



(amended)

Update: The Muslim Brotherhood Who Is Behind the Effort to Declare the Muslim Brotherhood a Terrorist Organization?

*By Roxanne Perugino
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The issue of designating the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) a foreign terrorist organization (FTO) has gained momentum in recent months.

During an April 13 hearing before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa, Representative David Trott (R-Michigan), a cosponsor of the House bill designating the MB a FTO, Ron DeSantis (R-Florida) and Darrell Issa (R-California), all questioned Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Anne Patterson, at length. Trott demanded to know why the Administration has resisted declaring the MB a terrorist organization given the “overwhelming” evidence of the MB’s involvement in and support for terrorism.

Patterson emphatically told the panel that the Obama Administration does not view the MB as a terrorist organization. The MB has denounced terrorism and the US views it as a legitimate political party. When pressed by members she said some elements of the MB might be involved in terrorist acts, but not as an organization. Trott was quite vocal in his criticism of the Administration’s refusal to designate the MB as a terrorist organization. He intends to pressure the House Leadership to bring the legislation to a floor vote. Patterson was repeating long-held US policy. During a February 25 hearing before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Secretary of State John Kerry told the panel that the Administration carefully assesses the Muslim Brotherhood’s status and while individuals of the organization have been designated terrorists, the Muslim Brotherhood “... writ large is not a terrorist organization.”



Background

The legislation had been dormant since its introduction on November 3, 2015. However, it gained renewed momentum following a House Judiciary Committee markup in February of this year.

On February 24, 2016, the House Judiciary Committee approved HR3892, the Muslim Brotherhood Terrorist Designation Act of 2015, with an amendment, by a vote of 17-10. The legislation urges the State Department to designate the Muslim Brotherhood a FTO. The bill was introduced last November by Representative Mario Diaz-Balart (R-Florida), and four Republican cosponsors and referred to the Judiciary Committee. Diaz-Balart denied the bill was aimed directly at Egypt, but according to lobbying records reviewed by Al Monitor, Diaz-Balart's office had been in touch with Egypt's lobbyists before introducing the bill. In the Senate, Senator Ted Cruz (R-Texas) introduced an identical bill on the same day S2230, a bill to designate the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization.) The Senate bill is pending before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and no action has yet been scheduled.

The House bill requires the Secretary of State to include in a report to twelve Congressional committees (a ridiculously large number of committees), a detailed justification of why the Muslim Brotherhood has not been designated as a FTO if it meets the criteria. The bill also would require the Secretary of State to explain what criteria have not been met if the Department determines that the Muslim Brotherhood does not qualify as a FTO.

If enacted, HR 3892 would have a threefold effect. The Administration would actually have to deny admittance to aliens tied to the Muslim Brotherhood; persons who provide material support to the Muslim Brotherhood would be subject to federal criminal penalties; and the Treasury Department would be able to require US financial institutions possessing or controlling any assets of the Muslim Brotherhood to block all financial transactions involving those assets.



Who is Lobbying for the Legislation?

Despite the clear, unequivocal response from both Patterson and Secretary of State Kerry, there are forces, other than members of Congress, who are pushing for the bill's passage, including Egypt and its lobbyists in Washington, the Coptic Solidarity movement, a number of Neocons, and presidential candidate Donald Trump. While Trump may not be personally lobbying for the legislation, his provocative statements on the MB have raised the debate and fueled anti-Muslim hysteria in the US.

The Egyptian Embassy in Washington has given the highest priority to enacting the legislation. Embassy staff have been urging members of Congress to support the legislation. There is speculation, however, that the Egyptian Ministry of Defense is less enthusiastic about the legislation. It believes that priority should be given to the US-Egyptian military relationship. Whether the Defense Ministry's view will diminish support for the legislation remains to be seen.

Other supporters of the legislation are continuing their efforts. On April 7, Coptic Solidarity asked its supporters to send messages to their representatives and senators asking them to cosponsor the bill and push for passage. Coptic Solidarity seeks to help Copts of Egypt and supports working for democracy, freedom and protection of the fundamental rights of all Egyptian citizens. It is virulently opposed to the MB. Alex Halaby, Coptic Solidarity President, believes it is "unconscionable" that the US has not taken action against the MB when Egypt, the UAE, Russia, Saudi Arabia and even Syrian have all declared the MB a terrorist organization.



Another right-wing group, the Clarion Project has come out in support of the legislation. The Clarion Project is a Washington, DC based nonprofit organization founded in 2006. It touts itself as the world's leading website for authoritative, up-to-date news on Islamic extremism, Sharia law and human rights. Clarion has been involved in the production and distribution of films such as *Obsession: Radical Islam's War against the West*; *The Third Jihad*; *Uranium and Honor Diaries*. On April 7, it published an article – *The Counter Jihad Report* -- supporting the legislation. <https://counterjihadreport.com/>

Neocon Frank Gaffney, President of the Center for Security Policy in Washington is another frequent critic of the MB and supporter of the legislation. He recently published an article in *The Hill*, criticizing members of Congress who met with members of the United States Council of Muslim Organizations on April 18. Gaffney article is [here](#).

Even the British Government has weighed in on the Muslim Brotherhood, but not specifically on the legislation. In December 2015, the British Government has issued a “blistering report on the MB entitled “Muslim Brotherhood Review”. The Report’s findings contradict the Obama Administration’s view of the MB alleging that the MB promotes violence, seeks world domination of Sharia, and views other religions as illegitimate. The Report goes on to claim that the MB has justified the killing of US and other coalition forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. Steve Emerson, a right-wing pundit on national security, terrorism and Islamic extremism who directs the Investigative Project on Terrorism has hailed the Report as a confirmation of what he and other groups have been saying about the Muslim Brotherhood.

Prospects for Enactment into Law

The legislation is misguided, harmful to US national interests, and potentially contributes to instability in Egypt and the broader Middle East. Although there has been an intensive lobbying effort in support of the bill, the House bill, HR3892 has only 48 cosponsors, all Republicans, except for one Democrat, while the Senate bill has only two cosponsors: Senators



Ron Johnson (R-Wisconsin) and Orrin Hatch (R-Utah). The bill does not have bipartisan support.

Even if passed by the House, the Senate must pass the legislation in order for to be enacted. It would be irresponsible of the Senate if the legislation were not the subject of a hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee before a full Senate vote. Whether or not there will be a hearing is up to Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Corker (R-Tennessee) who is more concerned with writing an Iran sanctions bill. For these reasons, and given the short time left in the legislative session, owing to an election year, and the pressure for more important legislation, such as the annual appropriations bills, it appears unlikely that the legislation will be enacted into law. Moreover, given the Administration's opposition it seems almost certain the President would veto the bill it were passed.