The *Khawaarij* and the Creed of *Takfeer*:
Declaring a Muslim to be an Apostate and its Effects upon Modern Day Islamic Movements

Craig Anthony Green
Summary

Islaam as a world religion is, in the present age, sometimes associated with terrorism and numerous bombings and conflicts around the globe.

While, Islaam does not encourage these actions there exist movements within the Muslim community which use violence as a means of political expression similar to the early extremist Khawaarij sect who abused the concept of takfeer.

Many modern day ideologues seem to adopt the main tenets of the Khawaarij creed and as a result exhort and carrying out actions of violence under the guise of Islaam.

In addition, Western media, secularists, and United States policy also appears to have a direct role in fostering the growth of these movements. Therefore, there is a need for further study into the ideological roots of these groups, their actions, and how societies can look for solutions to combat their ideals before they evolve into terrorist actions.

Key terms:
Islaamic creed, takfeer, Khawaarij, Qur’aan, hadeeth, extremism, terrorism, Wahhaabee, Salafee, sectarianism
Acknowledgements

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I declare that “THE KHAWAARIJ AND THE CREED OF TAKFEER: DECLARING A MUSLIM TO BE AN APOSTATE AND ITS EFFECTS UPON MODERN DAY ISLAMIC MOVEMENTS” is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Mr. Craig Anthony Green
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1 Transliteration Chart from the book *The Exorcist Tradition in Islaam* (Philips 1997:iv)
THE KHAWAARIJ AND THE CREED OF TAKFEER:
DECLARING A MUSLIM TO BE AN APOSTATE AND ITS
EFFECTS UPON MODERN DAY ISLAAMIC MOVEMENTS

By Craig Green

Introduction

In contemporary times Islaam in the minds of some has become synonymous with terrorism and terrorist acts like the heinous bombing of the World Trade Center (9/11), the USS Cole in Yemen, the Bali bombing in Indonesia, and the recent bombings in Saudi Arabia. Many of these terrorist acts have been perpetrated in the name of Islaam, and Muslims and non-Muslims both find themselves victimized. Many of the present day ideologies often attributed to these acts have a link with early Islaamic sectarianism. This research asserts that the fundamental creed of the original Khawaarij is present in many of the modern day Islaamic groups and sects, and forms the ideological root of many contemporary terrorist organizations. In addition, this research claims that the radicalization of these groups is in part a reaction to secularist thought, and U. S. government policy toward Muslim states.

This research analyzes the creed of the first sect in Islaam, the Khawaarij, and its influence on contemporary Islaamic movements and thinkers, and contrasts it with the

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2 America has unilaterally attacked and devastated two Muslim nations: Afghanistan and Iraq and as a result of these two wars non-Muslim countries feel increasingly vulnerable to acts of terrorism.

3 As the research will show, terrorism is alien to the orthodox Islaamic creed.
orthodox Islamic creed. In addition, it attempts to show how the media, U.S. policy makers, and many contemporary writers misconstrue core Islamic beliefs and misconceive public opinion about Islam, thus further alienating Muslims and contributing to the radicalization of many contemporary Islamic movements.

There are many misconceptions about Islam that stem from the creed of the original Khawaarij, the modern day groups that follow their creed, and the media (Oliver 2005:1). These misconceptions entail investigation in order to determine if there is indeed a link between terrorism and radical ideologues.

**Research Objectives**

The problem being investigated arose from the need to explain contemporary trends in Islamic extremist activities and violent terrorist acts world wide. The aim of this study is to investigate what effect, if any, these popular Muslim ideologues, which often are associated with radicalism, have upon violent extremist thought and to what extent their ideologies share common characteristics with the original Khawaarij. In addition, this study looks at the role secular ideology, United States foreign policy, and Western media contribute to the rise in contemporary extremist thought and violence.

In order to determine the extent in which Khawaarij thought, secularism, and U.S foreign policy effect contemporary Islamic thinkers and increase their propensity to

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4 The term orthodox as referred to throughout this research is a reference to the creed and practices of the Prophet as understood by his companions and it is frequently used in this research to denote contemporary Salafite ideology which will be discussed in further detail in chapters two and three.
encourage violence, analysis will be given to their texts and speeches to highlight statements and ideologies contrary to orthodox Islaam.

Significance of the Research Problem

This study can assist in filling a gap in contemporary English literature contributing to a much clearer understanding of the causes of modern day Islaamic extremism. This topic was chosen for two reasons primarily. Firstly, it is viewed in Islaam as an obligation to clarify the orthodox creed to distinguish it from sectarianism, and to provide scholarly refutation of deviant ideologies. Secondly, this study tries to offer the theoretical tools to pinpoint the cause and refine the debate around Islaamic extremism, so that the world may have warning signals before extremist action in the name of Islaam is perpetrated, and this knowledge is a first step towards prevention. The current study is important because it:

(a) Offers insight into some of the causes of extremist Islaamic ideology,
(b) Serves as a tool to understand, identify, and assist in curbing trends in violent extremism, and
(c) Contributes to the literature base that attempts to explain the causes of radical ideologies to assist policy makers, governments, and the general Muslim population to come up with viable solutions.

Research Theory

The underlying assumption in this study is that contemporary Takfeeree movements share a common set of traits with the original Khawaarij creed and in turn contribute to extremist behavior and violence. In other words, ideology and creed have a causal effect upon violent extremist activities and actions. In addition, many
"contemporary acts of violence are often justified by the historical precedent of religion's violent past. Yet the forces that combine to produce religious violence are particular to each moment of history" (Juergensmeyer 2003:6). Creed combined with historical, social and political changes all contribute to extremist, reactionary behavior leading to violence, primarily because many perpetrators of terror often react to a perceived threat or violation of their particular group or community, and attempt to rectify their situation by both preemptive and reactionary measures. Juergensmeyer concludes that many religious extremists see the world in absolute terms and the social tensions and political shifts combined with the need to restore lost prestige give these groups a sense of urgency in trying to find solutions (Juergensmeyer 2003:248).

**Methodology**

This study is exploratory in nature and comprises both classical and contemporary text analysis for theory and historical background, and it makes use of the books of contemporary scholars to highlight the misconceptions around takfeer, the Khawaarij, terrorism, and Islaam. This research relies heavily upon document analysis by surveying a variety of literary sources, both primary and secondary, such as published books, unpublished conference papers, internet sources like periodicals, articles, and statements and lectures of contemporary Islaamic thinkers.

Additionally, this study involves a comprehensive literature review by surveying contemporary Arabic and English literature as well as classical Islaamic texts which will be used in a historic development approach in order to trace the origin of the ideology of takfeer.
Most classical texts offer either a historical analysis of the *Khawaarij* sect while detailing their creed, or a general synopsis of a particular group which holds similar beliefs. However, there is very little literature that makes the connection between contemporary groups and their historical counterparts in the context of current events. There are a few texts that attempt to bridge this gap in Arabic, which completely elude the English reader therefore remaining outside of Western discourse. This study brings together various studies and disciplines redefining the problem in a contemporary setting.

Most of the texts which attempt to investigate the relationship between the *Khawaarij* and contemporary thought are in Arabic. One particularly useful work was taken from a lecture by 'Ubaykaan (2004), and transcribed into a small booklet. In this work he speaks about the origins of the *Khawaarij* with brief reference to classical Islamic texts as well as the rulings pertaining to this sect. He then gives the reasons for the reappearance of this sect and makes a very brief reference to the contemporary *Khawaarij*’s core belief. Unfortunately, this work is in Arabic, so it remains inaccessible to non-Arabic readers.

One of the most useful texts regarding contemporary *Khawaarij* and their relationship to the original sect was written by Qurayshee (1992). His book offers one of the most complete links between one of the most famous contemporary groups; *Jamaa’a al-Takfeer wa al-Hijra*, and the original sect. Although this work is monumental, and surveys many important issues related to the issue of *takfeer*, it still leaves the reader with a gap in the link between the original *Khawaarij* and modern day activists, groups, and events. Qurayshee’s research was not meant as a complete
survey of the contemporary groups and thinkers, but instead an exploration of the
creed of takfeer itself.

After the 9/11 terrorist attack there has been a rise in the amount of English
literature produced in the West to describe the events of 9/11. In addition, there is an
increasing body of literature which links the Khawaarij and some contemporary
Islaamic thinkers. A particularly insightful text used in this research is that of Delong-
Bas (2004) which compared the thought of Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhaab with
contemporary expressions of extremism. Her analysis was particularly perceptive as it
challenged many previously held assumptions made about Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhaab and
his movement by a thorough investigation into his creed and thought.

Finally, the method of historical analysis is used in this study to provide
background and insight into the theology of the original Khawaarij sect and its
evolvement into the political thought of contemporary thinkers.

Limitations and Scope

Primarily the ideologues surveyed in this research are from Saudi Arabia, Jordan,
and Egypt or have received Islaamic educational training and generally adhere to the
ideological creed espoused in the region. All of the ideologues examined in this study
are in some way associated with contemporary radical ideals and share fairly common
theories regarding jihaad and takfeer. This dissertation sets out to study a particular
set of characteristics from the original Khawaarij sect and compare these
characteristics with the ideologues discussed in this study. This dissertation does not
attempt to address, and provide resolutions to the problem, nor does it look into the
various socio-economic conditions that may provide the background conditions which lead to marginalization, thus creating an ideal situation for the recruitment and dissemination of extremist thought.

Another limitation of this study is that it focuses primarily on the views of contemporary Salafite scholars in Saudi Arabia and Yemen as they claim to adhere to the orthodox creed and view Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhaab as a revivalist, not extremist, and espouse many of his views which are considered controversial. In addition, in recent times Salafite clerics, particularly from Saudi Arabia, have come under scrutiny and many accuse them of being advocates of takfeer, terrorist ideology, and feeble and often compromised scholarship, so this dissertation highlights the views of those scholars regarding matters of creed, takfeer and extremism.

Contents of Study

This study is comprised of five chapters, beginning in chapter one with an introduction to the Khawaarij, and the creed of takfeer. This chapter defines the Khawaarij, and entails a brief historical analysis of the sect citing both Prophetic traditions, and statements of classical Islaamic scholars. The chapter ends by outlining the fundamentals of their creed. Chapter two contrasts the Islaamic creed regarding takfeer with the foundations of the Khawaarij belief. This chapter gives the reader the tools to distinguish the Salafite creed from that of the Khawaarij’s. Chapter three introduces contemporary groups and thinkers, detailing their relationship with the Khawaarij creed, and contrasts their beliefs with the orthodox Islaamic one. This analysis of the contemporary groups uncovers the main misconceptions about Islaam. Finally, chapter four expounds upon the misconceptions about Islaam by
contemporary writers and the Media with a clarification of their doubts and confusion.

Chapter five concludes the research with an analysis of the researcher’s findings.

**Definition of Academic Terms**

**The Khawaarij:** This is a general term the author of this study uses to describe the original and contemporary Muslim sects, that declared apostasy of other Muslims due to major sins they are supposed to have committed. This term also signifies the foundation of the creed of *takfeer* and its misuse.

**Takfeer:** This term denotes the declaration of apostasy of a Muslim, or group of Muslims, or society as a whole. Throughout the study, the creed of *takfeer* is explored, detailed, and its conditions are laid out in order to give an accurate meaning of the term and its usage.

**The Companions:** The term is used to refer to those closest to the Prophet Muḥammad specifically. The term has a more general usage as well, and that is to describe all of those who met the Prophet Muḥammad, and died as Muslims. In this study the more specific meaning is referred to as it references the first generation of Muslim scholars: those who knew the Prophet and were close to him during his judgments, arbitrations, and when he received revelation, so they were able to understand the context and get the meaning directly from the Prophet.

**Orthodox Scholars:** Throughout the study, this term is used to describe those who hold the orthodox belief, meaning they take their creed from the Qur’aan and the
authenticated traditions, actions and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, and the practice and understanding of his companions.

**Classical Scholars:** This is a general reference used in the study to describe the companions, their students, and those who came after them for the first twelve hundred years of Islaam. This term distinguishes early orthodox scholars from their more contemporary counterparts.

**Salafee Scholars:** This term is used to describe a particular group of scholars who claim to adhere to orthodox traditional scholarship which is derived from the Qur'aan, authenticate *hadeeth* traditions, and the creed and jurisprudence of the companions of the Prophet. This research tends to focus primarily on contemporary *Salafee* scholars from Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

**Sunna:** This term is used frequently throughout this study and it is "adherence to what the Prophet … was upon, and his rightly guided caliphathe, in belief, actions, and sayings…” (cited in al-Suhaymee 2005:27). This was a statement of Ibn Rajab, a classical scholar who lived in the fourteenth century. His statement provides one of the most useful definitions applicable to this study.

**Takfeeree:** This term refers to Muslims who declare others to be apostates without adhering to established orthodox principles.
**Jihaadee:** This term is used to describe those who call to *jihaad* or participate in fighting under the guise of *jihaad* without adhering to orthodox principles and classical interpretations of *jihaad*. 
Chapter One
The Khawaarij the First Sect in Islaam

1.1 Introduction
The Khawaarij was the first sect in Islaam according to most scholars, both classical and contemporary. Their history, creed, and characteristics are of great importance if one is to know and understand the Islaamic position regarding them. In this chapter they will be defined and introduced as the main subject of analysis, with a particular focus upon certain aspects of their creed, and its foundations.

1.2 Definition of the Khawaarij
According to al-‘Aqal, the Khawaarij can be defined as "those who declare Muslims to be disbelievers for their sins and rebel against the leaders of the Muslims dividing their unity" (1998:21). This also includes those who hold some of these ideas, as well as follow their way of thinking, or actions. This is one of the more comprehensive definitions of the Khawaarij; however the sectarian scholars disagree between themselves on a precise definition. ‘Awaajee a contemporary scholar of Islaamic sectarianism divides the various definitions into three. The first view being that the term Khawaarij refers to any Muslim group that rebel against the rightful Muslim leader. The second view refers to those individuals who rebelled against the caliphate of ‘Alee Ibn Abee Taalib or hold a similar opinion to them. The third definition of the Khawaarij ‘Awaajee cites refers to those who rebelled against the Muslim leader after the time of ‘Alee (2002:23). For the purpose of this research the
definition of al-‘Aqal was chosen as it is the most inclusive and accepted view from contemporary scholars.

The Khawaarij are associated by many names and sects which reveal some of their history and origins. Many of the names make reference to their various splits, and the particular creed of a sectarian leader. Some of the names they are associated with are the Khawaarij, the Muhakkima, the Mukaafira, the Azaariqa, the Ibaadeeya, and the Saba`eeya.5 One reason for the sectarianism amongst the Khawaarij is that the leaders amongst them often quarreled over points regarding their creed, and thus split and declared takfeer of one another (‘Awaajee 2002:25).

1.2.1 The Khawaarij

The name Khawaarij is derived from the Arabic word kharaja, which means to leave, or exit. This association refers to the sect splitting from the main body of Muslims, and rebelling with the sword against the Muslim rulers. This is a general name which encompasses those Muslims who rebel, or incite rebellion against the Muslim leader, and declare other Muslims to be apostates for committing major sins (al-Shahrastaanee 1984:107).

5 All classical scholars mention Saba`eeya as the beginning of the Shee’a sect. Al-‘Aqal, a contemporary scholar, mentioned them as a sect of the Khawaarriij as they rebelled against ‘Uthmaan and declared takfeer upon some of the companions of the Prophet. The Saba`eeya was included to show that many of the sects contain overlapping traits, and often a group or individual may not be easily classified into one sect or another.
1.2.2 The Muhakkima

The Khawaarij were also known as the Muhakkima. The word Muhakkima originates from the Arabic word hakama which means to judge, or rule. The Muhakkima refers to their rebelling against the judgment and rulership of ‘Alee the Prophet Muhammad's cousin. The Muhakkima claimed that ‘Alee did not rule justly by the Qur’aan in a judgment, but instead he deferred his arbitration to knowledgeable men in a dispute he had with Mu'aawiya, another companion; for this reason the Khawaarij declared ‘Alee a disbeliever. The Muhakkima also believed that it was permissible to choose someone to be their religious leader, as long as he ruled by their ideas of justice and equity. However, anyone who opposed him would be disposed of, and at the same time if they thought the leader was oppressive, corrupt, or deviant, they considered it obligatory to fight or kill him (al-Shahrastaanee 1984:108).

1.2.3 The Mukaafira

The Khawaarij also earned the term Mukaafira meaning the ones who declare others to be apostates. This is because they declared other Muslims to be apostates for major sins they committed, and they declared those who differed with them to be disbelievers as well (al-Shahrastaanee 1984:116). This characteristic is inherent to both the original sect and modern groups and it forms an integral part of their belief.

1.2.4 The Azaariqa

The Azaariqa were the followers of Aboo Raashid Nafee Ibn al-Azaaraq. This was one of the famous leaders amongst the Khawaarij who held that ‘Alee the Prophet Muhammad's cousin was a disbeliever, and he praised his killer. Furthermore, he held