

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

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Opening Statement

Rep. Stephen F. Lynch, Ranking Member

Hearing on “The Muslim Brotherhood’s Global Threat”

July 11, 2018

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I’d like to thank you for holding this hearing to examine the multi-national political, religious, and social movement known as the Muslim Brotherhood. I’d also like to thank our witnesses for helping this Subcommittee with its work.

The independent Program on Extremism at George Washington University describes the Muslim Brotherhood – founded in Egypt in 1928 – as “the world’s oldest and arguably most influential contemporary Islamist movement.” While the Muslim Brotherhood spans the Middle East and Africa and has spread into Southeast Asia and the West, it has manifested itself globally in varied forms – ranging from non-violent political actors to groups that have resorted to terrorism. According to the Program on Extremism, chapters, affiliated groups, and radical offshoots inspired by the Brotherhood’s Islamist ideology are marked by their adaptability to the local political conditions of a given country, their pursuit of individual organizational goals, and their “complete operational independence.”

The central Brotherhood body in Egypt officially renounced terrorism and violence under the Sadat regime in the 1970s. However, there is no doubt that certain affiliated organizations and spawn groups continue to espouse and engage in violent terrorist activity. Chief among them is Hamas, which has been designated as a foreign terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department since 1997. The original charter issued to establish Hamas in 1988 identified the terrorist group as “the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood.”

Muslim Brotherhood splinter groups like HASM also continue to engage in violence in Egypt. These organizations have perpetrated assassination attempts against Egyptian defense and security officials and bombings against government sites – including attacks against a police training center in the city of Tanta and the Myanmar Embassy in Cairo in 2017.

Meanwhile, democratically-elected political parties that also fall within the Muslim Brotherhood umbrella represent significant voting blocs in the parliaments and governing coalitions of some of our key counterterrorism allies in the Middle East and North Africa. In Jordan, which has served as the most critical regional ally in our coalition efforts to degrade and destroy the Islamic State, Brotherhood-affiliated opposition parties such as the Islamic Action Front hold several seats in the Jordanian Assembly. In Morocco, which remains a reliable regional partner in U.S. efforts to counter extremism and combat the Islamic State, the Islamist Justice and Development Party leads the coalition government. Ennahda, the main Islamist party in Tunisia, similarly leads the coalition government and has overseen its democratic transition since 2011. The State Department lists Tunisia along with Jordan and Morocco as our committed partner in the coalition to defeat the Islamic State.

In light of the multifaceted composition of the Muslim Brotherhood, our national security strategy under Republican and Democratic administrations alike has focused on identifying the terrorist threats posed by individual affiliates and leaders. Most recently, the State Department listed the president of Hamas' political bureau as a "specially-designated global terrorist," in January 2018, stemming from his ties with Hamas' military wing. The two Brotherhood branches involved in the 2017 terrorist attacks in Egypt also received this designation.

It is my understanding that some of my colleagues in Congress have called for the Trump Administration to go further and designate the Muslim Brotherhood in its entirety as a foreign terrorist organization— as Egypt, Saudi Arabi, Syria, Russia, and the United Arab Emirates have done. The effectiveness of our counterterrorism and force protection operations in the Middle East and North Africa demand that we approach this issue with great caution.

A wholesale designation would complicate our relationship with regional security partners, including Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco, Turkey, and Kuwait, where the Muslim Brotherhood functions within mainstream government and society. Former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson underscored this challenge during his congressional testimony last year: *"I think you can appreciate the complexities this enters into our relations with governments where the Muslim Brotherhood has matriculated to become participants- and in those elements they have done so by renouncing violence and terrorism."*

It could also further escalate the tension in the Middle East, which is already operating in a heightened state of conflict and where we still have 2,000 U.S. troops on the ground in Syria and an estimated 6,000 troops still deployed in Iraq. Just last month, Mr. Issa of California and I led a bipartisan congressional delegation to the Middle East to assess regional security and stability amidst the eighth year of civil war in Syria and the fourth year of civil war in Yemen. As we discussed during bilateral meetings with King Abdullah of Jordan, President el-Sisi of Egypt, Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel, and other allied leaders and military officials.

National security currently demands that we deconflict the chaos coming the multi-layered conflicts. The Muslim Brotherhood is experiencing significant decline in many countries the Middle East. Its social conservatism is being rejected by a younger generation that is leading to and accelerating that decline. It would be counterintuitive if we lumped political actors – nonviolent, non-terrorists—in with the groups that we wish to designate for their violent and terrorist activities.

I would hope that our witnesses would give us direction on how to best isolate those who engage in unacceptable terrorist activity and not inadvertently give support to those very same individuals.

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