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A Critical Examination of Neo-Salafist Perspectives on Jihad and Takfir

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Abstract

This article critically examines the ideological foundations and discursive strategies of neo-Salafist militant thinkers—particularly Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi and like-minded authors—on the concepts of jihad, takfir, and taghut. Drawing upon primary texts written by contempAorary takfiri-jihadi ideologues, the study analyzes their claims regarding monotheism (tawhid), the rejection of taghut, excommunication (takfir), and the legitimacy of violence against Muslim societies and rulers. Although these authors portray themselves as representatives of orthodox Salafism, their interpretations diverge sharply from the classical Islamic theological and legal tradition, as well as from the consensus of both Salafi and Sunni scholarship. The article concludes that contemporary militant neo-Salafism constitutes a selective and anachronistic appropriation of Islamic sources, resulting in an exclusionary doctrine that legitimizes coercion and political violence in ways incompatible with Islamic legal and theological norms.

Keywords: Neo-Salafism; Takfir; Jihad; Taghut; Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi; Militant Islamism; Wahhabism; Islamic Theology; Religious Violence; Islamic Law; Tawhid

Introduction

In recent decades, a distinct neo-Salafi discourse has emerged that reinterprets the concepts of *tawḥīd*, *takfīr*, and *jihād* in ways that diverge significantly from the classical Sunni theological tradition. Although this discourse claims to represent an authentic continuation of the early Islamic legacy, its formulations display radical departures from the epistemological and doctrinal frameworks developed within the Māturīdī and Ashʿarī schools of kalām. The expansion of disbelief categories, the politicization of monotheism, and the renewed emphasis on the permissibility of violence against fellow Muslims have become defining features of this intellectual current, particularly among militant Salafi writers.

The rise of neo-Salafism has not only reshaped contemporary debates over orthodoxy and authority within Muslim societies, but has also had direct sociopolitical consequences. The broadening of *takfīr* from an exceptional theological verdict to a methodologically routine instrument of boundary-making has enabled new forms of exclusionary identity construction. In parallel, the reconfiguration of *jihād* as a primarily intra-Muslim struggle, and the redefinition of *tawḥīd* to include the excommunication of political and social structures, has produced ideological justifications for sustained conflict, fragmentation, and sectarian polarization. These developments raise important questions about the continuity, legitimacy, and interpretive methodology of contemporary neo-Salafi thought.

Despite the growing scholarly interest in Salafism, much of the academic literature has focused on socio-political dimensions, security studies perspectives, or historical genealogy (Meijer, 2013; Lacroix, 2011; Wiktorowicz, 2006; Hegghammer, 2010; Sageman, 2004; Commins, 2006; Haykel, 2014). Comparatively less attention has been paid to doctrinal ruptures between neo-Salafi theology and the established corpus of Sunni kalam (Ahmed, 2016; Shiraz, 2016). This study seeks to address that gap by analyzing the neo-Salafi discourse on *takfīr*, *tawḥīd*, and *jihād* through a close reading of primary neo-Salafi texts currently in circulation, and by evaluating these positions in light of classical Māturīdī and Ashʿarī theological sources. By doing so, the study aims to demonstrate that neo-Salafism does not represent a mere revival of early Islam, but rather a modern ideological construction shaped by selective literalism, reductive hermeneutics, and a pronounced departure from the normative Sunni theological tradition.

The analysis presented here contributes to ongoing academic discussions on contemporary Islamic thought by offering a doctrinally grounded assessment of neo-Salafi positions. It further clarifies how certain contemporary readings of Islamic doctrine, albeit claims of orthodoxy, actually constitute a rupture with the inherited intellectual tradition of Sunni Islam. In this regard, the study not only illuminates the internal theological tensions within contemporary Salafism, but also situates neo-Salafi discourse within broader debates on authority, interpretation, and religious identity in modern Muslim societies.

1. Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi and the Neo-Salafist Reconstruction of Tawhid

In recent decades, neo-Salafist militant movements have developed a distinct discourse on jihad and takfir, grounded in an exclusivist understanding of tawhid and an expanded notion of taghut. This discourse legitimizes violence against Muslim societies, rulers, and individuals who do not conform to their theological standards. Among the most influential figures in this regard is Sheikh Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi (b. 1937, Jerusalem), whose writings and preaching have shaped contemporary takfiri-jihadi thought. This article examines al-Qudsi's works, alongside other militant neo-Salafist authors, and situates their claims within the broader framework of Islamic theology and jurisprudence.

Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi initially joined the Muslim Brotherhood but later distanced himself due to doctrinal disagreements over creed. He rejects allegations of affiliation with Takfir wa-l-Hijra and denies adopting Kharijite doctrines. In his work Tawhid, he develops concepts such as worship, religion, gods, and taghut, claiming that rejecting taghut—including modern institutions such as humanism, democracy, and the United Nations—is a religious obligation.

Although al-Qudsi asserts orthodoxy by citing early Muslim sources, his methodology departs significantly from classical Islamic scholarship. He selectively isolates Qur'anic verses and hadiths from their exegetical and legal contexts, disregarding the interpretive authority of the scholarly tradition. Yet, within the Islamic legal-theological framework, the foundations of religion are established through scholarly consensus (*ijmaʿ*), and no individual may unilaterally redefine core beliefs or excommunicate Muslims.

2. The Doctrine of Rejecting *Taghut*

In Rejecting *Taghut (Tağut'u Reddetmek)*, al-Qudsi enumerates eight conditions for rejecting *taghut*, all of which center on excommunication, hostility, and social dissociation. These include declaring *taghut* and its followers unbelievers, severing social relations, expressing enmity, and engaging in verbal and physical jihad against them.

From a theological standpoint, this doctrine stands in stark contrast to Sunni orthodoxy. Classical theology holds that the testimony of faith (*shahada*) suffices for entry into Islam,

and that excommunication requires definitive textual evidence and the agreement of qualified scholars. Al-Qudsi's formulation collapses the distinction between theological conviction, political allegiance, and social interaction.

3. Classifying Polytheists, Disbelievers, and Muslims

Al-Qudsi divides mankind into three categories: polytheists, disbelievers, and believers. This categorization contradicts Sunni consensus. Foundational authorities such as al-Tahawi, Ibn Taymiyyah, and Ibn Rajab affirm that pronouncing the shahada suffices for entering Islam, and that the inner state of belief is known only to God. The Qur'an explicitly warns against declaring believers to be unbelievers without clear proof (Q 4:94). Historically, extremist movements like the Kharijites similarly equated sins or insufficient observance with unbelief, yet Sunni orthodoxy decisively rejected this approach.

4. *Al-Walaʾ wa'l-Baraʾ* as Central Pillars of Religion

Al-Qudsi elevates the concepts of loyalty (*walaʾ*) and disavowal (*baraʾ*) to fundamental pillars of faith, demanding that Muslims hate and oppose disbelievers and avoid all forms of peaceful coexistence. He condemns interreligious cooperation, dialogue, and neutrality as forms of disbelief.

This position is unsustainable in light of Islamic tradition, which contains numerous examples of peaceful coexistence, including the Prophet's treaties with non-Muslim communities, marriages to Jewish and Christian women, and Qur'anic commands to act with justice and kindness (Q 60:8). Neo-Salafist doctrine thus exceeds the boundaries of scriptural intent and historical practice.

5. Takfir and the Inviolability of Life

Al-Qudsi contends that those deemed apostates lack the inviolability of life and property, citing militant authors such as Abd al-Qadir b. Abd al-Aziz to justify violence. Neo-Salafist literature systematically expands takfir to encompass secularists, democrats, liberals, and even Muslims who do not align with its ideological framework.

Islamic jurisprudence, however, upholds the inviolability of human life and property and affirms freedom of belief as a fundamental right. Sunni jurists unanimously maintain that

actions are not constitutive of faith, and disbelief cannot be declared on the basis of sin or political stance.

6. Neo-Salafist Conceptions of Jihad

Neo-Salafist jihad theorists (including Abu Mahmud Abu Umar, Abu Qutayba al-Shami, and Abd al-Qadir b. Abd al-Aziz) advocate armed struggle against Muslim rulers, reject democratic participation, and declare jihad obligatory against "apostate" regimes. They claim that political change cannot be achieved through elections or civic engagement but only through violence.

This view is historically unfounded and theologically problematic. Classical Islam viewed warfare as primarily defensive and context-specific within seventh-century Arabia, not as a universal missionary method. A holistic reading of Qur'an and Sunnah highlights peace, religious freedom, and coexistence as normative values, whereas warfare remains exceptional.

Militant neo-Salafist doctrine represents a radical deviation from Islamic orthodoxy. Its defining features include (1) selective literalism and de-contextualization of scripture, (2) doctrinal expansion of takfir, (3) politicization of tawhid and *taghut*, (4) rejection of coexistence and legal pluralism, and (5) normalization of violence. Historically, takfir remained a marginal practice associated with sectarian extremism, while Sunni orthodoxy affirmed faith as a matter of the heart validated through the shahada. Classical Islamic law forbids coercion, protects religious freedom, and restricts warfare to defensive circumstances. In this light, the neo-Salafist reinterpretation of jihad and *takfir* reflects ideological militancy rather than authentic Islamic scholarship.

Methodology

This study adopts a textual, analytical, and comparative approach rooted in Sunni theological scholarship. The primary objective is to examine and critically evaluate the discourse of contemporary neo-Salafism—particularly its formulations on *tawḥīd*, *takfīr*, and *jihād*—in light of the classical Sunni kalām tradition.

First, the research relies on primary theological sources within the Māturīdī and Ashʿarī schools. Foundational kalām texts form the theoretical and doctrinal baseline for assessing orthodoxy, normativity, and historical continuity in Sunni thought. By engaging directly with these first-tier primary sources, the study establishes the epistemological and interpretive principles through which takfīr, sovereignty, divine command, and human action have been addressed in classical theology.

Second, the discourse of contemporary neo-Salafism is analyzed through close reading of neo-Salafi authors whose works are the subject of critique in this study. The neo-Salafi writings used here are primarily in Turkish, not merely for convenience, but because they are readily available, widely distributed, and legally accessible in the Turkish market. Their active circulation makes the Turkish editions the operative medium through which neo-Salafi discourse reaches contemporary audiences. For that reason, analyzing the Turkish editions provides a more accurate sociological and discursive assessment of the movement's reception, dissemination, and influence.

The methodology is thus both comparative and critical: neo-Salafi claims are systematically compared against classical Sunni kalām, not with the intention of producing a descriptive historical narrative, but to demonstrate that neo-Salafism represents a substantive departure from, rather than a continuation of, traditional Sunnī theology. In doing so, the study highlights a rupture at several levels: epistemological (reduction of reasoning and context), hermeneutical (hyper-literalism), and doctrinal (expanded categories of disbelief and *tawḥīd*).

The evaluative framework of the article is explicitly grounded in the Māturīdī and Ashʿarī traditions, which constitute the mainstream theological heritage of Sunni Islam. The critique advanced here does not rely on modern ideological or political frameworks; instead, it draws upon classical creedal treatises, tafsīr, and legal-theological works that historically defined the boundaries of Muslim belief and communal belonging. By grounding the critique in this dual theological lineage, the study demonstrates both (a) the internal coherence and resilience of the Sunni kalām tradition, and (b) the extent to which neo-Salafi discourse departs from that tradition in content, method, and purpose.

In sum, the study utilizes (1) primary kalām sources from the Māturīdī and Ashʿarī canon, and (2) neo-Salafi texts currently in circulation in Turkey, in order to (3) analyze neo-Salafi discourse, and (4) evaluate it through a classical theological lens. This methodological strategy provides a historically grounded, theologically informed, and discursively contextualized critique of contemporary neo-Salafism.

The Ruling on Polytheists and Disbelievers

Al-Qudsi writes that polytheists and idolaters who refuse Islam when it is presented to them are to be killed (al-Qudsi, 2015, p. 113). Accordingly, people are to be fought until they utter the testimony of faith (*Shahada*). If a person utters the testimony of faith but does not worship Allah alone or engages in an act that violates monotheism, they are to be fought again (al-Qudsi, 2015, p. 116). According to the author, those who argue that merely uttering the testimony of faith makes someone a Muslim are effectively claiming that a hypocrite should be regarded as a believer. He contends that in order to preserve one's life and property, it is necessary not only to utter the testimony of faith but also to act in accordance with its requirements. What the testimony of faith necessitates, according to him, is obedience to Allah, performing all acts of worship exclusively for Him, and rejecting the worship of anything or anyone else.

Evaluation

Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi divides people into three groups: polytheists, disbelievers, and monotheists. Polytheists are those who have not yet received the invitation to Islam and possess no knowledge regarding the true religion. In this world, they are to be treated as disbelievers, while in the Hereafter they will be tested again. The second group consists of disbelievers, defined as all individuals who neither believe in monotheism nor reject polytheism. In the Hereafter, they will be cast into Hell, and in this world their lives and property may be seized. If they belong to the People of the Book (Jews and Christians), they may continue to live provided they pay *jizya* and accept the rule of Muslims. If they are Muslims, they are to be killed unless they embrace *tawhid*. From the language used in

the text, it is evident that the author excommunicates anyone who does not accept his interpretations, considering both their lives and property permissible.

However, Islamic scholars have unanimously maintained that anyone who utters the two components of the testimony of faith ("There is no god but Allah" and "Muhammad is His Messenger") thereby becomes a Muslim, and that uttering the testimony of faith is sufficient for entering the religion. Al-Tahawi, one of the most significant figures of the early Salafi creed, articulated the basic principle by stating, "What one enters Islam with, one leaves it with." Ibn Taymiyyah, considered one of the most prominent figures of Salafism, writes:

> "Religious leaders and Islamic scholars have unanimously agreed upon the
> following matter, which is considered essential in the religion of the Prophet:
> A person who is invited to bear the testimony of faith, whether they are
> atheists, polytheists, or People of the Book, becomes a Muslim when they
> bring the testimony of faith. One cannot become a Muslim without uttering
> this declaration." (Ibn Taymiyya, 1991, vol. 8, p. 7)

Similarly, Ibn Rajab, an important scholar of the Hanbali school, states that the Prophet (peace be upon him) accepted the entry of those who sought to embrace Islam merely by uttering the two sentences of the testimony of faith. Thus, they obtained and were granted all the protections and rights associated with being Muslim. He strongly condemned the killing of someone who uttered "*lā ilāha illā Allāh*" (there is no god but Allah) to save themselves from death at the moment a sword was raised against them. In fact, the Prophet accepted the conditions of individuals who wanted to embrace Islam but said, "I will not pray or give charity."

Islamic scholars have unanimously agreed that a person who utters the testimony of faith becomes a Muslim, and no additional condition is required. They considered verbal profession sufficient and emphasized that only Allah knows whether a person truly believes. The author's claim that a person must fulfill the "requirements of *tawhid*" in order to be considered Muslim is wholly incompatible with Islamic doctrine, and it is rejected

even by major figures of the Salafi tradition whom the author himself cites. Indeed, the Qur'an states:

> "O you who have believed, when you go forth [to fight] in the cause of Allah, investigate, and do not say to one who gives you [a greeting of] peace, 'You are not a believer.'" *(Sūrat al-Nisāʾ, 4:94)*

This verse clearly indicates that not only verbal testimony, but even offering a greeting of peace (*salām*), is sufficient to prevent harm; thus, those who utter it may not be attacked. Another verse states:

> "When the hypocrites come to you, [O Muhammad], they say, 'We testify that you are the Messenger of Allah.' And Allah knows that you are His Messenger, and Allah testifies that the hypocrites are liars. They have taken their oaths as a cover, so they averted [people] from the way of Allah. Indeed, it was evil that they were doing." *(Sūrat al-Munāfiqūn, 63:1–2)*

Imam al-Shāfiʿī deduced from the phrase "they have taken their oaths as a cover" that if someone who inwardly does not believe nonetheless verbally expresses an identity associated with Islam, such a declaration is sufficient for them to be treated as Muslim. Imam al-Dārimī, one of the early Salafi scholars, also accepted al-Shāfiʿī's position and stated that uttering an expression signifying one's Muslim identity is sufficient and that no further investigation is warranted (al-Awni, 2016, p. 14).

Islamic scholars never developed a doctrinal category called "the acceptance and conditions of *tawhid*." Rather, they addressed the rejection of idols and polytheism, specifically, of deities and entities worshipped instead of Allah. To declare people unbelievers on the basis that they do not fulfill the so-called "requirements of monotheism" despite professing Islam, and to deem their lives and property lawful, is a position historically upheld only by extremist factions such as the Khawarij. The inviolability of life and property (regardless of belief) is the most fundamental principle. Freedom of belief,

like the inviolability of life and property, is one of the essential rights of individuals, and the protection of these rights constitutes a primary objective of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharīʿa*).

Not Befriending Disbelievers

Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi considers friendship (*walāʾ / walāyah*) as the third pillar of worship. According to the author, regardless of its form or appearance, whoever loves and hates for other than Allah, or shows friendship or enmity for any reason other than Allah, has become subservient to that entity and has effectively worshipped it. For him, *tawhid* means affirming Allah alone in matters of love. If a person commits disbelief or polytheism for the sake of something they love, they have deified that entity. On this basis, the author opposes interreligious dialogue and religious freedom. He writes: "False religious leaders claim that there is no enmity between Islam and other religious communities, and they argue that emphasizing friendship and enmity in religion is extremism that creates hostility and animosity among nations and peoples" (al-Qudsi, 2015, pp. 148–149). According to the author, such views constitute disbelief, are deliberately designed to destroy Islam, and contradict monotheism (al-Qudsi, 2015, p. 149). He further states:

> It should be clearly known that in order to become a Muslim, it is necessary to excommunicate (*takfir*) polytheists, to be their enemy, to hold animosity towards them, and to detest those who love and defend them. From these statements, it is understood that the leaders who claim to be Muslims within contemporary human systems are in fact staunch disbelievers. Because these leaders have befriended polytheists, drawn close to them, and elevated them" (al-Qudsi, 2015, p. 151).

The author opposes not only friendship between Muslims and followers of other religions at the interpersonal level, but also relations between states. Consequently, he suggests that Muslims should distance themselves from disbelievers and, if possible, emigrate. He states: "Otherwise, by staying there, they would be committing a sin, but if they have no power to emigrate to another place, in such a situation, they should distance themselves from them

as much as their power allows, stay away from them and their beliefs, reduce their interaction with them, and patiently wait until the path of emigration opens" (al-Qudsi, 2015, p. 62).

Evaluation

Love and tolerance constitute the essence of the Islamic religion. The Qur'an, Sunnah, and Sīra emphasize kindness, brotherhood, and peace among people. The Prophet permitted marriage with Christian and Jewish women and himself entered such marriages. Marriage is built upon affection, and the permissibility of such marriages encourages mutual affection. He hosted religious scholars from Najran in the mosque and permitted them to perform their worship there. He emphasized that no harm should be inflicted upon people of different religions who live among Muslims.

The verse (Q 5:51) cited by the author as evidence for not befriending Jews and Christians refers to a wartime context in which aiding the opposing front was prohibited, and it corresponds to a historical event (al-Qudsi, 2015, p. 61). Likewise, in the verses mentioned by the author (Q 60:1–3), the Qur'an states, "O believers! Do not take My enemies and your enemies as friends." These verses were revealed to warn Muslims who intended to support the enemy during war. Therefore, the verse regarding not befriending Jews and Christians is a contextual warning for that particular period regarding supporting the opposing side in warfare; it does not command Muslims to sever familial or neighborly ties nor to harbor hostility toward them.

In fact, when the Prophet's uncle, Abu Talib, passed away, the Prophet ordered his Muslim son, 'Ali, to fulfill his duties toward his father (al-Maturidi, 2005, vol. 2, p. 351). Moreover, there are many examples in hadith and sīra literature instructing Muslims to treat their non-Muslim relatives with kindness.

Excommunication

Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi does not restrict the concept of *takfir* to verbal excommunication alone, but asserts that the lives and property of apostates and polytheists are not inviolable. He writes: "Merely uttering the phrase of the unity of God is not enough to render someone's life and property forbidden. It is also necessary to reject those worshipped besides Allah. If a person does not reject those worshipped besides Allah, their life and property are not forbidden" (al-Qudsi, 2015, p. 150). In this regard, he presents the following examples:

> Secularists, racists, capitalists, socialists, liberals, and democrats have different gods whom they worship; they belong to different factions according to the gods they worship. Some of them obey Americans, some obey Europeans, and some obey Russians… Although they worship different things, they have all united in committing major polytheism (*shirk*). There is no difference among them in terms of polytheism. Allah says, 'Fight against them until there is no more polytheism' (Q 2:193)" (al-Qudsi, 2015, p. 173).

The author cites 'Abd al-Qadir b. 'Abd al-'Azīz's book *Īmān wa-l-Kufr* ("Faith and Disbelief"), claiming that those he classifies as polytheists (*mushrik*) among Muslims possess no inviolability of life and property, and he asserts that fighting against them is a divine command.

'Abd al-Qadir b. 'Abd al-'Azīz discusses the issue of *takfir* in his book, noting that *takfir* is one of the central topics among militant Islamist-Salafi writers. He begins the book with a section explaining why faith and disbelief are important (Abdulaziz, *Īmān wa-l-Kufr*, pp. 3–15). He then examines the rules and impediments of *takfir*, and although the book appears to moderate excesses related to *takfir*, it is difficult to conclude that the author succeeds in this regard, since his goal appears to be to legitimize *takfir* and turn it into a systematic method.

'Abd al-Qadir b. 'Abd al-'Azīz's work *Tāghūt ve Destekçileri* ("*Tāghūt* and its Supporters"), published by *Davet ve Cihād* Publications and spanning 68 pages, includes rulings concerning those who support apostates and those who support tyrants. In his final

verdict, the author states: "Anyone who supports apostate rulers and helps them in word or action in fighting against Muslims is considered an unbeliever according to the apparent ruling" (Abdulaziz, *Tāghūt ve Destekçileri*, p. 59).

Evaluation

These views are incompatible with the theological and historical realities of Islam. The scholars of the early generations (*Salaf*) and the scholars of the Ash'ari and Maturidi schools unanimously held that those who profess the oneness of God, declare themselves Muslims, and perform the prayer cannot be declared unbelievers. For example, when the Muslim army led by Khalid ibn al-Walīd continued fighting and taking prisoners even after the opposing tribe declared their conversion to Islam, the Prophet vehemently condemned Khalid and supplicated: "O Allah! I am innocent of what Khalid has done."

Furthermore, the Prophet stated in several hadiths: "Whoever says 'lā ilāha illā Allāh' shall be saved." There is consensus that a person who declares the testimony of faith (*kalimah*) is recognized as a Muslim. The pillar of faith involves internal affirmation of Allah's existence and oneness and of the prophethood of Muhammad. Verbalizing this affirmation is sufficient for a person to be regarded as a Muslim. Scholars of Islam reached consensus on this definition of faith.

It is thus evident that beyond this affirmation, notions such as obedience, love, and submission as practical elements are not pillars of faith. Such views have been promoted by extremist groups, who tend to adopt violent, formalistic, and unilateral understandings. Since the concept of obedience encompasses practical actions, it is well known and emphasized by Islamic theologians that actions (*a'māl*) are not pillars of faith. Although there are differing opinions among Muslim scholars regarding the relationship between faith and action, there is consensus among Sunni scholars that disobedience in actions does not expel someone from the fold of Islam.

Regarding fighting disbelievers, Islam permits combat as a means of self-defense during aggression. However, it is incorrect to regard warfare as a method of spreading the religion. The Qur'anic verses permitting and encouraging *jihad* must be interpreted within the context of the specific circumstances of that era and cannot be abstracted from their historical reality. The Qur'an emphasizes the principles of religious freedom within universal ethical constraints, as exemplified in verses such as "There is no compulsion in religion" (Q 2:256) and "To you, your religion, and to me, mine" (Q 109:6).

Taghut

According to Ziyaeddin al-Qudsi, the greatest problem facing Muslims is the distortion of Islamic concepts. He claims that in the present age, Satan and his followers undermine Islam by corrupting the true meanings of Islamic concepts and replacing them with meanings that do not harm themselves or their administrations (al-Qudsi, *Tağutu Reddetmek*, p. 11). According to the author, the second major problem of Muslims is their failure to recognize disbelief (*kufr*) and to distinguish between disbelievers and Muslims. The third problem is that judgments concerning people are not based on the Book of Allah and the Sunnah, but rather on individual opinions and *taghut*.

Taghut refers to anything that diverts people away from worshipping Allah. Foreign laws are also considered *taghut*; those who write and promote such laws are either *taghut* themselves or soldiers of *taghut* (al-Qudsi, *Tağutu Reddetmek*, pp. 31–32). "Whoever obeys the *taghut*, does not declare them disbelievers, or does not declare those who do not declare them disbelievers. Then that person has become a disbeliever and has corrupted their faith" (al-Qudsi, *Tağutu Reddetmek*, p. 36). If a ruler permits what Allah has forbidden or enacts laws that enable banks to engage in usury, then that ruler becomes a disbeliever because they issue judgments among people and for people. Passing judgment is an act of worship, and accepting the judgment of someone other than Allah is, according to the author, equivalent to praying and fasting for someone other than Allah (al-Qudsi, *Tağutu Reddetmek*, p. 50).

The author emphasizes that the judgments of *taghut* can never be accepted, and even if the entire world does so, it is never permissible to participate in the courts of *taghut*. Supporting those who accept judgments other than Allah's and failing to declare them disbelievers is also considered disbelief, and since the matter pertains to *tawhid*, ignorance is not a valid excuse (al-Qudsi, *Tağutu Reddetmek*, p. 82). Moreover, according to the author, in order for the word of *tawhid* (the testimony of faith) to be beneficial, it is necessary not to love disbelievers, to resent them, and to avoid harboring affection for them. Even if they are one's closest relatives, loving a disbeliever renders one a disbeliever. The author states that a person who is in the company of polytheists, sitting with them, cannot be judged by Islam. Such a person must completely separate from them and express disapproval of the disbelief and deviations in which they are engaged. Additionally, the author expresses the view that failing to openly declare disbelievers without a valid excuse and living among them constitutes disbelief (al-Qudsi, *Tağutu Reddetmek*, pp. 110, 117).

Evaluation

No Islamic scholar in history has ever made the excommunication of others a condition of faith. Likewise, no Islamic scholar has considered living under different customs or administrative laws, or complying with them, as an act of blasphemy. The author distorts the meanings of Qur'anic verses and hadith by removing them from their contexts and reinterpreting Islamic concepts, presenting his own ideological views as religion and excommunicating those who do not adopt them. He promotes dangerous ideas by portraying even natural forms of human affection as harmful and by encouraging hatred and enmity. However, Islam does not prohibit love between people. The verse "Do not take Jews and Christians as allies" refers to avoiding admiration of the negative attributes of certain individuals, rather than to the blanket prohibition of loving all people. If a person's loved one commits theft, refusing to love their act does not necessitate harboring hatred toward the person themselves. The Prophet Muhammad had affection for his uncle Abu Talib, who supported him, and he wished for him to embrace Islam. This situation is

explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an: "(O Messenger!) You cannot guide those you love. Allah guides whom He wills, and He is most knowing of the [rightly] guided" (Q 28:56).

Sowing hostility among people and promoting hatred is not a religious command. Religion commands peace, love, and brotherhood. Numerous examples of this exist in the Qur'an and Sunnah. It is not possible to excommunicate individuals solely because they love non-believers, nor can a person who openly assists them be accused of disbelief. Even if a Muslim engages in espionage on behalf of non-believers, they would not be executed for such a crime or considered to have renounced their faith. On this matter, the four Sunni schools of law and Salafi scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim have reached consensus. The fact that Islamic scholars unanimously maintain that even acts potentially detrimental to Muslims do not expel a Muslim from the fold of Islam is clear evidence that individuals cannot be excommunicated on the basis of their deeds (al-Awni, 2016, pp. 164–165).

Jihad

Abu Mahmud Abu Umar wrote his work titled *al-Jihad wa al-Ijtihad* to demonstrate that jihad is the only path to salvation for Muslims. In the introduction, the author discusses the concepts of servitude and polytheism (Abu Qatada, p. 32). He claims that the community upon the right path (namely those adhering to Salafi ideology) fight against the polytheism of the palace and its leaders. The author first addresses the topics of servitude and sovereignty. He then discusses the concepts of community and imamate, describing the struggle of the group he calls *al-ta'ifah al-mansurah* (the group aided by God) against state governance. He asserts that the war continues and that those who claim the war has ended are unfortunate (Abu Qatada, p. 51).

In the third chapter, he focuses on jihad and change, attempting to show that the Salafi understanding of jihad differs from that of others by describing jihad movements in the Islamic world. Later, on page 99, he discusses the necessity of jihad for achieving political transformation in the Islamic world under the heading "The Legitimacy of Jihad Movements and the Way to Change Regimes." On page 100, he explains the methods of

regime change. According to the author, salvation for Muslims is not possible through moderation and worship; the only path to salvation is jihad (Abu Qatada, p. 102). He then emphasizes the circumstances that necessitate jihad movements in the world (Abu Qatada, p. 106). He argues that Islamic states cannot be established through polytheistic means such as democracy and asserts that jihad is the only means of establishing an Islamic state (Abu Qatada, p. 112). He subsequently addresses participation in parliaments and elections, claiming that such participation constitutes polytheism according to their theories of sovereignty (Abu Qatada, p. 112). The author claims that the primary focus of jihad is not against external enemies, but against the seemingly Muslim populace and their seemingly Muslim leaders (Abu Qatada, p. 153). He then discusses the *ahl al-fitna* (people of discord) and the struggle against them (Abu Qatada, p. 185). The author describes the nature, fundamental characteristics, and types of Salafi jihad (Abu Qatada, p. 204). According to him, the primary goal of the *mujahid* is to establish monotheism (Abu Qatada, p. 220). He dedicates a section of the book to explaining the fundamental concepts he employs, analyzing terms such as Salafism, deviant scholars, Sufis, and the People of Rejection (Abu Qatada, p. 226). According to the author, the rules of war against apostates are stricter than those against non-believers: "It is not permissible to make peace treaties, engage in ceasefire negotiations, or grant them protection" (Abu Qatada, p. 357). In the fifth chapter, he addresses jurisprudential concepts such as servitude and struggle, community, imamate, jurist, and the authority of the sultan.

In the preface to his book *Cihada Teşvik* (Encouragement to Jihad), Abu Qutayba al-Shami emphasizes the necessity of "fighting against *taghuts* (false deities or tyrannical rulers), removing them from their positions, and appointing a caliph for Muslims." After listing verses that imply that "judgment belongs to Allah," he argues that the constitutions of Islamic countries delegate this authority to individuals and institutions other than Allah, thereby constituting rebellion against Allah. He then states that the leaders and rulers in Islamic countries are disbelievers and provides examples. The author claims that the military institutions in Islamic countries are not controlled by Muslims and were established to annihilate Muslims. To achieve this goal, he writes, "They managed to

completely separate Muslims from weapons" (al-Shami, p. 14). He states: "Those who replace Allah's Shari'ah with human laws become disbelievers" (al-Shami, p. 17). In the section where he discusses the obligation to fight against apostate rulers, he emphasizes on page 46 the priority of fighting apostates because they are nearer. Quoting Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhab, he says: "Fighting against apostates and their supporters is a personal obligation (*fard 'ayn*) for every Muslim, except for those with legitimate excuses" (al-Shami, p. 60).

In the introduction to his work titled *Ehli Sünnetin Menheci ve Cihad* ("The Methodology of the People of Sunnah and Jihad"), Abdulkadir b. Abdul Aziz discusses the importance of preparing one's faith for jihad. He describes the duties of the *mujahid* towards Allah, the duties of *mujahids* toward their leaders, and the duties of *mujahids* toward one another. In this section, he outlines the principles of jihad in twenty points. In the eighteenth point, he states that warfare includes deception. In these points, the author attempts to justify the necessity of waging war against other groups who do not believe, based on the claim that people are created differently, and he lists the methods to be followed during such a war in point form.

Conclusion and Evaluation

It can be observed that the perspective of Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhab, the founder of the Wahhabi movement (who characterized broad segments of the Muslim community as polytheists and deemed the shedding of their blood and the seizure of their property lawful) is also adopted by the author. According to him, those who have not yet received *his* specific invitation are classified as polytheists, and their legal status in this world is equivalent to that of disbelievers. In the Hereafter, Allah will test them again, and the righteous among them will enter Paradise while the wicked will enter Hell. Those who have received the invitation, whether nominally Muslim or openly non-Muslim, are not considered Muslims if they do not reject *taghut* (false deities or illegitimate authorities); even if they pray and fast, they are regarded as lacking genuine *tawhid*, classified as disbelievers, and their lives and property are deemed licit.

Excommunication (*takfir*, declaring someone a disbeliever) was historically used by relatively small groups in the early centuries of Islam, such as the Khawarij, the Muʿtazilites, and certain Shiʿi factions, as a tool of propaganda against their opponents and as a means of preserving their own identity. These groups, motivated by a desire for self-preservation as sub-identities and by a rejection of the broader social order, attempted to instill confidence among their followers by depicting the wider society as deviant, misguided, and irreligious, thereby reinforcing their own communal boundaries. By contrast, the majority known as Ahl al-Sunna (Sunni Muslims) opposed *takfir* and did not regard obedience to oppressive Umayyad rulers or the commission of major sins as grounds for declaring a person a disbeliever.

Takfir is nourished by an ideology of othering and of perceiving oneself as fundamentally distinct from the rest of society. Takfiri groups are generally inclined toward violence. Militant Islamists seek to achieve two primary goals through *takfir*: (1) to form and consolidate their own group by claiming that all who do not share their views, do not embrace their specific understanding of *tawhid*, and do not love those who hold that understanding are disbelievers; and (2) to construct a theological foundation for violence against those they label as disbelievers.

Militant Islamists attempt to distinguish themselves from the Khawarij by asserting that they do not declare Salafi scholars to be disbelievers. At the same time, however, they claim that nearly all people living today, including devout Muslims, are polytheists or disbelievers. By concretizing their discourse of hatred through numerous examples, they craft a language of discrimination and hostility that ultimately encompasses everyone. Although some contemporary Salafi writers adopt a more moderate stance on issues such as democracy, the author maintains that even those who accept democracy, and those who refrain from declaring others disbelievers, including those who do not condemn those who fail to excommunicate others, fall into disbelief. In this way, they propagate a discourse of hatred from which even silence becomes grounds for condemnation.

Militant Islamists persistently defend *takfir* despite the clear prohibitions found within Islam. According to Islamic scholars, *takfir* can only be considered in cases where there is a definitive ruling transmitted through an uninterrupted chain of reliable narrators, corroborated by multiple sources, and established through scholarly consensus. Even in such instances, the individual's psychological state and true intention must be carefully assessed. Consequently, scholars have stated that if there is even a one-percent possibility of interpreting a statement or action in a non-disbelieving sense, *takfir* must not be applied.

Militant Islamists treat *takfir* as one of the two fundamental pillars of *tawhid*, if not the most important of them. Yet a Muslim is under no obligation to declare others disbelievers. On the contrary, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) warned that "If a person calls another a disbeliever unjustly, the accusation returns upon the accuser if the one accused is not in fact a disbeliever." It is impossible to know fully who truly possesses faith, what resides in their hearts, or the realities of their inner world. Human psychological states are constantly changing; indeed, some prominent Companions approached the Prophet and asked, "Am I a hypocrite?" Takfiri ideology, by disregarding human psychology, issues judgments as if dealing with robots and arrogantly seeks to establish an authority of fear through religious rhetoric such as: "If you do not reject this, you are a disbeliever; if you do not call a disbeliever a disbeliever, you are a disbeliever; if you do not declare as disbelievers those who fail to excommunicate disbelievers and remain silent, you are a disbeliever."

Islam promotes ease, mercy, and glad tidings, and commands believers to seek peace, embrace tolerance, and love human beings without making absolute distinctions between disbelievers and believers in the realm of basic human dignity. It is therefore incorrect to attempt to justify violence, discrimination, and hate speech by appealing to the sacred texts of Islam or to the practice of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The efforts of some Salafi writers to impose contemporary problems and modern concepts onto religious texts through extreme interpretive strategies represent a typical form of anachronism. The sociological and psychological roots of *takfir*-oriented discourse aimed at legitimizing violence and discrimination deserve further critical investigation.

Militant Islamists claim that those who adopt different ideologies and intellectual currents, who accept democracy, elections, and similar political mechanisms, and who recognize sources of law other than the religious texts, are disbelievers.

According to militant Islamists, jihad against apostates, those who have allegedly left the religion, is the most important form of jihad. Yet Islam regards warfare as legitimate only as a defensive measure under specific historical conditions to preserve life and communal existence on the Arabian Peninsula some 1,400 years ago. For this reason, regulations and legal norms concerning warfare were articulated. Severing these historical conflicts from their original context and applying them directly to the present amounts to comparing fundamentally unlike situations and constitutes an anachronistic approach from a historical perspective.

When the Qur'an and the Sunnah are examined holistically, it becomes clear that peace and religious freedom are the primary principles, and that warfare is permitted only in exceptional circumstances for self-defense. To regard warfare as a legitimate method for disseminating religious ideas is decidedly incorrect, for in Islam freedom of religion and freedom of thought are foundational principles.

Inciting violence and the use of force to seize political power is never acceptable. In the past, some small dissenting factions advocated armed struggle and rebellion as a means of bringing their ideas to power, but such views remained exceptional and were not embraced by the majority of Muslims. The essence of religion rests upon choices made through free will; hence, the endorsement of coercion and violence cannot be reconciled with the fundamental spirit of the faith.

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