

A

CLOSERLOOK

NATIONAL & WORLD NEWS

BY Y O S S I K R A U S Z

"All-h is our objective; the Quran is our constitution; the Prophet is our leader; jihad is our way; and death for the sake of All-h is the highest of our aspirations."

—The slogan of the Muslim Brotherhood



THE ISLAMIST MOVEMENT AMERICA WON'T CONFRONT

**THE MUSLIM
BROTHERHOOD
HAS REACHED
AMERICAN
STREETS AND
IS TESTING
WASHINGTON'S
WILLINGNESS
TO ACT**

ON THE RECORD

"This is just the beginning. All Jihadists are in the crosshairs. Similarly, anyone who gives aid and succor to Jihadists."

—Sebastian Gorka, deputy assistant to the president and senior director of counterterrorism, in an online post about the executive order.

"The Muslim Brotherhood and CAIR have long made their goals clear: to forcibly impose Sharia law and establish Islam's 'mastership of the world.' The actions taken by the Muslim Brotherhood and CAIR to support terrorism across the globe and subvert our laws through violence, intimidation and harassment are unacceptable. Today, I designated the Muslim Brotherhood and CAIR as foreign terrorist organizations and transnational criminal organizations."

—Texas Governor Greg Abbott, in a statement in mid-November.

"I would like to see an actual designation. It's not a designation. Read the text. It's a 75-day review period to initiate a process to possibly create a designation."

—Pro-Trump far-right influencer Laura Loomer, referring to an executive order by President Trump to start the process of designating some Muslim Brotherhood chapters foreign terrorist organizations.





he words “Free Palestine” were followed by fire—an attack with three Molotov cocktails.

The attack in June on a group of Jews marching in Boulder, Colorado, for the Israeli hostages left one older Jewish woman dead and several other marchers injured. When the police investigated Mohamed Sabry Soliman, who carried out the attack, they found that he had been influenced online by the teachings of the Muslim Brotherhood.

That determination spurred Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX) to reintroduce legislation to brand the Muslim Brotherhood a foreign terrorist organization, legislation that had been in the works on and off since 2014. That legislation is still making its way through Congress.

But in late November, President Trump also took action. He issued an executive order setting in motion a process by which the executive branch would make a deter-

mination about branches of the Muslim Brotherhood and decide whether they were terrorist organizations.

The executive order specifically mentions the Brotherhood chapters in Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan as ones that have called for violence, though it does not immediately designate them terrorist groups.

Trump’s order left some of his supporters unhappy, because it fails to simply say that the Muslim Brotherhood is a terrorist organization.

In contrast, Governor Greg Abbott of Texas and Governor Ron DeSantis of Florida went ahead and issued rules designating the Muslim Brotherhood and the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)—an American organization that has been tied to the Brotherhood—as foreign terrorist organizations. CAIR is suing both states in court.

Around the world, only one Western country, Austria, has designated the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization. The other countries that have done so are all Arab or Muslim countries, which generally have lower thresholds and standards of evidence to make such declarations.

What the divide between the White House and Texas and Florida hints at is that dealing with the Muslim Brotherhood is a bit more complicated than dealing with other international Islamist organizations. The groups affiliated with the Brotherhood extend to clearly recognized terrorist groups like Hamas, but they also

include a political party that was a coalition partner in Israel’s government. That leaves the US government with a dilemma.

A brotherhood around the world

The Muslim Brotherhood dates back to 1928, when it was founded by a schoolteacher and imam named Hassan al-Banna. In the aftermath of Ottoman rule, Egypt was under the influence of the British, though there was an independent Egyptian government, which demanded that the country be secularized.

Al-Banna was of the opinion that Islam should be the bedrock and basis of all of society’s institutions, not merely a religion in a secularized country, and he created the Muslim Brotherhood to promote that “from below,” meaning as a grassroots organization that would overwhelm society. The organization established hundreds of social institutions, like schools, mosques and health clinics, throughout Egypt.

But Al-Banna also espoused violence as a proper way of spreading Muslim doctrine, and a military wing of the organization began carrying out attacks, including political assassinations, in Egypt during the 1940s. The organization also sent volunteers to attack Israel in 1948.

The Muslim Brotherhood was outlawed in Egypt in 1948 because the government felt that it was a threat, possibly a violent

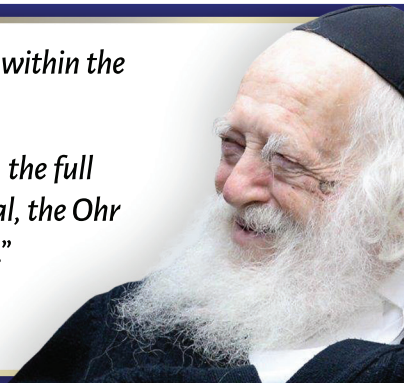


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one, to its rule. Al-Banna was killed on the street in 1949, and his followers claimed that it was an assassination by the government.

The Brotherhood would continue to be oppressed in Egypt after the 1952 revolution that brought Gamal Abdel Nasser to power. Nasser was nearly assassinated in 1954 by what was suspected to be a Brotherhood plot, and that led to many of the Brotherhood leaders being imprisoned or executed.

One who would go on to have outsized influence was Sayyid Qutb, whose writings in prison would influence Sunni radicals and terrorist groups, such as Al Qaeda and ISIS. Qutb was eventually executed in 1966, but his writings lived on.

While that kind of extreme radicalism was an offshoot of the Brotherhood, the general mass of the Brotherhood took a different route during the 1980s, founding political opposition groups in many countries that often ran in elections, including in Syria and Jordan.

There were still openly violent groups that were part of the Muslim Brotherhood, such as Hamas, which was officially recognized as the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. But in many places, the Brotherhood took on an air of respectability. Most notably, Mohamed Morsi, whose party was affiliated with the Brotherhood, became the president of Egypt from 2012 through 2013. The “growth from the bottom” idea of Al-Banna had achieved success—at least for a little time.

Morsi was quickly ousted by the current regime, and the Brotherhood was oppressed once more. But they had shown that the strategy worked.

Is it hard to call them terrorists?

During the first Trump administration, the president suggested that he would des-

One of the major supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood is Qatar—an important US ally that also loves to play both sides of every game.

ignate the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist group. But the White House quickly ran into a problem: lack of evidence.

That’s because a US designation of a group as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO) will likely need to come in front of a judge, and the executive branch will need to prove that they are one. But many of the Muslim Brotherhood organizations avoid any open acts of violence, preferring to promote political Islamism.

Some do support terrorist groups like Hamas, and others do carry out their own acts of terrorism. The first Trump White House did designate a couple of Muslim Brotherhood splinter groups in Egypt as terrorists, but it didn’t find evidence that the group as a whole is a terrorist entity.

Designating every branch of the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist group could even cause electoral problems in Israel. The Islamic Movement, which has fielded candidates for office in many Arab towns, is an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Ra’am Party, which was in the government coalition led by Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid, is the political party of the South-ern Branch of the Islamist Movement.

The worry about the association with both the Islamist Movement and by extension the Muslim Brotherhood has led Ra’am’s leader, MK Mansour Abbas, to say that the party will be giving up any religious affiliation and become a secular party. But that still shows the variety of political niches that the Muslim Brotherhood affiliates have made their way into.

One of the most important aspects of the Muslim Brotherhood, as it currently exists, is that it simply isn’t a single organization. As Michael Jacobson and Matt Levitt wrote in a recent article for the Washington Institute, “it does not operate as a centrally directed, unified organization.” There is no one person calling the shots for every Muslim Brotherhood affiliate, nor do they necessarily closely coordinate.

One other issue, however, that may be influencing the Trump administration is that one of the major supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood is Qatar—an important US ally that also loves to play both sides of every game.

In addition to Qatari support for Hamas and their promotion of Muslim Brotherhood rhetoric through Al-Jazeera, one of their most notable connections to the Brotherhood is their hosting of the International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS), which was founded by Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a prominent Muslim Brotherhood theorist. The UAE and some other Muslim countries eventually labeled the IUMS a terrorist organization, but Western countries resisted doing so, seeing it as simply a religious organization.

Al-Qaradawi, however, eventually ran afoul of several Western countries because of his open support of terrorist action, such as that of Hamas. Al-Qaradawi died in 2022, and his successors at IUMS have carefully kept their public statements free of open support of violence.

With Qatar so bound up with the Muslim Brotherhood, labeling it all a terrorist organization might be a difficult step for the Trump administration.

To understand the way that the US government is approaching the Muslim Brotherhood, we spoke with two experts

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Why has the White House issued the executive order on the Muslim Brotherhood now?

It's an interesting question. The Trump administration has been in place less than a year. We already had the initiative taken in Congress in July, including by Ted Cruz in the Senate. We understood that the Trump administration was considering an executive order earlier in the autumn; there was talk about it happening in October.

I think the main reason probably has to do with the Trump administration's dislike of various activities on university campuses and city streets. While a lot of them are explicitly connected to the situation in Gaza, the conclusion of some of the people in the administration was that this was also due to long-standing Islamist infiltration of the United States.

I think those are all factors. But you can tell that there was a hesitation, a reluctance about it, because of the delay from October.

And then you saw a surprise move from Greg Abbott, the governor of Texas, on November 17. Trump's executive order dropped just a week later, on November 24.

It's speculation, but Ted Cruz is very eager to get something done this time on the Muslim Brotherhood, and he's a close political ally of Greg Abbott. They may have been giving the administration a nudge, saying, "Well, we can do it in Texas. Why not do it federally?"

That's a guess, but I'm struck by the timing.

Maybe the question is not why Trump did it now but why he was reluctant to do it until now.

I think the hesitancy is because of two things.

One is that you commit to doing something that is very complicated, practically speaking, because of the amorphous nature of the Muslim Brotherhood. There is the concern to not commit to something as a policy that turns out to be unrealistic.

That has been in the mind even of people who are very opposed to the Muslim Brotherhood. They want to make sure the policy works.

The particular approach from the White House seems like it will work, because it will probably end up with the designation of the branches in Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon as foreign terrorist organizations.

The other reason that I think there was a hesitancy is that there was a recognition that there is a contradiction between being against the Muslim Brotherhood and being pro-Qatar and Turkey. This administration does rely quite heavily on bilateral relations with a wide variety of partners, but certainly Qatar has been a load-bearing partner for the administration, and Turkey has been as well.

If you think about the leaders who get access to Trump in the White House, [Turkish President Recep Tayyip] Erdogan gets access, as do the Qataris. So I think there was a pause while they were considering whether there was a contradiction.

But one thing that I think will happen right away is that people will recognize that, besides for those in prison, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood is dispersed in third countries. A number of them are going to be found in Istanbul, and a number of them are in London, and I don't know but some of them may be in Doha.

Quite quickly, designating the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood as an FTO and looking at some of its members to be specially designated global terrorists is going to generate tension with the countries that



are sheltering those individuals. So I think that there is still going to be a contradiction.

Why didn't the Trump administration designate the entire organization, if we can call it a single organization, a terrorist organization?

They will have looked at what other countries have done and noted that, generally in the West, the Muslim Brotherhood is not designated a terrorist group. It is in Austria, but not in the rest of Europe or in Canada or Australia.

They would have been mindful that it is a high bar to prove as a terrorist someone who has never been engaged in a violent attack but who is engaged in a project that is implicitly violent against Western interests.

There is an argument, which Greg Abbott and Ron DeSantis buy, and probably Ted Cruz buys, that there is a whole network of people in the United States who are terrorists. The Council on American-

Islamic Relations is something that Abbott and DeSantis are calling a terrorist organization.

But I think the White House would rather go after things that are more easily provable.

It's not impossible for some of those people to be American citizens, of course. And once you go after foreign branches of the Muslim Brotherhood, you'll start generating intelligence about their links back in the United States.

I expect that the White House is at the beginning of a process that is going to have several steps, partly because of eventually designating individuals who have links in the US, partly because once they have designated the first three branches, they will look at others, including those in Yemen, Syria and Libya, or even those in Turkey and Qatar. If they go to Syria or Libya, there is an immediate read-across to Turkey or Qatar.

Both Governors Abbott and DeSantis have said that they welcome the lawsuits by CAIR, and they have said that they be-

lieve that the process of discovery is going to yield intelligence that will make it easier for them to win their cases.

We also don't know what shape the Cruz legislation will end up in. It has already been approved by the Foreign Affairs Committee in the House. Will the legislation remain more far-reaching than the executive order?

How organized is the Muslim Brotherhood? Is there more than a philosophical connection between the branches? Is there a core group?

It's more than philosophical. What is missing from it—which makes it a very elusive target for legislation or law enforcement action—is command and control. You can't say that there is a person who is issuing instructions so that you can intercept those instructions and prove what is being done.

Also, there isn't a centralized budget, with salaries being paid out around the world or money being sent as branch budgets.

But it is more than a philosophy. There is a supreme guide. Egypt is still the leadership branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the supreme guide of the Muslim Brotherhood—who is the authority whether you are in CAIR in Texas or in Hamas in Gaza—is Mohammed Badie. But he is in prison in Egypt, and his deputy is also in prison there. Still, there is an acting supreme guide, Saleh Abdel-Haq, who is also Egyptian.

What is an acting supreme guide? He clearly doesn't have the moral authority of Mohammed Badie, and he clearly doesn't have the budgetary or command-and-control authority, because that doesn't exist. Still, you have a person who could be asked about what the position of the Muslim Brotherhood is on any subject.

We don't know where Abdel-Haq is. In 2023, he was in Istanbul, but I don't know where he is now. The relationship be-

tween Egypt and Turkey warmed up, and it is possible that Turkey decided that having someone who counts as a terrorist in Egypt was not a good idea.

The other thing that exists is an observable philosophical discipline. They have kept people on message; they haven't really faced the kinds of schisms that we've seen in other Islamist groups.

That's partially because of the Palestinian issue, which serves as a focus. But it also gets them into trouble, because as soon as they start talking about Palestine, they start advocating violence. That's what happened to Qaradawi, who had even been offered the role as the supreme guide a couple of times. He blew it when he advocated for violence in Palestine, and then he couldn't travel to England or France.

Are there other things that you think will have an effect on this issue?

I think the Sydney attack will have an influence. It speaks to the general easing of restrictions on anti-Semitic incitement that is starting to make Western governments very uncomfortable, which they should be.

They have kept people on message; they haven't faced the kinds of schisms that we've seen in other Islamist groups.

I think the Sydney attack has made the Australian government question its previous assumptions, and it has a lot of resonance in the United States. Governor Abbott pointed to it at a Chanukah reception as an example of what happens if you don't push back on Islamists and

their infiltration and intimidation.

The other thing that will have an effect is as more and more information is revealed about Qatari infiltration of the educational sector and to some extent the media sector, this could push buttons in the United States. If some of Donald Trump's favorite targets as fake news turn out to be joined at the hip with Al-Jazeera, that doesn't do the Qataris or the Muslim Brotherhood any favors.

The third thing that can have an effect is a bouncing back and forth of the issue overseas with the issue inside the United States. If the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood is designated a terrorist organization and some named Egyptians are specially designated foreign terrorists, and a few of those people are in London, then you could have the CIA go to MI5 and say, "These people in London are terrorists, and we want information on them and might want them to be brought to the US to face justice." Any country that is approached in those terms is going to have to figure out whether it cooperates, and if not, what to do about the Americans being displeased. I think this will affect the discussion in Europe, and that in itself may come back into the US debate.

ZALMY SHAPIRO

JOEL LUSKY

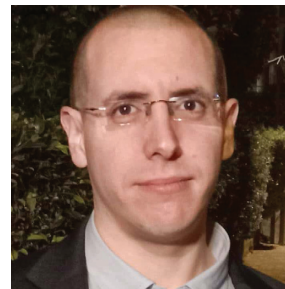
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To understand the way that the US government is approaching the Muslim Brotherhood, we spoke with two experts

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You've written about why the Trump administration might have taken a long time to make this designation.

Yes. The delays have been attributed to the Qataris saying that they needed time to do something about it.

We should remember that Trump said that Middle Eastern states were involved in this. The Saudis and the Emiratis are against the Muslim Brotherhood, and Trump needs them. But then there are the Qataris and Turkey, who see the Brotherhood as an opportunity and see the order by Trump as an obstacle that they need to work around.

The Trump administration decided not to designate all of the Brotherhood as a terrorist group at one time. How connected are the different parts of the Muslim Brotherhood?

When we examine the Trump administration's decision to use a light touch, it seems that from a legal point of view, it is hard to treat them all as one, though they do have shared values, with most of them seeing the West or the US as negative.

But the problem is that the Muslim Brotherhood affiliates are sophisticated groups. For example, there was already a report that just after Trump's order, CAIR eliminated from its website a statement about support of the "moderate Muslim Brotherhood."

So even if I can understand why the Trump administration did what they did, this will enable some of these groups. Islamist groups are experts at this sort of charade.

And even when Trump issued his statement, it was clear that some weren't being examined. The order mentioned Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon, but it didn't mention Qatar or Turkey.

One of the most prominent examples of the Muslim Brotherhood is the International Union of Muslim Scholars, funded by Doha and hosted in Doha. It is a very harsh anti-American voice. Their current secretary general, Ali al-Qaradaghi, who succeeded Qaradawi—who openly supported terror—just today said that he supports Qatar's support of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade. The group also published a fatwa calling for jihad against Israel. Despite all of that, neither IUMS nor Qatar were mentioned.

How organized is the Muslim Brotherhood?

We don't know more than we know. Sometimes these affiliates, for example in Europe, are functioning as charity organizations or similar groups. For that reason, we don't have enough knowledge to say how much organization there is.

But in general, I don't think we can talk about it as one organization, with one head from Egypt who runs the whole show.

Is there something you'll be watching for in the future?

The most surprising thing about Governor Greg Abbott's executive order was that he was able to resist the pressure of Qatar, which is very big in the gas and oil industry, which has power over the educational system in Texas, and which has connections with police forces.

Governor Abbott was able to resist the intense pressure that Qatar could bring to bear, but I want to see whether it was just a political statement or more than that. If we see that he closes mosques and organizations that associate with the Brotherhood, we'll see that there really is an opportunity to challenge the Muslim Brotherhood on American soil. ●