



# Political Islam Online

## Violent “*Takfiri*” Groups are back

The Egyptian press has reported the arrest of 62 radical Islamists who were allegedly planning to blow up the *bn-Khaldun* Center.<sup>1</sup> The Egyptian authorities identified those arrested as members of “*Al-Takfir wal-Hijra*.” [PI Online](#) examines the history behind this radical *Salafi* group and what these arrests may signify.

### The Meaning of “*Takfir*”

It is difficult to capture the full meaning or gravity of *Takfir* with a single English word. The word *Takfir*, which is used liberally by radical Islamists, is the most serious accusation in Islam. It stems from the word “*Kafir*” which is often used in the Qur’an and means “non-believer or infidel.” *Takfir* is used more specifically “to declare a Muslim a non-believer.”<sup>2</sup> The closest equivalents in Christianity would be to “to excommunicate” or “to declare a person a heretic.” The term *Takfir* was first used by *Ibn Taymiyyah*.<sup>3</sup> In modern times, the term is most associated with *Sayyid Qutb* who was a strong advocate of *takfir* to protect Muslim society. The gravity of the term *Takfir* is evident in its consequences. In Islam, non-believers must be fought and killed.



### Historical Background of *Al-Takfir wal-Hijra*

*Al-Takfir wal-Hijra* is a group founded by *Shukri Mustafa*.<sup>4</sup> *Mustafa* was imprisoned for distributing Muslim Brotherhood pamphlets. While in prison, he joined a splinter organization called *Jama'at al Muslimin* (Muslim Society). After his release from prison in 1971, he formalized the organization, which then became known by authorities and the media as *al-Takfir wal-Hijra* because of their secretive ways and radical ideology. That name refers, in part, to the core belief of the group, which has pronounced almost the entire Muslim society as non-believers because, in their view, society has gone astray. *Hijra*, which literally means migration, is a reference to the group’s withdrawal from what it considers a heretical Muslim society in order to build its strength in isolation, and then strike back once it has achieved sufficient strength. It is believed that *Ayman Al-Zawahiri*, the second in command in *Al-Qaeda*, was part of the group, and that *Al-Qaeda* training camps in Afghanistan were a manifestation of the group’s *Hijra* ideology. The Muslim religious establishment resents *Mustafa*’s radical theory which also rejects their authority, suggesting that the *Qur’an* and the *Hadith* should be interpreted directly by ordinary Muslims. During the seventies, therefore, the religious establishment became a strong ally of the Egyptian authorities against the group.

### Significance of the Recent Arrests

By identifying those arrested as part of *al-Takfir wal-Hijra*, the Egyptian prosecutor, *Tarik ‘Abd-al-Shakur*, has raised the specter of an extremely radical group of which most Egyptians disapprove and perhaps even fear. In doing so, he has signaled that this is a very serious matter. In view of the heavy-handed approach the Egyptian authorities have recently taken against dissidents and journalists, however, there is a heavy degree of skepticism on the street. Many do not accept at face value the government’s version of events. Egyptian authorities have also hinted that an unnamed, important *Salafi* Cleric in Egypt is behind the indoctrination of these individuals. If the accused are jailed without trial, the arrests may be seen as a diversion orchestrated by a beleaguered government. If, however, they are brought to trial, it will signify that the situation was as serious as the authorities claim and that the arrests were legitimate. In that case, the uncovering in Egypt of a group espousing such an extreme ideology could indicate that virulent fanaticism has simply gone underground.

<sup>1</sup> The Inb-Khaldun Center is a pro-democracy lobbying group headed by Egyptian dissident Saadeddin Ibrahim, a dual national (Egyptian/American) who lives in the United States.

<sup>2</sup> Other words used are: unbeliever, infidel, heretic and apostate.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibn Taymiyyah* is a fourteenth century *Hanbali* theologian who was most inspirational for modern *Sunni* radicals.

<sup>4</sup> *Shukri Mustafa* was born in 1942 and arrested in 1965 for distributing Brotherhood literature. It is believed that while in prison at *Abu Zahbal*, he became part of the *Jamaat al-Muslimin*. He was executed on March 19, 1978 shortly after the group kidnapped and killed the Minister of Religious Trusts, Dr. Hassan al-Dhahabi.

Source: Mooga – October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2007 – [http://www.mooga.com/MoogaNews/news\\_details.asp?id=118187](http://www.mooga.com/MoogaNews/news_details.asp?id=118187)

Other sites reporting: almasry, Islam-alyoum, al-khayma, karabeeg & bramjnet

Word root and derivatives: k-f-r **كفر** – *kufir* : non-belief, *kafir* : non-believer, *takfir* : Declare a person non-believer,  
*Takfiri* : Those who excommunicate (declare others kafir)