

Criminalising Non-Violent Organisations

CAGE submission to the UK Government review of the Muslim Brotherhood



Witness | Empower | Justice

Criminalising Non-Violent Organisations

Author: Muhammad Bushra

Designer: Ayman Muhammed / Qiyamah Media

Copyright 2014 CAGE Advocacy UK Ltd
All rights reserved

Permission is given to duplicate this document for personal use only, as long as it is unaltered and complete. Copies may not be duplicated for commercial purposes.

CAGE is an independent advocacy organisation working to empower communities impacted by the War on Terror policies worldwide. The organisation highlights and campaigns against such policies in hope to achieve a world free from oppression and justice.

CAGE
27 Old Gloucester Street
London
WC1N 3XX

Telephone: 0207 277 6700
Email: contact@cageuk.org
Website: www.cageuk.org

Photo credits: Thierry Ehrmann / Saleem Homsy / Muhammad Ghafi / DVIDSHUB / ISAFMEDIA

Used under the Flickr Attribution License.

Contents

4	Summary
5	Introduction
6	The Muslim Brotherhood
7	The conflation of violence and ideology under the banner of 'extremism'
11	Concerns regarding integrity
13	Conclusion

Summary

In the following brief, CAGE contributes to the UK Government's review of the Muslim Brotherhood by highlighting a number of key concerns.

A preliminary reservation driving these concerns is the curious mystification of a well-established organisation—how is the British Government in the dark and why has this review been launched only now? Founded in British-administered Egypt, the National archives will show that an understanding of the Muslim Brotherhood already exists. Detailed academic studies of the group have also long been in existence. UK Government engagement with its leaders should be resumed in promotion of dialogue and understanding. The context in which this review takes place, the group's recent designation as a 'terrorist organisation' by autocratic regimes, casts a dark shadow on its integrity and credibility.

First, the brief challenges the central charge prompting this review, that the Muslim Brotherhood might be an extremist organisation. UK guidelines on extremism define it as "vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs." Although defining extremism thus is problematic, applying this definition to the organisation invalidates the premise upon which this review is founded. The Muslim Brotherhood has consistently supported and promoted democracy and has achieved electoral victories in a number of countries. Its numerous branches are vital members of, or closely aligned with, governments allied to the UK. Armed groups have repeatedly denounced the organisation for its support for democracy. The Muslim Brotherhood poses a threat to autocracy, not democracy.

Second, the brief questions Government definitions of 'extremism' and 'violent extremism' and its insistence on conflating them. This follows on from a number of CAGE reports published recently in this regard. This argument rests on a discredited and ideologically charged attachment to a thesis of linear radicalisation. Drawing such false

equivalences worryingly echoes recent crackdowns on the organisation by autocratic regimes.

Charges of its involvement in violence are ill founded and politically motivated, whereas violence and abuse perpetrated against its members are well documented. Conducting intelligence investigations into alleged attacks as part of this public inquiry raises more questions than it answers. Most dangerously, Government guidelines on combatting what it terms 'extremism' disproportionately target practicing Muslims who choose to approach intellectual and political issues from the perspective of their beliefs, whilst simultaneously neglecting violent totalitarian state action against such Muslims. The UK must become more accepting of movements that enjoy wide support throughout the Middle East.

Third, the brief raises concerns relating to the integrity of the review. Evidence suggesting prejudgement of the Muslim Brotherhood ought be acknowledged and rectified. The public must be assured that foreign regimes and private defense companies hold no sway over British policy or security. Concerns regarding the timing of this review and the choice of Britain's current ambassador to Saudi Arabia to lead it must be addressed. Finally, the potential value of this report must be weighed in light of these concerns.

Introduction:

The curious mystification of the Muslim Brotherhood

“What I think is important about the Muslim Brotherhood is to make sure we fully understand what this organisation is, what it stands for, what its links are, what its beliefs are in terms of both extremism and violent extremism, what its connections are with other groups, what its presence is here in the United Kingdom. We will only get our policy right if we fully understand the true nature of the organisation that we’re dealing with.” - David Cameron¹

In this brief, CAGE contributes to the UK Government review of the Muslim Brotherhood by highlighting a number of key concerns.

First, the brief challenges the central charge prompting this review, that the Muslim Brotherhood might be an extremist organisation. Second, the brief questions the Government’s definitions of what constitutes ‘extremism’ and ‘violent extremism’ and its insistence on conflating the two terms. Third, the brief raises concerns relating to the integrity of the review and the efficacy of its potential outcomes.

Before this, a central reservation must be brought forth that drives the above concerns. How is it that the British Government is in the dark regarding an organisation that has existed openly for over 86 years - the oldest of its kind in the Middle East? And why is it that this review has been launched only now?

The Muslim Brotherhood, founded in Egypt in 1928, was instrumental in the build-up to the 1952 Egyptian Revolution, which led to the end of the rule of the monarchy and British administration. It would be surprising if the National British archives of colonies and dependencies contained no records relating to the group.

Additionally, in-depth academic studies of the group have been completed as early as 1960 and have been published as early as 1969.² Since then, countless studies analysing the group’s numerous branches, its operation at grassroots and governmental levels and its aspirations have been conducted.³

Further, the Prime Minister’s remarks grounding the review in a need to “understand what this organisation is, what it stands for, what its links are, what its beliefs are”, are strikingly curious in light of revelations of his meeting with its leaders at Chequers.⁴ Calling for a review in this fashion promotes

a default posture of suspicion towards the group’s declared motives and aspirations.

It casts unwarranted doubt on the trustworthiness of its representatives, implying their statements ought not to be taken at face value. Such a stance is extremely counterproductive and can only foster a cycle of mutual suspicion, which will not end unless replaced with a more open attitude of engagement and dialogue.

As for the review’s timing, it has been widely regarded as questionable, if not outright discreditable.⁵ It takes place in the context of the group’s designation as a ‘terrorist organisation’ by the military regime in Egypt and its political and financial backers in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates - moves condemned by human rights organisations as politically motivated.



¹ Cameron, D., David Cameron on the Muslim Brotherhood investigation [video], ITN, 1 April 2014
² Mitchell, R. P., *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, Oxford University Press, 1993 (1st Ed. 1969), p. xxvi
³ *Ibid.*, p. vii-xxii
⁴ Hearst, D., Exclusive: When Cameron took the Muslim Brotherhood to lunch, Middle East Eye, 15 April 2014
⁵ E.g.: Debates and Oral Answers, Columns 1244-6, House of Lords debate, Tuesday 8 April 2014; Sengupta, K., Prime Minister steps into minefield with inquiry into what ‘the Muslim Brotherhood is, what it stands for and what its presence is in Britain’, *The Independent*, 1 April 2014; Stacey, K., Daragahi, B., and Kerr, S., Brotherhood probe stirs UK tensions, *Financial Times*, 2 April 2014; Osborne, P., The Muslim Brotherhood: Why is Cameron taking orders from bloodstained generals and playboy princes?, *The Telegraph*, 2 April 2014; Doyle, C., Cameron’s review of the Muslim Brotherhood will end in farce, *Al Arabiya*, 3 April 2014; Malik, K., A Brotherhood Inquiry in Bad Faith, *The New York Times*, 21 April 2014

The Muslim Brotherhood:

Between the charge of extremism and the practice of democracy

“We want to encourage people away from a path of extremism and we want to challenge the extremist narrative that some extreme Islamist organisations have put out.”⁷ - David Cameron

The UK Government’s ‘Prevent’ strategy defines extremism as “vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs.”⁸

Defining extremism in this way is problematic, as will be discussed. However, even if this definition is accepted, it would be enough to invalidate the premise upon which this review is founded: namely the Muslim Brotherhood’s potential extremist nature.

The Muslim Brotherhood has been among the most vocal supporters of democratic change in the Middle East, having tirelessly advocated for democracy and its supporting values and institutions. Analysts have long seen it as a moderate Islamic group with which Western governments ought to work with in order to promote democracy.⁹

In the wake of the Arab Spring, the Muslim Brotherhood has welcomed democratic change, having established broad support after suffering decades of suppression under successive autocratic governments. This resulted in landslide electoral victories for the group and its affiliates in Egypt¹⁰, Tunisia¹¹, and Morocco.¹²

After the Egyptian military coup on 3 July 2013, the Muslim Brotherhood spearheaded a mass protest movement, calling for the restoration of democracy and rule of law. The group’s endurance in this regard has led to it being lauded as the greatest worldwide champion of democracy that year.¹³

Additionally, a number of intellectual offshoots of the Muslim Brotherhood, such as the Islamic Party in Iraq and the Islamic Minbar in Bahrain, are vital members of, or closely aligned with, governments allied to the UK.¹⁴ Similarly, the primary component of the Syrian National Coalition, endorsed by Britain as the sole legitimate representative of the Syrian

people, is the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁵

Al-Qaeda leaders have repeatedly denounced the Muslim Brotherhood for a host of charges; paramount among these is its support for democracy.¹⁶ In light of the Egyptian coup and statements as uninformed as Secretary of State John Kerry’s that the military was “restoring democracy,”¹⁷ al-Qaeda’s arguments that democracy is inherently ‘corrupt’¹⁸ and that Western nations had colluded in the coup¹⁹ can be anticipated to win support. The Foreign Office and members of the Houses of Lords and Commons, as well as a host of analysts and commentators, have all expressed serious concerns in this regard.²⁰

Only five countries have designated the Muslim Brotherhood a ‘terrorist organisation’, the latter three only since December 2013: Syria, Russia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The Muslim Brotherhood poses no threat to democratic orders; rather, its support for democracy only threatens autocratic regimes.²¹

⁷ Egypt: Terrorist Tag Politically Driven, Human Rights Watch, 28 December 2013

⁸ Cameron, D., David Cameron on the Muslim Brotherhood investigation (video), ITN, 1 April 2014

⁹ Prevent Strategy, HM Government, June 2011

¹⁰ Leiken, R. S., and Brooke, S., The Moderate Muslim Brotherhood, Foreign Affairs, March/April 2007

¹¹ Egypt’s Islamist parties win elections to parliament, BBC News, 21 January 2012

¹² Gamha, E., Final Results of Tunisian Elections Announced, Tunisia Live, 14 November 2011

¹³ Islamist PJD party wins Morocco poll, BBC News, 27 November 2011

¹⁴ O’Neill, B., Who was the greatest champion of democracy in 2013? Unbelievably, the Muslim Brotherhood, The Telegraph, 19 December 2013

¹⁵ Hatlani, I., Bahrain Between its Backers and the Brotherhood, Sada: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Middle East Analysis, 20 May 2014; Guide to Iraqi political parties, BBC News, 20 January 2006

¹⁶ Doyle, C., Cameron’s review of the Muslim Brotherhood will end in farce, Al Arabiya, 3 April 2014

¹⁷ Al-Zawahiri, A., “Bitter Harvest: Sixty Years of the Muslim Brotherhood (Excerpts)”, in Kepel, G., and Milelli, J.-P. (Eds.), Al Qaeda in Its Own Words, Ghazaleh, P. (Trans.), Harvard University Press, 2008; Leiken, R. S., and Brooke, S., The Moderate Muslim Brotherhood, Foreign Affairs, March/April 2007

¹⁸ Gordon, M. R., and Fahim, K., Kerry Says Egypt’s Military Was ‘Restoring Democracy’ in Ousting Morsi, The New York Times, 1 August 2013

¹⁹ Al-Qaeda chief: Egypt coup shows democracy corrupt, Associated Press, 3 August 2013

²⁰ Al-Qaeda says US colluded with Egypt in coup, Associated Press, 3 May 2014

²¹ Stacey, K., Daragahi, B., and Kerr, S., Brotherhood probe stirs UK tensions, Financial Times, 2 April 2014; Debates and Oral Answers, Columns 1244-6, House of Lords debate, Tuesday 8 April 2014; McElroy, D., Conservative MP warns UK ban on Muslim Brotherhood ‘could aid al-Qaeda’, The Telegraph, 1 Apr 2014

²² Malik, K., A Brotherhood Inquiry in Bad Faith, The New York Times, 21 April 2014



The conflation of violence and ideology under the banner of 'extremism'

“ Look, I think it's very important people understand that as a government, we are obviously opposed to violent extremism—the violent extremism that we've seen on our streets tragically in, for instance, that dreadful incident in Woolwich—but we're also a government that is opposed to extremism.”²²
- David Cameron

CAGE has recently published a number of reports addressing problems inherent in the UK Government's definition and use of the terms 'extremism' and 'violent extremism'. Primary among these is the effective institution of 'thought crimes', shifting focus away from violence and toward ideology and belief.²³ The reports assess the impact of this in terms of increasingly draconian emergent patterns of criminalisation²⁴ and policing.²⁵ This includes control orders and 'Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures' (TPIMs), the widespread reliance on secret evidence and closed hearings, the systematic harassment of communities based on racial and ethnic profiling, and the normalisation of citizenship removal. Such extreme measures, which are overwhelmingly directed at individuals not charged with involvement in violent criminal action, are often presented as justified by painting its victims as being 'insufficiently British' and lacking in 'fundamental British values'. When the BBC conducted a poll to identify what might constitute these 'British values', the largest number of votes was received in favour of the Magna Carta as the defining symbol of British national identity.²⁶ The supreme irony is that it is this very symbol that has been betrayed and undermined by the introduction of these measures of policing and criminalisation by this government and the previous government.

The UK Government's argument in support of conflating ideology and violence does not rest upon solid empirical evidence. Rather it relies on an ill-established attachment to a thesis of linear radicalisation, which reflects a narrow ideological position that has been discredited in academic

scholarship.²⁷ This thesis, increasingly popularised and promoted on both sides of the Atlantic due to its amenability to the interests of policy circles, presents terrorist violence as the inevitable end point of a particular cultural-psychological disposition, or as an individual theological process of reasoning and legitimation, or as a combination of the two. It conveniently discounts the role in promoting radicalisation played by politics, particularly the action of government, whether in terms of policy at home or the waging of war and other unpopular foreign policies abroad. Whereas the evidence that supports this style of linear ideology-centred radicalisation thesis is severely wanting, the role of political grievances is particularly well established and consistently documented.²⁸

The case of Ahmed Faraz offers a particularly poignant example of the serious problems inherent in a shift in focus away from violent criminal conduct toward ideology and belief. On 12 December 2011, Ahmed Faraz was convicted of a slew of terrorism offences in relation to his management of the Maktabah Islamic bookshop in Birmingham. The centrepiece of his trial was the publication and sale of a translated edition of the book *Milestones* by Sayyid Qutb, a leading figure in the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood before his execution by the Nasser regime in 1966. The Crown Prosecution Service had denied that the trial was a simple case of censorship, stating: "This trial was not about censoring books but about the defendant's role in the mass distribution of material, which had been added to and manipulated, in order to prime would-be terrorists to commit violent acts."²⁹

²² Cameron, D., David Cameron on the Muslim Brotherhood investigation [video], ITN, 1 April 2014

²³ Tackling Extremism in the UK: An Ideological Attack on Muslim Communities, CAGE, 13 December 2013

²⁴ Tackling Extremism in the UK: A Mandate for Secret Criminalisation, CAGE, 20 December 2013

²⁵ Mohammed, J., and Siddiqui, A., The Prevent Strategy: A Cradle to Grave Police-State, CAGE, 11 Feb. 2014

²⁶ Magna Carta tops British day poll, BBC News, 30 March 2006

²⁷ E.g.: Patel, F., Rethinking Radicalization, Brennan Center for Justice, New York University School of Law, 2011; Lambert, R. (2008) "Salafi and Islamist Londoners: Stigmatised minority faith communities countering al-Qaida." *Crime, law, and social change*, 50 (1-2), pp. 73-89

²⁸ Kundnani, A., *The Muslims Are Coming!*, Verso, 2014, pp. 115-52

²⁹ Cited in Qureshi, A. (2012) "Conviction of Thought: How Islamic Concepts are Ruled on in UK Courts." *Arches Quarterly*, 5 (9), p.171

Despite this claim, the trial did not focus on establishing firm causal links between the publications in question and violent criminal conduct. Rather, the trial very much hinged on proving the ideology of the defendant by attempting to interpret the meaning of Milestones, and claiming it to be a misinterpretation of the teachings of the Qur'an. Thus, in spite of the hysteria surrounding the supposed application of Shari'a law in the UK justice system³⁰, "the judge had to become a de facto theologian who could distinguish between Qutb's false interpretation of Islam and an officially endorsed moderate Islam."³¹ This sets a disturbing precedent for government curtailment of freedom of thought and the imposition of restrictions "on the freedom of believers to explore their own textual tradition and interpret its meaning for themselves—ironically mirroring the approach of fundamentalists whom such policies ostensibly aim to marginalize."³² One year later, on 21 December 2012, the Court of Appeal quashed the conviction, citing the lack of sufficient evidence in support of a causal link between the content of the publications and committing terrorist acts. Further, it stated: "The case was not a judgement on Islamic law or theology; it was about the encouragement of unlawful terrorist acts."³³

The Faraz case also reveals the major pitfalls inherent in relying on unsound standards and dubious methods in attempting to make concepts as highly subjective as textual interpretation more tangible. As an example of this, the judge overseeing the trial consented to an interpretation of Qutb's Milestones as being Manichean, separatist, and excessively violent, in part because it was taken to argue that ties of family and other such relations were unimportant.³⁴ However, Leonard Binder, Distinguished Professor of Political Science at UCLA, cites this very argument by Qutb for de-emphasising family ties as introducing liberal values of individualism that could serve an agenda for reform within Islam, offering the foundation for an "Islamic liberalism."³⁵ This is one example of how even a relatively simple concept can be interpreted in radically divergent ways. Government attempts to sanction one interpretation at the expense of another requires the endorsement of a definitive position on what are often abstract ideas and does nothing to counter the root causes of violence. Author Arun Kundnani, remarks: "Government attempts to establish an official interpretation of Islam as a benign monolith are as flawed as campaigns to present Islam as a monolithic threat."³⁶

Prime Minister Cameron's direct allusion to the Woolwich killing in the context of justifying this review is particularly a disquieting and irresponsible manifestation of this trend

of conflating ideology and violent action. Drawing false equivalences, the remark worryingly echoes Saudi Arabia's recent lumping together of the Muslim Brotherhood with al-Qaeda and its branches, affiliates, and other armed groups under the banner of 'designated terrorist organisations', a move condemned by human rights organisations as an attempt to silence political dissent and calls for democratic reform.³⁷

It is strikingly odd that the UK Government should treat as serious allegations levelled by the Egyptian military regime and autocratic regimes in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, especially given the context of the brutal crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood. On the one hand, such allegations have proven to be ill-founded, politically motivated, and incongruous with reality. On the other, calls for such a major review, based on mere allegations of extremism, are disingenuous without a comparable investigation, based on tangible evidence of the military regime's violent actions, rhetoric, and opposition to democracy.

A key charge levelled against the Muslim Brotherhood, which contributed to the Government's decision to conduct this review, is its supposed involvement in carrying out a violent attack on a tourist bus in Sinai in February 2014, which killed three people. However, no evidence has been produced to implicate the group.³⁸ To the contrary, the al-Qaeda-linked group, Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, has claimed responsibility for the attack.³⁹

Particularly puzzling are the Government's instructions to the head of MI6, Sir John Sawers, to oversee the investigation into this incident as part of this public review. Security analysts have highlighted that if such allegations are indeed based on credible information, normal practice would allow MI5, MI6, GCHQ, and Scotland Yard to conduct a routine investigation, whose findings would inform policy, rather than conducting it as part of a review debated in the public domain, whose findings would not be binding.⁴⁰

³⁰ Bingham, J., Sharia law in UK: calls for Parliamentary inquiry, The Telegraph, 23 Mar 2014

³¹ Kundnani, A., The Muslims Are Coming!, Verso, 2014, pp. 107

³² Ibid.

³³ R vs Faraz [2012] EWCA Crim 2820

³⁴ Cited in Qureshi, A. (2012) "Conviction of Thought: How Islamic Concepts are Ruled on in UK Courts." Arches Quarterly, 5 (3), p.175

³⁵ Binder, L., Islamic Liberalism: A Critique of Development Ideologies, University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. 177

³⁶ Kundnani, A., The Muslims Are Coming!, Verso, 2014, pp. 107-8

³⁷ Saudi Arabia: New Terrorism Regulations Assault Rights, Human Rights Watch, 20 March 2014

³⁸ Doyle, C., Cameron's review of the Muslim Brotherhood will end in farce, Al Arabiya, 3 April 2014

³⁹ Sengupta, K., Prime Minister steps into minefield with inquiry into what 'the Muslim Brotherhood is, what it stands for and what its presence is in Britain', The Independent, 1 April 2014

⁴⁰ Ibid.: Stacey, K., Daragahi, B., and Kerr, S., Brotherhood probe stirs UK tensions, Financial Times, 2 April 2014; Doyle, C., Cameron's review of the Muslim Brotherhood will end in farce, Al Arabiya, 3 April 2014



Further allegations of Muslim Brotherhood involvement in promoting violence have proven baseless. Egypt's military regime has repeatedly claimed that, when in power, the Muslim Brotherhood-led government, against the military's advice, had pardoned jailed Islamist militants, who have been responsible for violence. However, records show it was the military administration that pardoned 850 militants before elections brought the Muslim Brotherhood to power, compared with 18 released afterwards.⁴¹

As for the security situation in Sinai, letters from top officials in the ousted administration have stated that the military refused President Mohamed Morsi's request for military action in Sinai. Leaked recordings have corroborated this, showing the head of the armed forces, Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, refusing the job and asserting, "I always stress to the senior people, my mission is not to combat terrorism."⁴²

Muslim Brotherhood supporters have been victims of flagrant human rights abuses perpetrated by the current regime in Egypt. These include the killing of over 1,000 peaceful protesters⁴³, and the sentencing to death of 529 people in March 2014⁴⁴ and a further 683 in April⁴⁵, after what have been decried by human rights organisations as sham trials. Analysts have observed that any action taken against the Muslim Brotherhood as a result of this review, particularly in light of a failure to take action against the military regime's abuses, could be seen as the UK Government condoning these human rights violations.⁴⁶

The UK Government's emphasis on combatting what it terms 'the extremist narrative' of potential 'extreme Islamist organisations' has, paradoxically, caused it to fail to condemn or take action against extremist political violence and rhetoric deployed against such organisations. At best, this reflects the adoption of an ideological position that prefers a totalitarian state that establishes the semblance of a liberal order through

the use of force to a democratic state that establishes the semblance of an Islamic order through free democratic processes. This position is not a new one and is reminiscent of Egypt's colonial past.⁴⁷ At worst, it merely reflects a cynical, instrumentalist approach to foreign relations, in which useful autocrats are preferred to unpredictable democrats, despite all pro-democratic rhetoric.⁴⁸

The UK Government's guidelines for defining extremism disproportionately target practicing Muslims who choose to approach intellectual and political issues from the perspective of their beliefs.⁴⁹ Even a cursory survey of contemporary scholarly debates shows prominent topics to include the critique of concepts such as democracy⁵⁰, secularism⁵¹, liberalism⁵², totalitarianism⁵³, terrorism⁵⁴, the universality of the state⁵⁵, the place of theology in politics⁵⁶, as well as concepts that relate more directly to Islam and Muslims, such as those of the Islamic state⁵⁷ and the Caliphate.⁵⁸ Free discussion of such topics and the critique of such concepts are not off limits in themselves. However, when individuals and groups in Muslim communities initiate such debates, Government guidelines offer the perception that a critical red line has been overstepped.

⁴¹ Kirkpatrick, D. D., Egypt's New Strongman, Sisi Knows Best, The New York Times, 24 May 2014

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Egypt: No Acknowledgment or Justice for Mass Protester Killings, Human Rights Watch, 10 December 2013

⁴⁴ Egypt: Shocking Death Sentences Follow Sham Trial, Human Rights Watch, 25 March 2014

⁴⁵ Egypt: Fresh Assault on Justice, Human Rights Watch, 29 April 2014

⁴⁶ Doyle, C., Cameron's review of the Muslim Brotherhood will end in farce, Al Arabiya, 3 April 2014

⁴⁷ Maghraoui, A. M., Liberalism without Democracy: Nationhood and Citizenship in Egypt, 1922-1936, Duke University Press, 2006

⁴⁸ Malik, K., A Brotherhood Inquiry in Bad Faith, The New York Times, 21 April 2014

⁴⁹ Tackling Extremism in the UK: An Ideological Attack on Muslim Communities, CAGE, 13 December 2013

⁵⁰ Graham, G., The Case Against the Democratic State, Imprint Academic, 2002

⁵¹ Smith, S. D., The Disenchantment of Secular Discourse, Harvard University Press, 2010

⁵² Wallerstein, I., After Liberalism, The New Press, 1995; Kahn, P. W., Putting Liberalism in its Place, Princeton University Press, 2005

⁵³ Zizek, S., Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?, Verso, 2011

⁵⁴ Honderich, T., Terrorism for Humanity: Inquiries in Political Philosophy, Pluto Press, 2003

⁵⁵ Spruyt, H., The Sovereign State and Its Competitors: an Analysis of Systems Change, Princeton University Press, 1994

⁵⁶ Robbins, J. W., Radical Democracy and Political Theology, Columbia University Press, 2011

⁵⁷ Hallaq, W. B., The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament, Columbia University Press, 2013

⁵⁸ Al-Rasheed, M., Kersten, C., & Shterin, M. (Eds.), Demystifying the Caliphate, Hurst & Company, 2013

A common refrain in alarmist discourses surrounding the Muslim Brotherhood's democratic rise to power has been the claim that, once elected, the group would instate an illiberal order based on 'an extreme interpretation of Islam'. This concern has proven false, as demonstrated in the case of Ennahda, the group's Tunisian affiliate. However, Brookings Institution fellow Shadi Hamid observes that even if such claims are accepted, "the notion that liberalism is "neutral" can be accepted only within a liberal framework. Islamists cannot fully express their Islamism in a strictly secular state. The feelings of alienation that a liberal might feel in a hypothetical "Islamic democracy" are probably not too dissimilar [from what an Islamist might feel in a liberal democracy]."⁶⁰ He recommends that the ideology and ideas of such groups "need to be taken seriously as something deeply and honestly felt," and that "[t]he lesson of the Arab Spring isn't that Islamist parties are inimical to democracy, but that democracy, or even a semblance of it, is impossible without them."⁶¹

⁶⁰ Tunisia's Ennahda to oppose sharia in constitution, Reuters, 26 March 2012

⁶¹ Hamid, S., The Brotherhood Will Be Back, The New York Times, 23 May 2014 Ibid.



Concerns regarding integrity

“ I’ve commissioned this piece of work by a very experienced and senior ambassador, John Jenkins, who is our ambassador in Saudi Arabia.”⁶² - David Cameron

A number of key concerns remain relating to this review’s integrity and potential pressures that might have been exerted in calling for it. These include possible pre-judgement, the influence of industry, the review’s timing, the choice of its head, and its potential outcomes.

Evidence suggests the Government had already formed a premature opinion of the Muslim Brotherhood well before calling for this review. Upon his visit to Egypt as the first foreign leader since the start of the Revolution, Prime Minister Cameron took the peculiar step of publicising his decision to meet with all groups in the Egyptian political arena except the Muslim Brotherhood. When asked why, he stated that deciding between the Muslim Brotherhood and the old regime was “part of the problem” and he wanted to offer young people “something to believe in other than a more extreme Islamic route.”⁶³

Another concern is the influence of the defence industry and its clients on the Government. On the same February 2011 trip, Cameron had been criticised for being accompanied by a defence sales team.⁶⁴ Concerns have been raised that this review was launched just six weeks after BAE Systems struck a major sales deal with the Saudis and just three weeks after Saudi Arabia’s designation of the Muslim Brotherhood as a ‘terrorist organisation’.⁶⁵ This is particularly troubling in light of revelations that the previous Labour government had submitted to threats from Saudi royals, to the effect that they would make it easier for terrorists to attack London unless corruption investigations into their arms deals were halted. This implies a disturbing pattern in which our democratically elected government and the security of the British people are held to ransom by the whims of foreign regimes and big business interests.

The review’s timing also raises the spectre of Saudi and Emirati pressure. Although Downing Street has denied the



review is aimed at banning the organisation, senior UK officials have admitted to having been put “under huge

⁶² Cameron, D., David Cameron on the Muslim Brotherhood investigation [video], ITN, 1 April 2014

⁶³ Snubbed by Cameron, Egypt Islamists signal intent, Reuters, 21 February 2011: With David Cameron in Egypt, Bagehot’s notebook, The Economist, 21 February 2011

⁶⁴ Morris, N., Cameron attacked for Egypt visit with defence sales team in tow, The Independent, 22 February 2011

⁶⁵ Osborne, P., The Muslim Brotherhood: Why is Cameron taking orders from bloodstained generals and playboy princes?, The Telegraph, 2 April 2014

⁶⁶ Leigh, D., and Evans, R., BAE: secret papers reveal threats from Saudi prince, The Guardian, Thursday 14 February 2008

pressure, as have the Americans, from the Saudis to do something about the Muslim Brotherhood.”⁶⁷ Similar pressure seems to have accompanied Saudi Arabia’s \$12 billion grant to Egypt’s military regime⁶⁸, as reflected in General El-Sisi’s shift in narrative regarding the government he deposed. In the direct aftermath of the coup, he repeatedly framed his actions as an uninvited but necessary last resort after failing to convince President Morsi of ways to remain in office. However, he has since increasingly argued that the essential nature of the Muslim Brotherhood and its ideological fabric pose existential threats to Egypt.⁶⁹

A major concern stems from the announcement that the review is to be headed by Britain’s current ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Sir John Jenkins. The point has been highlighted most forcefully by former ambassador to Saudi Arabia Lord Wright of Richmond, as well as other members of the House of Lords.⁷⁰ Commentators have noted the choice casts a distasteful political dimension on the review that seriously damages its credibility, even if the Government’s denial of conflict of interest is accepted.⁷¹

The review can lead to no good outcome, regardless of its findings. Anything less than proscribing the Muslim Brotherhood will lead to worsened relations with allies in the Gulf and the emergent regime in Egypt. Declaring the Muslim Brotherhood an extremist organisation would lead to heightened anti-British sentiment throughout the Muslim world, where the group enjoys vast support. Whatever gains might be made in clarifying British policy will be negligible by comparison.

⁶⁷ Stacey, K., Daragahi, B., and Kerr, S., Brotherhood probe stirs UK tensions, *Financial Times*, 2 April 2014

⁶⁸ Nordland, R., Saudi Arabia Promises to Aid Egypt’s Regime, *The New York Times*, 19 August 2013

⁶⁹ Kirkpatrick, D. D., Egypt’s New Strongman, Sisi Knows Best, *The New York Times*, 24 May 2014

⁷⁰ Debates and Oral Answers, Columns 1244-6, House of Lords debate, Tuesday 8 April 2014

⁷¹ Doyle, C., Cameron’s review of the Muslim Brotherhood will end in farce, *Al Arabiya*, 3 April 2014; Malik, K., A Brotherhood Inquiry in Bad Faith, *The New York Times*, 21 April 2014; Osborne, P., The Muslim Brotherhood: Why is Cameron taking orders from bloodstained generals and playboy princes?, *The Telegraph*, 2 April 2014

Conclusion

The Muslim Brotherhood is no shadowy organisation with obscure motives or a questionable commitment to democracy. It is the longest standing group opposed to autocratic rule in the Middle East. Further, it is no marginal extreme group operating on the fringe of the political spectrum, but rather enjoys exceedingly wide support, as demonstrated by successive electoral victories.

The UK Government should make serious changes to the way it defines extremism, distancing itself from the ideologically charged conflation of thoughts and actions. It must recognise that its current guidelines marginalise vulnerable minority communities at home and alienate foreign populations abroad.

Concerns regarding the integrity of this review ought to be taken seriously to safeguard the independence of its findings and the credibility of the UK Government. In particular, the public must be assured that foreign regimes and private corporations hold no sway over British policy or security.

Political and ideological oppression must be condemned and rejected. After decades of brutal suppression under successive regimes in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood achieved clear victories in the country's first free parliamentary and presidential elections. A new wave of repression led by the current regime will not end the stalemate - it will only prolong it.

Sayyid Qutb, the Muslim Brotherhood figure most often associated with allegations of advocating 'violent extremism', says: "Islam is not after replacing foreign despotism with a national one. All tyranny is the same. What Islam is after is the freedom of people so that they can make their choice in complete freedom."⁷²



⁷² Qutb, S., In the Shade of the Qur'an, Volume XV, Salahi, A. (Trans.), The Islamic Foundation, 2008, pp. ix-xii

CAGE
27 Old Gloucester Street
London
WC1N 3XX

Telephone: 0207 277 6700
Email: contact@cageuk.org
Website: www.cageuk.org

CAGE

Witness | Empower | Justice