb al Taḥrīr*, 13-14; al Nabhānī, *Nizām al Islām*, 64-67.

⁶⁸Al Nabhānī, *al Takattul al Hizbī*, 44.

⁶⁹Al Nabhānī, *al Dawlah al Islāmīyah*, 10-11.

existence was widely known before this, what was now disclosed for the first time was the existence of the *kutlah*: Muhammad "publicly disclosed (the fact that the Muslims were) grouping together to all people" (*azhara amr al takattul li al nās jamī'an*). As the initial policy of contacting only those individuals who exhibited a readiness to respond was now supplanted by an endeavor to address all people, al Nabhānī describes the new phase as one of confrontation between Islam and unbelief and the friction (*ihtikāk*) between correct ideas and corrupt ones. He concludes that the Prophet's disclosure of the *kutlah*'s existence thus signalled the start of the "second phase": that of "interaction and conflict" (*marḥalat al tafā'ul wa al kifāh*). In the section entitled "*Tafā'ul al Da'wah*," our author proceeds to map the progress of the *da'wah*'s interaction⁷⁰ in the face of mounting opposition from the Quraysh.

Once more, it should be noted that the terms *intilāq*, *ihtikāk*, and *tafā'ul* derive from al Nabhānī's blueprint for Ḥizb al Taḥrīr's program: the notion of *intilāq* was already developed in the context of *Inqādh Filasṭin*, as noted above.

Two of the Da'wah's Phases (Dawran min Adwar al Da'wah)

This is a particularly important section,⁷¹ as it functions as a summary of and a commentary on the preceding account of the *sīrah*. Through a repeated, more detailed, and thorough imposition of terms and categories drawn from Ḥizb al Taḥrīr's program, it crystallizes and strengthens the parallel posited implicitly between the latter and the *sīrah*.

Al Nabhānī asserts repeatedly in this section that Muhammad progressed through two consecutive phases during his career in Makkah. The first of these (*dawr al ta'līm wa al tathqīf*) aimed to embody Islamic ideas emanating from the Islamic doctrine in individuals once they understood them, and then group them together on the basis of these ideas (*fahm al afkār wa tasjīduhā fī ashkhās wa takattuluhum ḥawlahā; taktīl man yastaṭī' al takattul 'alā asas al 'aqīdah al islāmīyah*). This was achieved by focusing on *tathqīf* in order to prepare the new Muslims spiritually and intellectually. Muhammad would "send someone to indoctrinate them as a group in study-circles (*yursilu man yuthaqqifuhum kutlatan fī halaqāt*)."

In spite of the secrecy that surrounded their grouping together at this stage, our author asserts that once the new Muslims had embodied Islam,

⁷⁰Ibid., 17-20.

⁷¹Ibid., 21-24.

the *da'wah* could no longer remain confined to them. As they began to contact anyone in whom they perceived a willingness to embrace Islam, people came to feel the existence of the *da'wah* and the fact that there were individuals conveying it. With this, he observes that the *da'wah* passed beyond the starting point (*nuqṭat al ibtidā'*). Consequently, attempts to address the people as a whole (*mukhāṭabat al nās*) were introduced. "Thereby," al Nabhānī asserts, "the first phase (that of secret grouping together and indoctrination, by means of which the grouping is constructed) came to an end, and it became necessary to transfer to the second phase (that of interaction and conflict).

It is noteworthy that it is in their launching⁷² of the *da'wah* on its second phase that our author, for the first time, refers to the Muslims as a (political) party group (*kutlah ḥizbīyah*). We will comment on his use of this term later. Here, it should be noted that al Nabhānī argues in *al Takattul al Ḥizbī* that the individuals who, through their grouping together on the basis of its ideology, form the embryonic Ḥizb al Taḥrīr constitute a mere *kutlah* and not a fully-fledged political party until the beginning of the phase of interaction. It is only then that the *kutlah*, having been exposed to the vicissitudes of time and travelled through various stages of party development (*al ḥayāt al ḥizbīyah*),⁷³ acquires the attributes and qualifications that make it worthy of assuming power and evolves into a complete political party (*ḥizb mutakāmil*). Al Nabhānī's introduction of the term *ḥizbī* to describe the *kutlah* formed by the first Muslims at this particular junction is therefore precisely consistent with the blueprint he developed to map out the future of the party he created.

During the second phase in his career (the phase of interaction), Muhammad's aim was, allegedly, to transform the ideas of Islam into a "driving force" that would propel people to apply them in society. Alongside the ongoing "intensive indoctrination (of individuals) in study-circles" (*al tathqīf al murakkaz fī al ḥalāqāt*), he thus now initiated a campaign to address people in groups via "collective indoctrination" (*al tathqīf al jamā'i*). The latter term again denotes a specific activity in Ḥizb al Taḥrīr's program, as does the term *mukhāṭabat al nās*.

Although some eight years of confrontation with the ideas of unbelief had carried Muhammad's *da'wah* to broader horizons, this success had brought increasing harm to the Muslims in Makkah. Alongside this, al

⁷²Manifest in Muhammad leading the believers in two orderly rows to perform a circumambulation of the Ka'bah.

⁷³Al Nabhānī, *al Takattul al Ḥizbī*, 22-23; Ḥizb al Taḥrīr leaflet, "Jawāb Su'āl," undated.

Nabhānī lists a number of concomitant developments that allegedly convinced the Prophet that it was now necessary for him to proceed to the third phase of his mission: the "phase of applying Islam." Among these, he cites Muhammad's failure to obtain the support and protection of the Thaḳīf and other tribes, the growing inability of the Muslims to convey the *da'wah* in the face of mounting pressures in Makkah, the general recalcitrance of Makkan society as a whole, and the fact that Arabs elsewhere in the peninsula failed to approach the Muslims out of fear of the Quraysh.

*The Da'wah in Madinah: The Second Pledge at al 'Aqabah*⁷⁴

By comparing Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr's experience in Makkah in the course of a single year with Muhammad's career in Makkah over some twelve years, al Nabhānī finds an appropriate context for "deducing" a principle that is fundamental to his notion of how to engender change in society. He asserts that a society is transformed and a revolution (*inqilāb*) produced if the relations within it are influenced by influencing people's emotions and ideas.⁷⁵ The number of individuals who undertake to achieve this is immaterial: what matters is that they should not be detached from society as a whole, but should operate from within it, as Mus'ab allegedly did in Madinah. Al Nabhānī's comments in this section also introduce other concepts drawn from the thought-system he elaborated in the context of Ḥizb al Taḥrīr's ideology, as we will indicate below.

Having appreciated the enormous difference between Makkah as the "chief center of unbelief" and Madinah, where over a single year Mus'ab had Islamized society's formerly polytheistic emotions and ideas, al Nabhānī has Muhammad contemplating emigration from Makkah as a means of enabling the Muslims "to transfer the *da'wah* to its practical phase, i.e., applying Islam and conveying its message with the force of a state and government." He stresses that the motive behind the *hijrah* was not to escape from the sufferings inflicted by the Quraysh, but rather to empower the Muslims so that they could continue to pursue the *da'wah* by taking advantage of the strength of Islam in Madinah and the readiness of the society there to receive the Prophet and host the Islamic state. Through the second pledge at al 'Aqabah, our author has the

⁷⁴Al Nabhānī, *al Dawlah al Islāmīyah*, 26-35.

⁷⁵This principle appears repeatedly in Taḥrīr publication. It derives from al Nabhānī's notion of society. See *Nizām al Islām*, 30, 33, 47; *Nizām al Hukm*, 10; *Dukhūl al Mujtama'*, 3-4.

Prophet creating "the cornerstone and the first pillar in the construction of the Islamic state." According to al Nabhānī, the hijrah "transported Muhammad and his *da'wah* a leap forward from one phase to another: from the phase of indoctrination and the phase of interaction to the phase of applying Islam's rules to people in their interrelations."⁷⁶

A discussion of the general features of al Nabhānī's treatment of the *sīrah* reviewed here concludes this analysis.

Presentation and Prolepsis: Al Nabhānī's Manipulation of the Sīrah

Before addressing the present-minded and proleptic nature of this treatment, the use of three specific terms in this, touched on above, will be examined. The first of these is the root *katala*, which appears in the forms *takattala*, *takattul*, *taktīl*, and *kutlah*. Al Nabhānī clearly employs this root (and its derivations), which does not arise in the Qur'an or Ibn Hishām, in its modern usage, which has a specifically political significance.⁷⁷ In his use of *takattala*, he evidently intends the modern political sense, which he has adapted to mean "grouping together to form a political party specifically." In the following quotation, for example, he uses it alongside *ijtima'a*, with the clear message that it has a significance distinct from the latter: "The Muslims would gather secretly in their houses, in the mountain paths, and in al Arqam's home, and group together (*fa yajtami'u al Muslimūn fī buyūtihim sirran wa fī shi'āb al jibāl sirran wa fī dār al Arqam sirran wa yatakattalūn*)."⁷⁸

The second term is the root *thaqafa*, which appears in the forms *thaqafa*, *tathqif*, and *thaqāfah*. The Qur'anic usage of this root is confined to the version *thaqifah*, where it means "to come upon or find."⁷⁹ In the *sīrah*, Ibn Hishām uses the verb *'arada 'alā* for explaining Islam, and *'allama* or *faqqaha (fī al dīn)* for teaching or instructing in the faith.⁸⁰ Al Nabhānī's use of *thaqafa* and its derivatives in the context of the *sīrah* reflects its usage in modern Arab political discourse, where it has the sense of "to educate, enlighten, or indoctrinate." Derived from a Euro-

⁷⁶Al Nabhānī, *al Dawlah al Islāmīyah*, 36.

⁷⁷*Takattul*, for example, signifies the formation of blocs in the political sense.

⁷⁸Al Nabhānī, *al Dawlah al Islāmīyah*, 21. Ibn Hishām uses *ijtima'a* to describe the Companions "coming together" to discuss something, for example. See Ibn Hishām, *al Sīrat al Nabawīyah*, vol. I, 336.

⁷⁹See, for example, Qur'an 2:191; 8:57.

⁸⁰See, for example, Ibn Hishām, *al Sīrat al Nabawīyah*, vol. II, 23, 76.

pean context and introduced by communist parties, this usage was common during the 1930s and 1940s among secular Arab nationalist parties, to which it was generally confined.

The third term deserving comment was discussed earlier. We refer here to the use of the adjective *ḥizbī* to describe the *kutlah* formed by the new Muslims. This is another example of the imposition of modern categories on the *sīrah*.

The use of terms drawn from modern Arab political discourse illustrates the influence of al Nabhānī's general context on his reading of the *sīrah*. His shift from the dominant ideology of Arab nationalism and pan-Arabism to the radical pan-Islamism of Ḥizb al Taḥrīr is clear, and his *Inqādh Filastīn* represents an early way-station along this journey. However, evidently he remained convinced of the general framework through which the secular nationalist trend articulated an analysis of the problems facing Arab society and advanced solutions to these. He was also convinced of the methods and strategies it adopted in pursuing these solutions. Al Nabhānī thus retains aspects of this trend, now clothed in Islamic garb and worked out within an Islamic framework. Central features of the discourse and methods of the new parties are not adapted to Islamic discourse. In the process, he has manipulated the latter as dictated by his specific objectives, legitimizing in terms of Islam the construction of a quintessential modern mass political party and the path he delineated for it. As a result, the creation of Ḥizb al Taḥrīr, participation in it, and the route by which it pursues its goals are all advanced with the force of Islamic legal rules.

Let us pursue this point further in relation to the *sīrah* specifically. Al Nabhānī's proleptic use of terms has enabled him to manipulate the *sīrah* text so that it can be construed as Islamic legitimation for the new party's program. Thanks to his presentist approach, his reading of the past effectively reconstructs or reinvents it for the sake of the present. As a source of Islamic legal rules, the reconstructed or reinvented *sīrah* is then upheld as the divinely prescribed blueprint that Muslims must adopt. Although elsewhere al Nabhānī has the following to say about history per se, this clearly does not apply to the *sīrah*, which must be excepted from this general judgment due to its subject matter and prescriptive nature:

History mustn't be taken as a basis for revival: a knowledge of the part neither throws light on nor opens the path to the future.⁸¹

⁸¹Al Nabhānī, *al Shakhṣīyah al Islāmīyah*, vol. I, 303.

On the contrary, through what LaCapra describes as the "unrestrained fictionalizing and mythologizing" of the past typical of presentism,⁸² al Nabhānī "discovers" many a torch and key in the *sīrah*. His central assumption in this respect can be summarized in the notion that, from early on in his mission, Muhammad developed a clearly defined and coherent plan complete with distinct stages and the ultimate goal of establishing a state that would implement and export Islam. All of his actions are then explained on the basis of this assumption. Naturally, this plan mirrors that of *Ḥizb al Taḥrīr* in its broad outlines and details.

While such a teleological approach to the past⁸³ is always an appealing temptation, owing to the necessarily retrospective orientation of the present-day observer, it is, as Skinner indicates, absolutely ahistorical: the historical meaning of an action cannot be influenced by events that take place at a later date, whether or not they are causally linked to that action. As for the terms and concepts al Nabhānī employs, the following remark by Skinner in his discussion of the need to recover authorial intention is particularly apt:

[I]f a given statement or other action has been performed by an agent at will, and has a meaning for him, it follows that any plausible account of what the agent meant must necessarily fall under, and make use of, the range of descriptions which the agent himself could at least in principle have applied to describe and classify what he was doing.⁸⁴

Indeed, as Skinner puts it:

[N]o agent can eventually be said to have meant or done something which he could never be brought to accept as a correct description of what he had meant or done.⁸⁵

In the final analysis, we would argue that through his presentist treatment of the *sīrah* and his proleptic interpretation of Muhammad's

⁸²Dominic LaCapra, "Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts," in D. LaCapra and S. Kaplan (eds.), *Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 80.

⁸³The view that developments are due to the purpose or design served by them. A teleological view of the *hijrah* would suggest that it can be explained by the purpose of establishing the Islamic state in Madinah.

⁸⁴Skinner, in Tully (ed.), *Meaning and Context*, 48.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, loc. cit.

intentions and actions, al Nabhānī has in fact reduced this text to a "pre-text for his own inventions and immediate interests."⁸⁶

Conclusion

It has been argued that methods of political organization and styles of political rhetoric are "largely defined by the context."⁸⁷ In the post-World War II Arab Middle East, a new political order, dominated by the newly-instituted modern nation-states, largely defined the political context. Zubaida posits these states as the framework for a new type of politics that was shaped by the concepts, vocabularies, methods, and strategies of the modern political fields that developed in relation to them.⁸⁸ The new generation of modern political movements that emerged during the interwar period organized themselves and functioned in a manner that took into account the new realities, thereby making themselves effective actors in the context of the new political fields.⁸⁹

As part of this trend, Hizb al Tahṛīr has both operated within and been very much part of these modern political fields. This is evident with regard to its methods of political organization, its strategies, activities, political discourse, concepts, and aspirations. With reference both to al Nabhānī's adoption of modern methods of political organization and to his couching of these in terms of traditional Islamic constructs, the following quotation from Marx provides an illuminating analogy:

[A] beginner who has learnt a new language always translates it back into his mother tongue, but he has assimilated the spirit of the new language and can freely express himself in it only when he finds his way in it without recalling the old, and forgets his native tongue in the use of the new.⁹⁰

Al Nabhānī had clearly "learned the language" of the region's new political fields and was convinced of the need to adopt it as *the* medium of articulation, by assuming modern political forms and processes

⁸⁶LaCapra, in LaCapra and Kaplan (eds.), *Modern European Intellectual History*, 80.

⁸⁷Roger Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (London: Routledge, 1992), 20.

⁸⁸Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State*, 140-50.

⁸⁹Compare with Owen, *State, Power and Politics*, 19.

⁹⁰Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 6th ed. (Moscow: Progress Publ., 1972), 10.

associated with the modern nation-state and its related political fields. However, he was unable or unwilling to make the kind of transition described above. Consequently, he was compelled to balance two utterly distinct cultures: the modern political and the traditional Islamic. It is in relation to the evident tension between these two cultures, reflecting a broader tension between the pull of modernity and the requirements of Islamic authenticity, that he displays his innovativeness and creativity in his interpretation of the textual sources of Islam.

Our closing remarks center on Islamist judgments of al Nabhānī's achievements. As noted earlier, his attempt to create a modern Islamic political party has met with the suspicion of Islamist circles. In spite of the fact that these circles insist on Islam as a holistic ideology addressing both *dīn wa dunyā*, they have questioned the Islamicity of Ḥizb al Taḥrīr's character and approach. For some, only a movement that itself reflects this holistic character, by addressing itself to all aspects of the community's life, meets the perceived criteria of Islamic authenticity.

More fundamentally, however, the Islamist suspicion of Ḥizb al Taḥrīr can be attributed to a reluctance to accept explicitly the basic principles of the secularized nation-state, even though there is no doubt that these states are accepted as an elemental political fact. The fact that Ḥizb al Taḥrīr promotes itself as a vehicle for supplanting the secular nation-state does not rehabilitate it in the Islamist perception. We would argue that, according to the Islamist critique, the perceived deviant character of Ḥizb al Taḥrīr derives from its ideologue's open adoption of the forms, concepts, and vocabularies of the modern political field, and his clear conception of his party's program and goal in terms of this field exclusively. Al Nabhānī's attempt in Ḥizb al Taḥrīr to recontextualize the canonical textual sources of Islam in the context created by the new political field and the configuration of concepts developed by the new trend of political parties mobilized relatively few Muslims, even during the party's most successful years in Jordan (between 1953 and 1957). This raises doubts about the effectiveness of his creative hermeneutics in convincing a constituency then deeply suspicious of the secular nation-state and its related political forms and methods.