

Written evidence from Noha Mellor, PhD, University of Bedfordshire (ISIL0003)

Introduction

1. I am Professor of Arab Media at the Research Institute for Media, Arts and Performance, University of Bedfordshire. I am also member of the Board of the British Society of Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES), and Adjunct Professor in the Department of Asian, Middle Eastern and Turkish Studies at Stockholm University, Sweden. I have authored or co-authored several books about Arab media and culture, in addition to numerous scholarly articles, book chapters as well as mass media features and op-eds, covering a range of topics including religious ethics in news reporting, representation of 9/11 in Pan-Arab press, and Al Jazeera's coverage of the Muslim Brotherhood.

2. In addition to the above publications, I've recently co-edited a book about Political Islam and the media and I am currently preparing a manuscript for a new book about the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), drawing on a vast number of Arabic sources including the MB media, MB leaders' memoirs, MB founder's epistles and articles. This research is directly relevant to this inquiry and particularly to the government's recent report, *the Muslim Brotherhood Review*. It is important to stress that this testimony focuses on the Egyptian face of this movement, which later branched out into different countries across the world including the UK. The evidence aims to shed some light on the Muslim Brotherhood movement and its record as a representative of political Islam.

3. I have focused on three themes for the sake of brevity. These are: the movement's tendency to 'Islamise' conflicts, its attitude towards the use of violence, and its perception of democracy.

Islamising conflicts

4. Since its inception, the MB has had a tendency to Islamise the conflict with the West and Israel, by using an inflammatory, anti-Jewish discourse. The MB's magazine, *Al-Nadhir*, for instance, in circulation from 1938 to 1940, published a series of articles called 'The Danger of Jews on the Islamic World', claiming that the Jews had instigated world wars and conflicts.

5. There was a letter in Vol. 1, issue 14 of *Al-Nadhir*, objecting to the appointment of an Egyptian Jew as the Egyptian Consul in Paris, referring to it as 'the appointment of a spy in the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs', and describing Jews as having no nationality and no homeland. It is noted that the MB launched several attacks during the 1930s and 1940s, targeting Jewish interests in Egypt. The movement generally failed to see Egyptian Jews as equal citizens, but rather as supporters of 'Zionist Israel'.

6. The MB's influential ideologue, Sayyid Qutb, produced an infamous essay entitled *Our Battle with the Jews*, in which he designated the Jews as the Muslims' worst enemies; in that book he wrote that 'the Jews deliberately divert this nation away from its Qur'an which is the Muslims' source of power [...] and everyone else who diverts this nation from its religion and the Qur'an is an agent of the Jews [...] and the Jews will remain safe, as long as this nation is distracted from the true faith'.

7. There are numerous examples of such discourse in subsequent MB magazines, such as *al-Lewaa al-Islami*, dated 26 April 1990, which includes a long article detailing the so-called ‘Jews’ conspiracy’ and claiming that the Jews planned all global wars, including WWI and WWII, and that the Jews re-wrote a new *Torah*, detailing their ‘greedy’ aspirations to rule the world.

8. This discourse is still alive in the MB leaders’ statements. The ousted president, Mohamed Morsi, for example, urged Egyptians in 2010 to raise their children on ‘hatred for Jews and Zionists’ and also called Zionists the ‘descendants of apes and pigs’.

9. It is notable that the MB leaders use anti-Jewish or anti-Zionist language, even when talking about issues unrelated to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; for instance, in 2011, Egypt faced the choice of either proceeding with the parliamentary elections and thereby ending the military rule, or prioritising the drawing up of a new constitution; many political parties, including the MB’s Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), were not in favour of the second option, and campaigned for the acceleration of the elections. During that time, the president of the FJP, Mohamed Morsi, described those who called for a constitution first as ‘Zionists and agents of Israel and America.’

10. According to the MB’s ideology, Western cultural mores are the source of moral decadence and corruption in Islamic societies such as those in Egypt. Central to this ideology is the belief that Western societies, or what MB leading members call ‘crusaders’, not only intend to halt the progress of Islamic societies, but to hinder the full Islamisation of these societies. The solution for the MB is for Muslims to maintain their distance from Western cultures.

Attitudes towards violence

11. The MB movement has called for the resistance to Western ideas and cultural values since its inception in 1928. There are numerous examples in MB publications illustrating this ideology. The movement leadership has always claimed that it will combat Western ideologies through education and proselytization (or what is called *Dawa*), but their tactics also included a covert paramilitary apparatus which was involved in a number of political assassinations in Egypt, in the 1930s and 1940s. The founder of the MB, Hassan el-Banna, used to issue statements denouncing that kind of violence, and claiming that those who perpetrated any violence acted on their own initiative and not according to MB leadership’s orders. However, the MB members’ trial documents from 1954, which were made available to the public, indicated that those members acted on order from the leadership.

12. The MB movement adopts a gradualism strategy of four stages: 1) *Dawa*, or call to Islam, through education and upbringing; 2) proselytization of non-Muslims; 3) *jihad* through violence, when necessary, against Muslim rulers and non-Muslims; and 4) a caliphate which is the union of Muslim countries under one caliph. Most of these principles are clearly laid out in their founder’s epistles which are still in circulation today.

13. The MB educational and welfare activities include schools, private tutoring, health clinics, and so on, are offered to the general public. We know, however, that such services have been used to garner support and Islamise society in a bottom-up process. The movement also gathered strong support from students’ organisations and trade unions in Egypt, and developed a large

network of commercial enterprises. Its membership has targeted all social strata, but not all members have been admitted as 'active' members; membership, in fact, falls into different categories: 1) general membership for anyone accepted by a district administration and proven to be *righteous*; 2) associate membership; 3) active membership for those who agree to maintain their duties as active members; and 4) *jihad* membership for members who are handpicked by the general executive bureau for observance of duties and commitments. Members of the covert apparatus are usually selected from the third and fourth categories.

14. Following the crackdown of Nasser's government on the MB, especially on the covert apparatus, in the 1950s and 1960s, many members were imprisoned while a few others were executed. A large number of those released from prisons immediately formed new 'armed cells', although not necessarily affiliated with the larger MB movement; other estranged members formed *takfiri* or joined *Salafi* groups. The result was that *takfiri* ideology varied through this branching out of Islamist ideology. Comparing the MB with some of these groups prompted some scholars to characterise the MB as 'moderate', but there is evidence that the MB itself has adopted a *takfiri* ideology from its inception, as evident in some of its founder's writings.

15. Some of the MB statements, moreover, condone violence; for instance, the MB's *Dawa* magazine, volume 32, issue 70, March 1982, published a memorandum defending the assassins of president Sadat, on the grounds that they acted 'in defence of Islam [...] because Sadat refrained from applying Shari'a [law] [...] and thus he deserved to be killed'. A group of MB students at Al-Azhar University in Egypt staged a violent protest against the decision to expel some of their members in 2006; in the same year, the then General Guide, Mahdi Akef, announced that the MB was ready to send members to fight alongside *Hezbollah* in its war against Israel, not to mention the movement's open support of *Hamas* and its violent actions. According to various media reports, some MB members have been engaged in recent violent acts in Egypt, and, following the military coup in Egypt in 2013, the leading MB member, Mohamed el-Beltagy, made notorious remarks on camera about violence in the Sinai Peninsula, claiming that 'what's happening in Sinai, as a response to this military coup, will stop, the second Sisi announces that he's stepped back from this coup'. We also know that *Ansar Jerusalem* group includes some MB members.

16. The movement tends to release contradictory statements: on the one hand, it states that it is a peaceful movement, and on the other, its actions and other statements (such as those against the Jews) reflect the opposite. This contradiction may indicate a conscious tactic to win political support while working with MB members to create an Islamic state.

17. The movement has always been deliberately secretive about its funding sources. There is evidence that the MB has depended on donations since its inception; in addition, the movement usually relies on members' individual contributions, including those living outside Egypt, and their *zakat* payments.

18. The MB has an international network across the world, including Europe, which has become a refuge for MB members fleeing their countries of origin; in this respect, I fully agree with the

government's conclusion that MB members have used the U.K. as a base to 'regroup and recover from setbacks in Egypt and elsewhere'.

MB's perception of democracy

19. Some scholars argue that the MB movement began as *Dawa*, and thus a purely religious movement with no political ambitions, while there is strong evidence that the movement has always adopted a political mission, understood as a willingness to influence the political sphere in Egypt and beyond. It did not entertain the idea of setting up a political party until only recently, although the movement's founder had clearly declared the political objectives of his movement. The movement has sought a far more influential role than running a political party, namely to Islamise society, and thus create a pretext for an Islamic state in which all state activities will be mediated by Islam.

20. The MB movement has always had the political aim of reordering Muslim society in Egypt and abroad in an Islamist fashion. Its founder, Hassan el-Banna, used to propagate the integration of Islam in politics; for instance, he once wrote that 'Muslims' faith is not complete unless they prove to be long-sighted politicians [...] Each Islamic society must enlist political affairs on the top of its agenda, otherwise it needs to re-learn the true meaning of Islam'.

21. The MB's 'creed' or set of principles is based on the totalitarian belief that only MB's interpretation of Islam is the right one, and therefore, members must obey their MB leaders. This creed was announced in its third congress in 1935, which laid down the movement's practices, and declared that each Muslim must conform to its principles - if they forsook any of them, they would be renouncing *the* true Islamic ideals. The creed was published in 1938 in the MB's magazine, calling for each member to subscribe to this creed. This creed includes a pledge not to enter their children in a school that does not respect Islam, to boycott all publications and societies which do not adhere to Islamic teachings, and to believe that the reason for Muslims' backwardness is their negligence of Islam; the solution therefore, is to follow Islam, according to the MB's rules.

22. The movement's commitment to democracy is confined to its acceptance of the power of the ballot boxes. The movement, however, does not accept legislation deemed irreconcilable with Islam; for instance, in 2007, the MB leadership suggested a council of clerics who would vet all legislation to make sure that it conformed to Shari'a. Several scholars, including the Egyptian, Farag Fouda, assassinated in 1992 at the hands of two members of *Jamaat Islamiyya*, clearly highlight the difficulty of such an arrangement, simply because good governance cannot only depend on rulers' piety, for rulers are humans prone to temptation.

23. The MB's record in the Egyptian Parliament does not show a keen interest in respecting international conventions; for instance, in 2007, the MB wanted to exclude non-Muslim minorities as well as women from Egyptian politics. The following year, the MB called for its members to fight in Gaza as part of its *Jihad* against Israel, consequently violating Egypt's peace treaty with Israel.

24. The MB opposed the children's rights bill in 2008, which complied with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The MB particularly opposed the criminalisation of female genital

mutilation ('cutting'), the raising of marriage age to 18, and to legally recognising illegitimate children.

25. The 57th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (2013), aiming to end violence against women, was met with a statement in English from the MB leadership, condemning that UN declaration by calling it 'misleading and deceptive'. The MB claimed that the UN document contradicted Islamic principles and ethics and would not only 'destroy the family' but would also 'lead to complete disintegration of society'. According to the MB, the document granted girls full sexual freedom by raising the age of marriage, legalising abortion, providing contraceptives for adolescence girls, granting equal rights to homosexuals and to 'adulterous wives and illegitimate sons', and equal inheritance rights for women. The MB also argued that it gave wives the right to accuse husbands of rape and would allow Muslim women to marry non-Muslim men. According to the MB, such 'destructive tools' would drag society to *jahiliyya* or pre-Islamic ignorance, and it urged Muslim countries and all Islamic groups to reject the UN declaration and to 'take a decisive stand on this document and similar declarations'.

26. During their time in power in 2012 -2013, the MB undermined Egyptian women's rights. The parliamentary quota for women was removed and the parliament then drafted legislation allowing the legal age of marriage to be lowered from 18 to 13, and some MB clerics even indicated that the age of nine is also acceptable in Islamic law.

27. The MB's disagreement with laws based on liberal principles also includes its opposition to freedom of expression; for instance, in 2001, an MB member complained to the then Minister of Culture, Farouk Hosny, that three novels published by a branch of the Culture Ministry included pornographic language, prompting the minister to order an investigation and to later withdraw the books from circulation. The MB is willing to trump freedom if it deems this freedom disrespects God's laws according to its own interpretation.

28. It is noteworthy, moreover, that although the MB movement continually declares its support for judicial independence, its ousted president, Mohamed Morsi, granted himself sweeping powers during his presidency in 2012 -2013. Morsi claimed immunity from judicial review, pushed through a new constitution based on shari'a law, released known terrorists from prison, appointed a sympathetic prosecutor-general and a number of MB members in key positions.

Conclusion

29. Given the above points, I find the movement's discourse and actions irreconcilable with liberal democracy or tolerant multi-culturalism. I therefore fully endorse the government report's conclusion that aspects of the movement's ideology and activities "run counter to British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, equality and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs".

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