

## ARTICULATING TAKFIR: Ayman Al-Zawahiri and The Global *Jihad* Ideology

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### Abstract

*Takfir is an ideology excommunicating fellow Muslims because of having different beliefs or expressing a different point of view. This article deals with the development of the takfir doctrine which separates some groups not only based on theological aspects but also on socio-political aspects, such as justifying democratic system or collaborating with enemies of Islam. It particularly addresses the question of how Ayman al-Zawahiri globalized the takfir doctrine as a campaign against secularism, capitalism, human rights, and environmental crisis, in order to invite local jihadist groups to fight together in a global sphere.*

*[Takfir adalah paham yang mengucilkan sesama Muslim karena berbeda keyakinan atau berbeda pandangan. Artikel ini mengkaji perkembangan doktrin takfir dan memisabkannya menjadi beberapa kelompok tidak hanya berdasarkan aspek teologis semata, melainkan juga pada aspek sosial-politik, seperti membenarkan sistem demokrasi atau menjalin relasi dengan musuh-musuh Islam. Secara khusus, artikel ini fokus pada pertanyaan tentang bagaimana Ayman al-Zawahiri menggelorakan*



*doktrin takfir sebagai kampanye melawan sekularisme, kapitalisme, hak asasi manusia, krisis lingkungan, sekaligus mengundang kelompok jihad lokal untuk berjuang bersama dalam lingkup global.]*

**Keywords:** *Takfir, Global Jihad, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Ideology*

## Introduction

The doctrine of *takfir* has long been seen as a dangerous ideology due to excommunicating fellow Muslims having different views on Islamic belief. This doctrine went beyond theological and socio-political aspects. For Ayman al-Zawahiri, a country can be called an infidel (*kafir*) state if its government refuses to implement Allah's laws as its primary constitution. In addition, the call for global *jihad* against "near and far enemies" are continuously propagandized to promote the establishment of the Islamic caliphate.<sup>1</sup> The fight against the "near enemies" is focused on those considered infidels or on the authorities who failed to enforce sharia law, exceeded the limit, or oppressive. The "far enemies" is conducted through the armed battle against the Islam enemies who caused ignorance and decline in the Muslim community.<sup>2</sup>

The doctrine of *takfir*<sup>3</sup> also captured the dynamic differences in religious understanding and practice among Muslims. A true example was the isolation mechanism by the Egyptian al-Takfir wal-Hijra group. They require its members to isolate themselves (*uzlah*) as the only way to escape from the situation of infidelity and ignorance (*jahiliyah*).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Jihad Al-Tawaghit* (Bait al-Maqdis, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Eli Alshech, "The Doctrinal Crisis within the Salafi-Jihad Ranks and the Emergence of Neo-Takfirism: A Historical and Doctrinal Analysis," *Islamic law and Society*, Vol. 21, No. 4, 2014, pp. 419-452.

<sup>3</sup> Khalid bin Muhammad Al-'Anbari, *Rulling by Other That What Allah Revealed; the Fundamentals of Takfir* (al-Aqur'an was-sunnah Society of North America, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Mohamed Badar, Masaki Nagata, and Tiphane Tueni, "The Radical Application of the Islamist Concept of *Takfir*," *Arab Law Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2017, pp. 134-162.

Another example, through al-Qaeda and its network, al-Zawahiri could even expand the obligation of *jihad* from a local territory to a global scale by connecting local goals to transnational goals. To this point, it seems clear that the diversity of *takfir* practices illustrates the difficulties in drawing a clear line of when a Muslim, group, or government can be categorized as infidels.

For the *takfir* ideology, the main character is the strict implementation of the concept of *al-wala' al-barra'*,<sup>5</sup> which functions as a social closure mechanism—the process of retraction of boundaries, constructing identities, and monopolizing scarce resources for their group.<sup>6</sup> The mechanism of social inclusivism is expected to produce a unique identity and to create a closed Muslim communities.

This article deals with al-Zawahiri's roles in establishing boundaries between the friends and foes and his *takfir* campaign accumulating global *jihad* groups. This article employed library research materials<sup>7</sup> and theological approach strengthened by historical reviews in analyzing of religious texts. The theological approach was an inseparable part of religion-based research activities to answer if religion can be deeply explored. Whereas the historical approach used to explain and analyze the development of civilization in a historical context.

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<sup>5</sup> Saifudin Asrori, "Mengikuti Panggilan *Jihad*; Argumentasi Radikalisme dan Ekstremisme di Indonesia," *Aqlam: Journal of Islam and Plurality*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2019, pp. 118-133.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Vertigans, *Militant Islam: A Sociology of Characteristics, Causes and Consequences* (London: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Robert K. Yin, *Applications of Case Study Research* (New York: Sage Publishing, 2011).

## The Contestation of *Takfir* Discourse

The doctrine of *takfir* is one of most contemporary controversial theological.<sup>8</sup> The term *kafir* (infidel)—with its various forms derived from the Qur'an—has been mentioned 525 times, which are generally related to actions related to Allah SWT. Such actions cover 'not acknowledging or denying the favors' (al-Baqarah: 191) or 'opposing and disobeying to Prophet Muhammad's teachings' (an-Nisa': 89; al-Anfal: 60).

The Khawārij<sup>9</sup> group was the first to implement the doctrine of *takfir* as a political doctrine and its religious movement. It started from the dispute between Ali bin Abi Talib and Muawiyah, which was carried out by means of arbitration. In this situation, the Khawārij considered the arbitration contradicting Islamic teachings as stated in al-Ma'idah: 44, which reads: "*Whoever does not determine the law with what is transmitted Allah is an infidel.*"<sup>10</sup> The doctrine of *takfir* in the Khawārij began with political issues as they argued that family relations had no role in the election of the Caliphate. This view later led to the reaction of the Ali bin Abi Talib's followers—the Shi'ites. From this point, *takfir* was then developed into a theological-based religious movement, believing God would carry out his good promises and threats for those denying the ambiguous (*mutasabihat*)<sup>11</sup> of Quranic verses.<sup>12</sup>

This development also shaped different theological and law enforcement concepts, such as the perfect faith, the characteristics of true believers, and the conditions of people with heavy sins on the *al-wa'ad and*

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<sup>8</sup> In term, *takfir* refers to several meanings, including covering, covering, forgetting something. "Night" can be associated with *kufir* because it covers or envelops humans, similarly "farmer" can also be associated with *kufir* because he covers grain in the ground. Harun Nasution, *Islam Ditinjau dari Berbagai Aspeknya Jilid II* (Jakarta: UI-Press, 1974).

<sup>9</sup> Early Islamic sect, which formed in response to a religio-political controversy over the Caliphate.

<sup>10</sup> Harun Nasution, *Islam Ditinjau....*

<sup>11</sup> Verses that contain multiple meanings, and are difficult to understand.

<sup>12</sup> A Khalid bin Muhammad Al-'Anbari, *Rulling by Other...*

*al-ma'id* (day of judgment). Based on this doctrine, the Khawārij became an exclusively religious community and began to 'labeling' other Muslims with infidels if they did not practice fundamental Islamic teachings, such as neglecting prayers or not donating their wealth to the poor.<sup>13</sup> In an extreme manner, the Khawārij even allowed the killing of those not acknowledging their values.

Those views indeed received many reactions—one of them was from the Murji'ah sect.<sup>14</sup> They believed that such a concept of serious sins must consider Allah's decision. Therefore, they left all the judgments to Allah and did not easily label those sinners. Moreover, some of their primary teachings also cover acknowledging someone's faith by believing Allah in their heart, and as long as they believe in faith testimonies (*syahadat*), they are still Muslims despite their heavy sins. They believed that Allah is the only one having the right to judge those who believe in Him.<sup>15</sup>

Different perspectives on punishment for sinners also came from the Mu'tazilah sect, which developed their doctrine based on Wāṣil ibn 'Atā'. They held a perspective that a believer's faith must be reflected on their deeds and confessions. Furthermore, they did not see the Muslim sinners as infidels, but as '*fasiq*'—they would be punished in the hereafter and should not be excluded from society.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, they did not allow such *takfir* teachings in their community. In addition, the Mu'tazilah had five main teachings (*ushul al-khamsah*), namely the teachings of monotheism (the nature of Allah is His substance, the Qur'an is a creature, Allah in the hereafter is invisible to human eyes), the justice from

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<sup>13</sup> Mohamed Badar, Masaki Nagata, and Tiphonie Tueni, "The Radical Application..."

<sup>14</sup> Murji'ah comes from the word *arja'a* which means to delay or give hope. The main point of his teaching is to postpone the big sins committed by Muslims to Allah on the Day of Judgment.

<sup>15</sup> Nasution, *Islam Ditinjau...*

<sup>16</sup> Saiful Mujani, "Mu'tazilah and the Modernization of the Indonesian Muslim Community: Intellectual Portrait of Harun Nasution," *Studia Islamika*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1994.

Allah is based on their deeds, promises, and threats, position between two positions (*al-manẓilah baina al-manẓilataini*), *amar ma'ruf*, and *nabi munkar*.<sup>17</sup>

The issue of faith and infidelity became the attractive concerns to al-Ghazali. The definition of *kafir* is the denial of the Prophet Muhammad and all the teachings. While faith concerns the beliefs themselves in all forms of teachings.<sup>18</sup> He provided five criteria for a person to be classified as infidels or religious: *wujud al-dhati*, *wujud al-bissi*, *wujud al-khayali*, *wujud al-'aqli*, and *wujud al-shibbi*. *Wujud al-dhati* is an essentially existing entity beyond the five senses (*al-biss*) and the human rationales (*al-'aql*). However, both the five senses and the reason can capture the entity—this knowledge was then called as perception (*idrak*). *Wujud al-bissi* is a sensory entity depicted in the eye from something that does not have an actual existence. Whereas, *wujud al-khayali*, is the entity whose image is captured by the five senses. When the object disappears, the image of the object remains in the recording of the sensory memory. Furthermore, *wujud al-'aqli* is a rational entity with true spirit, essence, and meaning abstracted without further imaginary images. The last, *wujud al-shibbi* is a metaphorical entity with no form. It's not in form nor essence; outside or inside the five senses, and not in imagination or mind, but they exist in something else which resembles it in one of its characteristics.<sup>19</sup>

From those criteria, al-Ghazali did *takfir* to some philosophical groups based on several views. The first is their belief that what will be resurrected later in the afterlife is purely spiritual (*ruh*), while the body will be destroyed. The second is their belief that Allah only knows things in general, and He does not know the detailed things (*juẓ'īyyat*) that occur in nature. This is apparent infidelity, according to al-Ghazali, and it is in line with Qur'an in Yunus verse 61. The third is their belief in the eternity

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<sup>17</sup> Harun Nasution, *Islam Ditinjau...*

<sup>18</sup> Abû Hâmid Al-Ghazâlî, *Faishal Al-Tafriqah Bayna Al-Islam Wa Zandaqob* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1993).

<sup>19</sup> Umar Faruq Thohir, "Kafir dan Mukmin dalam Perspektif Tasawuf Akhlaqi Al-Ghazali," *Jurnal Ayy-Syari'ah*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2019.

of the universe and all substances.<sup>20</sup>

The issue of infidel also arises from Ibn Taymiyyah perspective. He classifies infidelity in two forms: *kufr ṣāḥir* (tangible infidelity) and *kufr bathin* (intangible infidelity). *Kufr ṣāḥir* was divided into three categories: *al-Kitābiyyun* (the Jews and Christians), *al-Majusi*, and the polytheists. Whereas, *kufr bathin* is illustrated as a hypocrite who reveals their Islamic values and simultaneously hides their lies. However, there is a difference between absolute and specific *takfir* for those hypocrites. Absolute *takfir* is the punishment of the infidels because of their words and action. Meanwhile, specific *takfir* (*mu'ayyan*) is the law enforcement to the infidels.<sup>21</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah further explained specifically the required conditions of *takfir mu'ayyan* by formulating several methods of *takfir*. The first is the existence of threatening texts contained in the al-Qur'an and *al-Sunnah* and texts from the *imam* (religious leaders) regarding *takfir* and *tafsik*. Therefore, unless an exception is found for a specific person, a stipulation is not required.<sup>22</sup> The second is the act of *takfir* generally, such as public warning explained publicly and thoroughly because the sentence is based on the proven condition and has no obstructions to the decision. The third is when Ibn Taymiyyah gave his speech about the *'ulama* who opposed the interpretation of the *ahlul bid'ah*. The decision was based on the rule that they did not consider that the interpretation must have certain conditions, and the interpretation is not required unless certain conditions are obtained along with the evidence. The fourth is when Ibn Taymiyyah cites Ahmad ibn Hanbal that he did *takfir* to the person who says the Qur'an is a creature. Whoever directs the *takfir* to a specific person must bring evidence that that person fulfills the conditions with no obstructions.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Abû Hâmid Al-Ghazâlî, *Al-Munqidh Min Dlalâl* (Cairo: Dâr al-Kutub al-Hadîtsah, 1974).

<sup>21</sup> Ibn Taimiyah, *Fatawa Kubra* (Beirut: Dar al- Kutub al-Islamiyah, 1987).

<sup>22</sup> Badri Yatim, *Sejarah Peradaban Islam* (Jakarta: Rajawali Press, 1997).

<sup>23</sup> Amsal Bakhtiar, "Problematisasi Metafisika dan Fisika dalam Filsafat Islam: Perbandingan antara Al-Ghazali dan Ibn Rusyd," *Research Report*, UIN Syarif

Further, Taymiyyah's thought was developed by Muh}ammad ibn Abdul Wahhāb at-Tamīmī (Abdul-Wahhāb). He argued that *takfir* should be based on a strict interpretation of the Qur'an as an effort to "purify" Islamic teachings, which are considered *bid'ah* and *keburafat*.<sup>24</sup> For some period, this thought was transformed into Wahhabism group. They believed that Islam could gain victories in some battles, expand beyond the Arabian Peninsula rapidly, and become a large religion due to the purity of the teachings. At this point, Abdul-Wahhāb restored the cause of the Muslims' weakness by returning directly to the Qur'an and *sunnah*.

Another Wahhabism teaching is reflected in two *tauhid*: *rububiyah* and *ullubiyah*. *Rububiyah* definition believes that Allah is alone in creating and managing the universe. However, believing in *rububiyah* does not to be a Muslim. In Wahhabism, to be a Muslim is *ullubiyah* which believes there is nothing to worship except Allah. Therefore, those who worship Allah and idols, or the Prophet Jesus, failed to this criterion. In another aspect, learning something not based on the Qur'an and *sunnah* is considered infidel for denying "*qadar*" and interpreting the Qur'an by *ta'wil*.

The Wahhabism also opens for deliberation (*ijtihad*) for those meeting the requirements of *ijtihad*. According to Abdul-Wahhāb, a decline of *ijtihad* is a significant degradation for Muslims as they may lose their identity and reasoning power for only examining the opinions of the 'ulama having similar views on them. Therefore, to save Islam from terrible danger, Abdul-Wahhāb recommended opening *ijtihad* widely to invite people to directly understand religion from its sources: the Qur'an and *sunnah*.<sup>25</sup>

Discourses related to infidelity and faith continued to develop when Islam meeting with Western ideas. The idea of religious purification occurs based on the belief that Islamic teachings constantly change

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Hidayatullah Jakarta, 1998.

<sup>24</sup> Arrazy Hasyim, "Teologi Muslim Puritan: Genealogi dan Ajaran Salafi" *Ph.D Thesis*, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2017.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*



based on external influences. Therefore, Islamic principles are often misunderstood, misused, or perhaps forgotten, which ultimately brings Muslims away from the straight path (*sirat al-mustaqim*).<sup>26</sup> Modernization is generally carried out by encouraging the Muslim community to review the understanding and interpretation of Islam through understanding its messages, especially in the post-prophecy period. However, it requires continuous interpretation in line with continuously changing situations; this effort is called *ijtihad*, an effort to obtain an independent and deliberate assessment intended to discover the meaning of Islamic teachings and reveal their general principles.<sup>27</sup> Through *ijtihad*, Islamic religious messages do not stagnate and reflect the values of Islam as eternal and universal.<sup>28</sup>

The milestone of the modern Islamic movement was continued by Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838-1897).<sup>29</sup> Al-Afghānī's idea of renewal is based on his belief that Islam is a religion suitable for all aspects. The consequence of this view is the necessity of Muslims to perform *ijtihad*. The mechanism of *ijtihad* is developed by keeping the ties to the fundamental religious teachings. In addition, al-Afghānī's anti-colonialism and anti-Western domination doctrine led to the idea of the unity of the ummah (pan-Islamism). Al-Afghānī considered it necessary for Muslims to unite because he saw that one of the weak factors was the separation itself.

The idea of purification of religious teachings was continued by Muhammad Rashīd ibn 'Alī Ridā (1865-1935).<sup>30</sup> He rested on the

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<sup>26</sup> Shireen T. Hunter (ed.) *Reformist Voices of Islam: Mediating Islam and Modernity*, Shireen Hunter (London & New York: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> Fauzan Saleh, *Modern Trends in Islamic Theological Discourses in 20th Century Indonesia; a Critical Survey* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

<sup>28</sup> Fazlur Rahman, "Islamic Modernism: Its Scope, Method and Alternatives," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1970, pp. 317-333.

<sup>29</sup> Charles Kurzman, *Modernist Islam, 1840-1940: A Sourcebook* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>30</sup> J.L Eposito and O. J Voll, *Makers of Contemporary Islam*...

concern of seeing Muslims left too far than the West. For Rashīd Ridā, Muslims must be brought back to the true Islamic teachings, and outside from all about *bid'ah*.<sup>31</sup> Rida also rejects the nationalism movement that Mustafā Kāmil Pasha—a pioneer in Egypt and the Turkish Nationalism movement—because nationalism contradicts the teachings of brotherhood among Muslims, which does not recognize differences in language, homeland, and national entities. All Muslims are united under one belief, one moral system, and one educational system and are subject to a legal system run based on Islamic law and caliphate.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, Egypt's political turmoil in the early independence days triggered a socio-religious movement called Ikhwanul Muslimin. This organization founded by Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949), one of the most influential Islamic revivalist figures. This organization calls for the re-establishment of a “pure” Islamic system as the foundation for all social relations. Only through creating a society based on the comprehensive and complete implementation of Islam can Egypt survive its inevitable encounter with modernity.<sup>33</sup> Through the organization, al-Banna promoted a model of the Islamic system developed voluntary organizations sharing characteristics of Islamic-religious values, including schools, social groups, Boy Scout organizations, newspapers, health clinics, and mosques.<sup>34</sup> In 1940, the organization had 500 branches with about one million active members. During the 1952 coup, the organization became the largest social organization in Egypt, with about

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<sup>31</sup> Mansoor Moaddel, “Conditions for Ideological Production: The Origins of Islamic Modernism in India, Egypt, and Iran,” *Theory and Society*, Vol. 30, 2001, pp. 669-731.

<sup>32</sup> Azyumardi Azra and Harun Nasution, *Perkembangan Modern dalam Islam* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor, 1985).

<sup>33</sup> Ishak Musa Husaini, *The Moslem Brethren: The Greatest of Modern Islamic Movements* (Westport: Hyperion Press, 1956).

<sup>34</sup> Robert W. Hefner (ed.), Lynn Welchman, *Muslims and Modernity: Culture and Society since 1800*, *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol. 6, 2010.

2.000 branches and two million active members.<sup>35</sup>

Unfortunately, the Ikhwanul Muslimin leadership vacuum caused by the imprisonment, torture, and isolation carried out as part of Nasser's persecution resulted in no strategy, policy, or spiritual advice to guide the organizations after 1955. Detained Ikhwanul Muslimin members tried to restore their glory by promoting Sayyid 'Ibrāhīm Husayn Qutb (1906-1966) as the prominent figure to provide spiritual advice. He was one of the Ikhwanul Muslimin leaders arrested in the first wave of persecution in 1954.<sup>36</sup> Q}utb conceptualizes the need for a revolution in terms of submission to the oneness of God (*tauhid*). He specifically referred to a leader with absolute power violating his submission same as violating to Allah.<sup>37</sup> Q}utb argues that establishing a society based on divine law requires a revolutionary action (*harakah*). One of the strategies is to eradicate the *jahiliyah* elements trying to influence humankind from submission to the only legitimate authority. Ikhwanul Muslimin in its diaspora developed into a radical organization and spread to many countries of Islamic majority, including Indonesia.

*Jihad* against infidelity—in further—was also followed by the establishment of Al-Qaeda as a radical Sunni Islamic paramilitary organization with the primary objective of reducing external influence on Islamic affairs. This organization was founded by Osama bin Laden and Abdullah Azam, this organization aims to gather all the strengths to expel the Soviet Union from the Afghanistan war.<sup>38</sup> Al-Qaeda developed along with local Islamic organizations such as, the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) Filipino (Moro), Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Al Qaeda

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<sup>35</sup> Nedzad Grabus, "Islamic Theology between Tradition and Challenge of Modernity," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 2012, pp. 267-277.

<sup>36</sup> Adnan A. Musallam, "The Posthumous Impact of Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966) on Ayman Al-Zawahiri and Global *Jihadists* of Al-Qa'eda," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 2020, pp. 1-13.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Raymond Ibrahim (ed.), *The Al Qaeda Reader: The Essential Texts of Osama Bin Laden's Terrorist Organization* (New York: Crown, 2007).

in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) which was formed in 2009 from the collaboration between two existing militant groups, namely Al-Qaeda in Yemen (AQY) and Al Qaeda in Saudi Arabia, Al-Qaeda in Iraq which was founded in 2004, and Jabhat al Nusra (JN) which contains Syrian Muslim troops.<sup>39</sup>

The struggle to uphold Islamic law has also developed in Indonesia through various organizations, such as Jamaah Islamiyah (JI) (1995), Jamaah Anshorut Tauhid (2009), Lintas Tanzim (2009), Tauhid Wal *Jihad* (2009), Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (2010), Front Pembela Islam Lamongan (2010), Mujahidin Indonesia Barat (2012), Forum Aktivis Syariat Islam (2013), Jamaah Ansharusy Syariah (2014), and Jamaah Anshorut Daulah (2015).<sup>40</sup> Through Al-Qaeda, al-Zawahiri connected all *jihad* activities as an Islamic struggle from a local to global *jihad*. The critical idea is to liberate *jihad* from the idea of Western political resistance and is understood as the main struggle for liberating Muslims and avoiding national-based tendencies. The primary goal is the unity and leadership supported by religion or the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate.<sup>41</sup>

### **On Ayman al-Zawahiri**

Ayman Muhammad Rabi'a al-Zawahiri was born on June 19th, 1951, in Cairo, Egypt. He began his education in various Qur'anic learning activities at the Hussein Sidqi Mosque and then received a preparatory and introductory school certificate from the Qawmiyya School to pursue his high school diploma at Maadi School. He was also fond of literature and poetry during his childhood and early youth. In 1978, completing his education at the Medical Faculty of Cairo University, al-Zawahiri obtained

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<sup>39</sup> Bruce Riedel, *The Search for Al Qaeda: Its Leadership, Ideology, and Future* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2010).

<sup>40</sup> Saifudin Asrori, "Mengikuti Panggilan *Jihad*..."

<sup>41</sup> Sajjan M. Gohel, "Deciphering Ayman Al-Zawahiri and Al-Qaeda's Strategic and Ideological Imperatives," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2017, pp. 54-67; Montasser al-Zayyat, *The Road to Al-Qaeda: The Story of Bin Laden's Right-Hand Man* (London: Pluto Press, 2004).

a master's degree in surgery and then pursued a Ph.D. degree in surgery with 'distinction' from a university in Pakistan while living in Peshawar.

His *jihad* activities<sup>42</sup> have already been seen from his involvement in Islamic activities in the Ikhwanul Muslimin. In 1966-1967, al-Zawahiri and his friends formed an 'underground' group, led by Nabil al-Bur'i. Sayyid Qutb's works had a significant influence on al-Zawahiri. Qutb was a crucial figure in developing the ideology of the Ikhwanul Muslimin. For al-Zawahiri, the process of executing Sayyid Qutb became a turning point that lit the spark to the development of the Islamic movement—though the Nasser regime thought it would suppress him.

For al-Zawahiri, Sayyid Qutb's works help Muslims define enemies, especially internal enemies, which are no less dangerous than external ones because they function as minions of external interests against Islam. According to al-Zawahiri, Sayyid Qutb's ideology sowed the seeds of an Islamic revolution that justified the use of violence, both externally and internally. Sayyid Qutb's thoughts contributed to the growth of the *jihad* movement in Egypt, which eventually became a global *jihad*. Besides Qutb, al-Zawahiri's thoughts were also influenced by Abdullah Azzam.<sup>43</sup>

Muhammad Qutb (1919-2014)—Sayyid Qutb's brother—wrote books reflecting Sayyid Qutb's ideology and disseminated it. Al-Zawahiri knew Muhammad Qutb as a teacher teaching Islamic studies in Saudi Arabia, and he was one of his followers during the 1980s when he left Egypt for Saudi Arabia. Muhammad Qutb was a writer whose writings were widely distributed among the Arabs. His masterpiece, *Jabiliyya in the Twentieth Century*, became the guidebook for radicalism. Another work, *Islam: The Misunderstood Religion*, also extends Qutb's ideas by proclaiming that fundamentalist Islam is superior to the Western.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> John A. Turner, *Religious Ideology and the Roots of the Global Jihad* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>43</sup> Bruce Riedel, *The Search for Al Qaeda*...

<sup>44</sup> Sajjan M. Gohel, "Deciphering Ayman Al-Zawahiri..."

### Al-Zawahiri's on *Takfir*

In simple terms, al-Zawahiri provides a limitation (*al-hadd*) to labeling a country as an infidel state. He makes an analogy that a country does that not practice Allah's law as a fundamental ground is an infidel. *Takfir* is used in the modern era to punish the violence against the leaders of Islamic countries who are deemed not religious enough. In other words, the leaders of these countries do not practice Islamic law as the primary basis in running their government system.<sup>45</sup> Al-Zawahiri considered that implementing the laws from Allah in a country is obligatory and non-negotiable because there is no law higher than Islamic law. Therefore, al-Zawahiri viewed those having different perspectives, such as assuming the laws from Allah as not an obligatory one, has met the requirement of complete infidels.<sup>46</sup>

For al-Zawahiri, any government system in any country must be rejected if it is not based on Islamic laws. This view also targets those Muslim-dominated countries that run their government system under democratic system—which, in his view, is considered to have no legitimacy from Allah. People who deny Qur'an and *sunnah* then agree with the democratic system can also be labeled as infidels.<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, al-Zawahiri labels Muslims as infidel when their Muslim-dominated country is invaded, but they accept the invasion without fighting against the invaders, acknowledge other religions, and live with them.<sup>48</sup> Al-Zawahiri views that the ruling government in those invaded countries is illegitimate, and Muslims working and participating in the infidel government are parts of the infidel government regime. For example, al-Zawahiri labels several Islamic government regimes allied

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<sup>45</sup> John L. Esposito, "Islam and Political Violence," *Religions* Vol. 6, No. 3, 2015, pp. 1067-1081.

<sup>46</sup> Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Jihad Al-Tawaghit* ..., p. 22.

<sup>47</sup> Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Al-Hasad Al-Marr*..., p. 36.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

with infidel countries: USA, and Israel.<sup>49</sup>

Al-Zawahiri also stated that an organization, either Islamic-based or not, that takes part in the political process of an infidel government regime is part of its regime and must be eradicated.<sup>50</sup> Then, al-Zawahiri called on Islamic fighters (*jihadists*) to make various efforts to fight against the enemies they have labeled as infidels through armed battles. To label the categories, al-Zawahiri divided the infidels into two groups: ‘near enemy’ and ‘far enemy.’ He further asserted that the near enemies should be eradicated earlier than the far enemies, as seen in an article entitled, *The Way to Jerusalem Passes Through Cairo*, published by Al-Mujahidin in April 1995. In the article, al-Zawahiri explicitly mentioned the necessity to fight and defeat the Egyptian and Algerian governments so that Islam could retake control of Jerusalem in Palestine. He considered the two countries as Islamic countries or Muslim regimes. However, they were considered ‘near enemies’ because the government system was not based on Islamic law, was accompanied by Western countries, and performed unfavorable policies for the survival of Islam. Meanwhile, what is meant by ‘distant enemies’ are countries that are considered infidels, such as Israel and America.<sup>51</sup>

Al-Zawahiri practiced the principle of *al-wala’ wa al-bara’* by giving support, love, and loyalty. Through al-Qaeda, though having no state territory, they do not stop protecting Muslims globally by keeping the ties and collaborating with allies, such as the Taliban in Pakistan. Al-Zawahiri’s way of showing love or loyalty to Muslims was manifested in the form of threats and attacks to those attempting to invade Islamic communities. Furthermore, he believes in the principle of *al-wala’ wa al-bara’* based on “winning the hearts and minds of Muslims” and considers support from

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<sup>49</sup> Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Jihad Al-Tawaghit* ..., p. 121.

<sup>50</sup> Shane Drennan, “Constructing *Takfir* from Abdullah Azzam to Djamel Zitouni,” *The CTC Sentinel*, 2008.

<sup>51</sup> Montasser al-Zayyat, *The Road to Al-Qaeda*; Ayman al-Zawahiri, “Knights under the Prophet’s Banner,” *The Theory and Practice of Islamic Terrorism*, 2008, p. 40–57.



Muslims as an essential factor for their struggle.<sup>52</sup>

In this case, al-Qaeda focuses on the far enemies, such as the USA and its allies of Western countries. This is based on the thought of Osama bin Laden who gave the mandate to prioritize the attacks against far enemies, especially the United States. Priority for eradicating far enemies is due to the assumption that 'if far enemies can be weakened, they might stop supporting the local Muslim government.' Like a snowball effect, it might be easier for al-Qaeda to overthrow the running government.<sup>53</sup>

The above statement clearly illustrates how al-Qaeda makes far enemies their priority enemies before targeting local regimes. As the first step, they need to remove the USA and its Western allies from the Arabian countries by carrying out military attacks against the United States bases in the Middle East. Once successful, the next step is to overthrow the infidel, and pro-Western regimes. This action would be followed by implementing an orthodox Sunni government that implements a strict interpretation of Islamic laws. After overthrowing the infidel regime, they aim to unite Islamic countries in a transnational Caliphate. This newly established country would become a strong base for al-Qaeda to conduct offensive *jihad* activities against non-Islamic countries (*darul kufr*). From this end, the next step would all be about carrying out all offensive *jihad* activities to eradicate *darul kufr* until other forms of beliefs disappear from the earth. With the universal adoption of Islam in any matter, al-Qaeda believes that the world will achieve its peace and justice, and the sovereignty of Allah (*al-hakimiyya*) is fully established.<sup>54</sup>

Further, al-Zawahiri stated that the USA, Russia, and Israel must pay an invaluable price for persecuting Muslims. He stated that the government in Washington and Tel Aviv use Muslim rulers to protect their interests. Attacking the Americans and the Jews in Islamic countries is not enough, therefore *jihad* must be carried out in their territory. He

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<sup>52</sup> al-Zawahiri, *Al-Hasad Al-Marr..*

<sup>53</sup> Ayman al-Zawahiri, "Knights under the Prophet's..."

<sup>54</sup> Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Jihad Al-Tawagit...*



stressed that the Judeo-Christian alliance would never allow any Muslim power to rule a true Muslim country, and therefore, the struggle against the alliance should be carried out worldwide. The Islamic movement must attack the enemies more strongly by causing the most significant number of casualties. Suicidal bombing, for example, can cause maximum casualties and with minimum effort. In addition, the targets must also be appropriately chosen to have the most significant influence on the enemies' morale and psychological impacts.

Over the years, al-Zawahiri has expressed an intense hatred of the American government and has frequently clashed with its president. He has condemned them for their intervention in Islamic countries and accused the United States of conspiring in the "Crusader-Zionist plot" against Muslims worldwide and their allies in Europe and the Arabs.<sup>55</sup> He represents the global *jihad* against the United States and its allies as the war of Christianity and Judaism against Muslims.

## Conclusion

*Takfir* is a dangerous ideology excommunicating fellow Muslims for having different views and beliefs in affairs related to religion and politics. In its development, this doctrine is not only intended as a purification of religious, but also develops in the socio-political aspect. In general, this article concludes that the articulation of the *takfir* discourse and the call for global *jihad* launched by Al-Zawahiri has become a serious concern in the global ideological contestation.

Through al-Qaeda, Al-Zawahiri, who was much inspired by Sayyid Qutb's thoughts, has a mission to unite all Muslims in the world and eradicate disbelief, especially the USA, Israel, and their allies. Before eradicating all of them, for Al-Zawahiri, it was essential to overthrow the pro-Western regime. For him, all countries that have not implemented pure Islamic law are considered *darul kufr*. So that the Islamic state he

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<sup>55</sup> Adnan A. Musallam, "The Posthumous Impact..."

dreamed of would be realized only by offensive *jihad* under the control of a transnational caliphate. Al-Zawahiri and Al-Qaeda believe that the world will achieve peace, justice, and Allah's sovereignty (*al-hakimiyya*) if the implementation of Islamic law is accepted, and strictly enforced.

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