



# GLOSSARY: ISLAMIC EXTREMIST MATERIAL

This is a short guide to terms and phrases frequently found in Islamist extremist material. These terms are not used exclusively by Islamists and their use is not an indicator of extremist belief. They often have similar meanings in general, non-extremist contexts.

## GLOSSARY

Transliteration – there are a number of different ways that many of these terms have been transliterated from Arabic into English. Spellings vary between users and are also often misspelt (e.g., kafir / kaafir / kaffir).

### AL-AKHIRAH

‘The last, the final’: The afterlife. Contrasted with dunya.

### AL-AMR BI-L-MAR’UF WA-L-NAHY ‘AN AL-MUNKAR

‘Commanding good and forbidding evil’: A religious term Islamist extremists often use to explain or justify their attempts to enforce their moral code on others.

### AL-DAWLAH AL-ISLAMIAH

‘Islamic State’: A state governed according to Shari’a law. Several states have called themselves Islamic, including Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. Whilst states that call themselves Islamic may also have man-made laws, Islamists believe that no man-made law should be prevalent, and that that it is prohibited to rule a country by any other system than Shari’a. The most famous application of this system has been by ISIS – which has called itself ad-Dawlah al-Islāmiyah fī ‘l-‘Irāq wa-sh-Shām – the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (Syria).

### AL-JIHAD AL-AKBAR

‘The greater struggle’: In Islamic terms the spiritual struggle to live a good and spiritually pure life. Many Islamist extremists emphasise the jihad al-asghar instead.

### AL-JIHAD AL-ASGHAR

‘The lesser struggle’: In Islamic terms an armed struggle against evil and injustice.

### APOSTASY

In an Islamic context, to purposefully cease to be a Muslim. The term apostate is used by Islamist extremists to label Muslim individuals, groups or nations that have, in their eyes, committed acts that go against their interpretation of Sharia law, so they may class as an apostate someone who considers themselves to be a good Muslim.

### ‘AQIDAH

‘Creed’: The core beliefs of the Islamic faith.

**AL-WALA' A WAL BARA'**

The principle of loyalty to God, the religion of Islam, and to its followers, and the rejection of other religions and non-Muslims. A key concept for many conservative Islamic groups.

**BAY'AH (BAYAT)**

A pledge of loyalty to a person. It has historically been seen as the oath of allegiance to the Khalifa or other ruler and the invocation of God's blessing upon that ruler. Members of an Islamist extremist group will often swear bay'ah to the group's leader.

**BID'AH**

'Innovation': In Islamic terms, innovation in religious belief or practice. In popular usage this roughly equates to the term 'heresy'.

**CALIPHATE**

See: Khalifah.

**CONVERT**

An individual who has converted to another religion. See also 'revert'.

**DAR AL-HARB**

'The land (or domain) of war': This is a term used to describe those territories held to be at war with Islam. For some this means any territory which is not in dar al-islam and includes the entire 'West' including the USA and UK.

**DAR AL-HIJRAH**

'The land (or domain) of emigration': This is one of the titles given to Medina and land of Islam (see Dar al-Islam), because people emigrate to it from non-Islamic lands.

**DAR AL-ISLAM**

'The land (or domain) of Islam': This is a term used to describe the territories of Islam. The extent of these territories is highly contentious, with some Islamist extremists claiming that all lands which

were once ruled by an Islamic state (such as Spain) should be included. Others maintain that even Muslim majority countries that are not 'proper' Islamic states are not part of the dar al-islam.

**DAR AL-KUFR**

'The land (or domain) of unbelief': This is a (semi-derogatory) term used to describe those countries where Islam is not the majority faith, and so means the same as dar al-harb.

**DA'WAH**

'Summons': The call to embrace Islam. Often the term used by Islamist extremists to describe their propaganda effort.

**DAWLAH**

'State, government': The word is often used to indicate a state, including an Islamic state. Currently used by some Islamist extremists as shorthand for the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, but can also mean any state of any variety.

**DEEN**

'Religion, faith, judgement': In the context of Islamist extremism, used to denote Islam.

**DEOBANDI**

A conservative movement very influential in South Asia and Afghanistan. The movement rejects Western influence and seeks a return to their interpretation of 'classical' Islam.

**DUNYA**

'The world': The term used in the Qur'an and religious tradition to refer to the material world, rather than the spiritual world (see al-akhirah).

**EMIR**

A commander, prince or leader. Also spelled 'Amir'. Often used to designate the leader of an Islamist extremist network or group.

**FARD 'AYN**

'Individual religious duty': A religious obligation that falls upon the individual (such as prayer). Most Islamist extremists view violent Jihad as fard 'ayn.

**FARD KIFAYAH**

'Communal religious duty': A religious obligation that falls upon the state or the community to fulfil. Most Muslims regard Jihad as fard kifayah.

**FATWA**

An Islamic legal opinion, issued by a legal scholar known as a mufti. A fatwa is usually issued as a response to a specific question. The weight of the opinion is directly linked to the authority of the scholar issuing it. Scholars linked to terrorist organisations have issued their own fatwas about the legality of specific terrorist acts or operations.

**FIQH**

Islamic law or Jurisprudence. The parts of the Sharia that can be expressed as clear rules, rather than (for example) as ethical principles.

**FITNAH**

Chaos, disorder, internal dissension or strife.

**FITRAH**

Natural (meaning the created human nature) disposition of people, which includes the instinct to worship only Allah, attraction to the opposite gender and the fear of death. It can refer to instinctive acts of natural cleanliness, for example cutting nails, trimming moustache.

**HADITH**

'Speech' or 'report': A report of the sayings or deeds of the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions. These reports form one of the foundations of Islamic law.

**HARAM**

'Forbidden', 'proscribed', or 'sacred': In common usage this term refers to an act or item that is

forbidden by Islamic law. In terms of the holy cities of Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem, it refers to the sacred precinct around each city in which a person must behave in accordance with the sacred nature of the site.

**HIJRAH**

'Migration' or 'dissociation': Meaning to migrate or to change one's affiliation from one group to another. The term generally refers to the Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina in the year 632, which became the first year of the Islamic calendar. In Islamist extremist ideology it has been used to refer to either a spiritual or physical withdrawal from the 'un-Islamist' world.

**HISBA**

Duty of promoting good and discouraging evil. See: Al-amr bi-l-mar'uf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar.

**HIZB**

'A sixtieth': In the Qur'an, the term refers to factions that might weaken the religion. In modern usage it means 'Party'. Used as a derogatory term by some Islamist extremists for members of groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir who are seen as overly 'political'. Occasionally used as a derogatory shorthand for a member of the Shi'a group, Hezbollah.

**IMAN**

'Belief' or 'faith': The word has the sense of not just belief, but also of security and safety.

**ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM**

A semi-derogatory term used to describe forms of Islamic belief and practice that fall outside the norms of 'mainstream' Islamic practice, usually of an overtly political or behaviourally conservative nature.

**ISLAMIST**

An individual, group, or movement that believes that Islamic law should provide the foundations for the governance of a state.

**IZHAAR AL-DEEN**

The dominance of the religion of Islam over all other ways of life.

**JANNAH**

'Paradise': The afterlife for believers.

**JIHAD**

This is the Arabic term for 'struggle' in all its forms. Colloquially has been used as a short-hand term for a religious war, although this is regarded as insulting by many Muslims.

**JIHAD AL-NAFS**

'The struggle against the lower self': See al-Jihad al-Akbar.

**JIHAD AS-SAYF**

'The struggle of the sword'. See al-jihad al-asghar

**JIHADI**

An individual, group, or movement that believes that violent Jihad in defence of 'occupied' Muslim territory is currently required, and is engaged in, actively prepares for, or promotes acts of violence to carry this out.

**KAFIR**

'Disbeliever' or infidel who has rejected Islam. 'Kuffar' is the plural of kafir, which can also be spelt 'kaafir' and is sometimes misspelt as 'kaffir'.

**KHALIFAH (CALIPH)**

Caliph, the 'deputy' of God on Earth. Normally applied to the early successors to the Prophet as leaders of the Islamic state or khilafah and by later imperial rulers up to 1924. Used by extremists to refer to the head of a hoped-for future pan-Islamic state.

**KHILAFAH (CALIPHATE)**

Used by extremists to refer to a hoped-for future pan-Islamic state. There is no routinely agreed definition of the notional boundaries of the desired khilafah.

**KHURASAN**

Historically, an Islamic province that covered Eastern Iran as well as parts of Afghanistan and Central Asia. Term used by Islamist extremists to refer to modern day Afghanistan.

**KUFR**

'Unbelief': In Islamist extremist terms, any act that does not agree with their narrow definition of correct action and belief.

**KHAWARIJ (KHARIJITES)**

The name given to a number of groups in early Islamic history who are now regarded by 'mainstream' Muslims as extremists. A derogatory term for any Islamic group seen to be holding extreme beliefs, particularly in relation to violence or overthrowing the state. Often used by non-extremist Muslims as a pejorative term for extremists.

**MADRASA**

'School': A place of study, a school or college, including a school for religious studies.

**MANHAJ**

'Method': A religious methodology.

**MARTYR**

See: Shaheed.

**MASJID**

A mosque.

**MUJAHID / (PL) MUJAHIDIN**

Muslim(s) who undertake(s) armed Jihad.

**MUJOON**

A term used to describe places of disobedience which people attend to commit sins. This might include pubs and night-clubs, for example.

**MURABIT / (PL) MURABITUN**

A Muslim based in a Ribat.

**MURTADD**

'One who turns back': Normally used to describe someone who has turned their back on Islam and become an apostate. Islamist extremists also use it to describe fellow Muslims who have engaged in acts that they believe to be fundamentally un-Islamic. See Apostasy..

**MUSHRIK**

'An idol worshipper' or polytheist. Often used by Islamist extremists as a catch-all derogatory term for any individual who does not follow Islam, or their particular form of Islam.

**NABI**

A Prophet.

**P.B.U.H.**

Acronym for 'Peace be upon Him': A blessing which is affixed to the Prophet Muhammad's name whenever it is written in English. See also: S.A.W.

**QIBLAH**

The direction of prayer toward Mecca.

**QISAS**

'Retaliation': Islamic law allows for retaliation in the bounds of justice for those who are wronged. Many Islamist extremists use this as a justification for violence against the West.

**RADICAL ISLAM**

A term used to describe forms of Islamic belief and practice that fall outside the norms of 'mainstream' Islamic practice, usually of an overtly political or behaviourally conservative nature.

**RAFIDAH**

'Rejectionists': Derogatory term used by some Sunnis to describe Shi'a. It refers to the Shi'a rejection of the first three Caliphs.

**REVERT**

A term used to refer to individuals who convert to Islam. The term comes from a belief that all people are born Muslim, but are led astray from their natural religion by their upbringing.

**RIBAT**

'Fort', or 'base': Historically, a small fortification at the edge of Islamic territory garrisoned by volunteers engaged in defending Islam from external threats. Islamist extremists use it as a term to refer to the act of defensive violent Jihad.

**SALAFISM**

A puritan approach to Islam, often very conservative, that attempts to emulate what is understood to have been the way the Prophet Muhammad and the early Muslims practised their religion. May be used as a term of abuse by non-Salafi Muslims.

**SALAFI-JIHADI**

A strand of Jihadi thought that combines the Jihadi attitude to the legitimacy of violence with Salafism.

**SALAT**

The daily act of worship, consisting of five prayers, carried out at specific times from sunrise to early evening.

**S.A.W.**

Acronym for the Arabic phrase 'Sallallahu alayhi wa sallam' meaning 'May Allah bless him and grant him peace.' The expression is used by many Muslims after stating the Prophet Muhammad's name. See PBUH.

**SHAM**

'The Left/North': Greater Syria, which historically covered modern Syria, as well as Israel, Lebanon, and parts of Jordan and southern Turkey. Islamist extremists tend to use it to refer to Syria and Lebanon.

**SHAHEED**

'Witness': In Islamic thought, the term for martyr. Used by Islamist extremists and Jihadis to describe an individual who has died in pursuing the goals of movement.

**SHARI'A**

The name given to the rules of Islam that can govern all aspects of a Muslim's life.

**SHEIKH**

'Old man': In religious terms an appellation of respect for an Islamic religious leader or scholar.

**SHIA**

'Party' or 'sect': The term applies to a number of groups or divisions within Islam that believe that temporal and spiritual authority passed from the Prophet Muhammad to his immediate descendants. The Shia make up less than 20% of the worldwide Muslim population, primarily located in Iran, Iraq, and the Levant. They differ from the main Sunni population over a number of matters of doctrine, and are disliked by many religiously conservative Sunni Muslims.

**SHIRK**

'Association': The sin of granting something or someone powers that belong only to God. The basis of polytheism, it is the one sin that, in Islam, God will never forgive.

**SHURA**

'Consultation': For Islamists, a term used to describe the process of popular consultation used in decision making instead of democracy. Hence Shura Council.

**SUFISM**

Islamic mysticism. The practices of Sufism are regarded by Salafi Muslims as un-Islamic, and are scorned. Islamist extremists share this view, and in some countries have attacked the shrines and graves of Sufi saints. Sufis may be Sunni or Shia.

**SUNNAH**

'Customary procedure, well-followed path': In religious terms, the habits and ways of the Prophet Muhammad, which are regarded as the example which all Muslims should follow.

**SUNNI**

'Followers of the Sunnah': The form of Islam practiced by the majority of the world's Muslims. Not Shia.

**SURAH**

A Chapter, specifically one of the 114 chapters that make up the Qur'an.

**S.W.T.**

Acronym for the Arabic phrase 'Subhanahu wa ta'ala' meaning 'highly praised and glorified is He', the expression used following saying or writing the name of 'Allah'.

**TAGHUT**

'Idol': A religious, derogatory term used to describe anything worshipped other than God. Used by Islamist extremists as a term of abuse for tyrants and oppressors, it has been used as a derogatory term for Western democracy which extremists see as a form of religion rather than a political system.

**TAKFIR**

'To declare someone an unbeliever': To condemn a Muslim or Muslims as infidels/apostates. Takfiri is used as a pejorative term to describe Islamist extremists.

**TAWHID**

'Unity': The concept of the oneness of God. This concept is one of the most central in Islam, and its details are widely debated by Islamic scholars. Extremists use the extension of tawhid into the political sphere to justify the rejection of concepts such as democracy.

## TAZKIYA

'Recommendation': While having an overtly religious meaning 'Tazkiya al-Nafs' ('Purification of the Self'), in Islamist extremist terms it means having a trusted individual vouch for you, or reference you, when travelling in a conflict zone. This may be required to pass vetting processes.

## ULAMA

'Persons of knowledge': Religious scholars.

## UMMAH

The general world-wide community of all Muslims.

## VIOLENT JIHAD

This is a term for what is perceived to be the armed defence of Islam against aggression. Participation in violent Jihad can take a number of forms, ranging from taking part in combat to providing logistical support. See al-jihad al-asghar.

## WAHHABISM

(1) A reformist, purificatory approach to Islam similar to Salafism set forth by Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, an 18th

century Arabian preacher which continues to be the official religious policy in Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Followers of this approach normally object to the use of this term to describe them.

(2) Generic or derogatory term used by some governments to describe versions of Islam that they dislike.

## 786

The Arabic letter of the opening phrase of the Qur'an equals 786 in the Islamic numerology. Some Muslims – mostly in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar – use 786 as a substitute for the phrase 'bismillah ir-rahman ir-rahim' ('in the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful').

## 1924

A year of particular importance to Islamist extremists with an interest in the Caliphate (such as Hizb ut-Tahrir or successor groups to al-Muhajiroun). It is the year in which the Ottoman Caliphate was formally abolished, and which they see as the end of an era and as a sign of Western hostility to Islam.

### READ MORE

CREST has produced a guide to the process of converting to Islam. It also covers why some people choose to convert, what they experience – good and bad and the factors that might influence a convert to become an extremist. Download it for free here: <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/islam-conversion/>

### NOTICE

This guide was created for Radicalisation Research, a CREST-funded website which collates high-quality peer-reviewed academic research on radicalisation, extremism and fundamentalism. Visit here: <http://www.radicalisationresearch.org/>



Whilst this guide has been compiled by experts in this subject we are keen to keep it up-to-date and as accessible and useful as possible. If there are other phrases or words that you have come across that you would like to see included, please let us know here.

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