

**Ambassador Daniel Benjamin (ret.)**  
**John Sloan Dickey Center for International Understanding**  
**Dartmouth College**  
**The Muslim Brotherhood's Global Threat**  
**Testimony Before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform**  
**Subcommittee on National Security**  
**Washington, DC**  
**July 11, 2018**

Chairman DeSantis, Ranking Member Lynch, Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for inviting me to appear here today. The subject of the Muslim Brotherhood remains one of broad interest both for policymakers and the public. I welcome the opportunity to contribute to a discussion that could have important consequences for our nation's relationship with the Muslim world and, ultimately, our national security.

As a starting point, I would like to address the title of this hearing: "The Muslim Brotherhood's Global Threat." I do so because I believe it is important to deal with two questions the title begs. The first is whether there is a singular entity entitled the Muslim Brotherhood. The second is whether that entity – or some group of Muslim Brotherhood branches or affiliates – represent a genuine global threat.

With regard to the first question, this answer is fairly straightforward. As scholars, intelligence analysts and policymakers in past administrations have come to agree, there is no singular, monolithic Muslim Brotherhood. Founded in the 1920s in Egypt by Hassan al-Banna, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood inspired and even assisted in the creation of many of other branches in other countries, including Jordan, Syria, Tunisia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Some countries have Islamist parties that have ties to the Brotherhood of varying kinds. But decades after the genesis of the Egyptian *Ikhwan*, there is no central administration linking these disparate groups. In character and matters of doctrine, they vary greatly.

For example, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt is an outlawed organization, many of whose members are incarcerated or on the run. In Jordan, the Brotherhood supports a legitimate political party, The Islamic Front, which has played an important – even central – role in Jordan's parliament. The Kuwaiti Brotherhood's party is also a legitimate member that country's parliament. In Morocco, the PJD, or Justice and Development Party, which has held the prime minister's position, is also said to be linked to the Muslim Brotherhood. Tunisia's Ennahda is frequently characterized as having ties to the Tunisian Brotherhood, though the party has probably confounded the expectations of Muslim Brotherhood members elsewhere by saying that it is separating politics from religion. Ennahda's inclination toward conciliation and cooperation have made it a major supporter of the democratic development of that country. Interestingly, a female member of Ennahda was elected mayor of Tunis just last week, and she does not wear a veil – another demonstration of heterogeneity among groups described as belonging to the Brotherhood.

It worth underscoring: No serious researcher has yet demonstrated durable links between these groups that could be described as ones of command and control. If one of the questions looming behind the title of today's hearing is whether the Muslim Brotherhood should be designated as a foreign terrorist organization by the State Department, then the answer would have to be no for several reasons of which is that the Muslim Brotherhood does not have the first desideratum of being "a foreign organization." While many organizations have links to the original Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, there is no single foreign organization.

Does the Muslim Brotherhood constitute a global threat? Here too, I would answer that it does not. Most of the groups that are said to be Muslim Brotherhood affiliates or franchises support democracy and abjure violence. The Egyptian Brotherhood has foresworn violence since the 1970s, and there is no compelling evidence that it has reversed course on that issue. It is noteworthy that two Egyptian MB splinter groups, Liwa al Thawra and HASM, were designated early this year under Executive Order 13224 as terrorist organizations, and both do indeed have a record of violence. It is, however, fallacious to say that this is a sign of the Brotherhood's return to violence. These groups appear to have split off because their members wanted to commit violence while the Brotherhood as a whole did not.

The Palestinian terrorist group Hamas is often described as the Muslim Brotherhood's Palestinian chapter, so it is worth discussing in this context. There is no doubt that at its inception, Hamas has ties to the Egyptian Brotherhood. But it is a mistake at this point to say that the group is an affiliate of the Brotherhood. Hamas has its own charter and a history of foreign relations – including with Iran – that no other Brotherhood group would sanction. If we are being precise about our language, Hamas is certainly not an affiliate of any other Brotherhood entity in the way that, say, al Qaeda in Arabian Peninsula is an affiliate of al Qaeda. The group does not take orders from any other entity. It is, I would add, in no way a global organization, and thus not a global threat. Moreover, it is worth noting that Hamas has historically restrained – sometimes violently – jihadi groups in Gaza that sought to target Israel with catastrophic attack. Though it carries on its own offensives against Israel, Hamas has not sought to carry out the massive attacks against Israel that were characteristic of al Qaeda for fear that it would elicit a devastating Israeli invasion of Gaza or rule the group out as a possible future negotiating partner for Israel. It is also worth noting that for all the opprobrium that both Egypt and Saudi Arabia have heaped on the Muslim Brotherhood, both have engaged with Hamas. Egypt's security discussions with Hamas are well known; King Salman has courted the group and hosted its leadership in the Kingdom just three years ago in an effort to prevent it from renewing its ties to Iran

To be clear, I have no particular sympathy for the Muslim Brotherhood. The Egyptian group, for example, often delivers hate-filled anti-American and anti-Western pronouncements that are truly repellent. But if there is a threat emanating from the various organizations that can be grouped as part of a Brotherhood family, it is that the repression against them may cause them to decide that violence is their only option.

Anyone looking for the place where the next great jihadist wave will break would have to consider Egypt a strong possibility. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood has hundreds of thousands of members and, despite the poor governance of Mohamed Morsi, millions of

sympathizers. The widespread use of extrajudicial killing, indiscriminate incarceration and torture has created a situation in which moderate Islamists – people who want their society to be more Islamic but do not support violence – have no good options. They can capitulate and abandon their beliefs, which most religious believers are unlikely to do. Or they may come to see themselves as being cornered and having no alternative but to take up arms. It is important to remember that jihadism emerged in Egypt – and specifically from the notorious Tora Prison – amid the persecutions of the Nasser period. It will be a tragedy if that lesson has been forgotten, and a renewed jihadist movement again emerges from Egypt's jails.

Let me make a few more observations: First, the Trump administration evaluated the Muslim Brotherhood immediately after coming into office and determined that there was no legal basis to designate the group. Although there has been much speculative writing in the press about the orientation of Muslim Brotherhood, the State Department's decision not to designate is telling. The Department's decisions are not based on open-source information of uncertain quality. Instead, designation decisions are based on all-source information, including classified intelligence. The fact that such a review took place, and that the wishes of senior policymakers to designate the group were well known, tells a clear story. No basis was found for designating was found at the time, and I am unaware of any indication that there is more of a basis now. That fact should play an important role regarding any deliberations about the United States's posture toward the *Ikwhan*.

A final point: Policymakers and legislators, like physicians, must keep in mind the injunction to do no harm. A hardline approach to Muslim Brotherhood groups and their members could well do significant harm. The U.S. may be enjoying improved relations with some Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, but its reputation globally among Muslims is at a low point due to President Trump's travel ban, his loose talk about a Muslim ban or a registry of Muslims and an array of negative comments about Muslims. The U.S. faces continuing threat from jihadist terrorist violence. Unwise actions to target Muslim Brotherhood groups will only deepen the animus against America, and we should not be doing anything that helps our enemies attract more recruits. Since the Egyptian Brotherhood and al Qaeda have been sworn enemies – the anti-Brotherhood animus of al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri is legendary – driving the groups into an embrace would be a first-class strategic blunder. Intelligence assessments leaked to the press have expressed concern about precisely this kind of consequence from a designation or other measures against Brotherhood groups.

This is not just a problem in other countries. Muslims here in the U.S. who already feel discomfited by the rhetoric and actions of the administration may become more alienated, a development with potentially negative effects. The last thing the U.S. needs is to accelerate radicalization at home. Even short of that, anything that contributes to the estrangement of the American Muslim community should be avoided. U.S. law enforcement relies on its ties with the Muslim community for a large portion of the tips it gets about potential bad actors. Damaging that relationship make no sense whatsoever.

Thank you for your time and attention, and I look forward to your questions.

**Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
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**Daniel Benjamin** has been the Director of the John Sloan Dickey Center for International Understanding at Dartmouth College since 2013. Ambassador Benjamin was nominated by President Obama to serve as Ambassador-at-Large and Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the State Department and confirmed by the United States Senate in May 2009. In that position, he was Secretary Hillary Clinton's principal advisor on issues related to terrorism, countering violent extremism and homeland security. Before joining the Obama Administration, Benjamin was director of the Center on the United States and Europe at the Brookings Institution. During more than five years on the National Security Council staff in the 1990s, Benjamin served as a foreign policy speechwriter and Special Assistant to President Bill Clinton and as Director for Transnational Threats.

Benjamin is the co-author of *The Age of Sacred Terror* (2002), which was awarded the Arthur Ross Prize of the Council on Foreign Relations and was named a New York Times Notable Book and a Washington Post Best Book of 2002. He has written on international affairs for The New York Times, Politico, TIME Magazine and many other publications. Benjamin began his career as a journalist and was a foreign correspondent for TIME Magazine and Germany Bureau Chief for The Wall Street Journal. He holds degrees from Harvard and Oxford, where he was a Marshall Scholar.