



Oral evidence: [Political Islam](#),

HC 897

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Members present: Crispin Blunt (Chair); Mr John Baron; Mike Gapes; Stephen Gethins; Mr Adam Holloway; Daniel Kawczynski; Yasmin Qureshi; Andrew Rosindell; Nadhim Zahawi

Questions 41-105

Witnesses: **Ibrahim Mounir**, Deputy Supreme Guide, Muslim Brotherhood, **Dr Anas Altikriti**, Chief Executive Officer and founder, the Cordoba Foundation, **Dr Radwan Masmoudi**, adviser to Rached Ghannouchi, President of the AnNahda party, Tunisia, and **Sondos Asem**, former Foreign Media Co-ordinator at the office of President Mohamed Morsi, Egypt, gave evidence.

Please note that a subsequent translation of the words spoken by Mr Munir in Arabic is included amongst the written evidence—see [ISL0058](#).

Q41 Chair: Welcome to this afternoon's meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee, where we are taking evidence as part of our inquiry into political Islam. For the benefit of our witnesses and the people who have taken an interest in this evidence session, let me try to put the inquiry into context. The whole role of wider political Islam has been very important in the development of the politics of the region over the last four or five years. There are theses out there that the successful development of political Islam will be a bulwark against a move to violent extremism. Equally, there are views that political Islam, as it has developed in various parts of the region, is a gateway to violent extremism. There has been some controversy about the British Government's report into the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. It is the role of this Committee to oversee the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in particular, and for us to come to our view on where the merits of these arguments lie.

I just want to say, in that respect, that I am extremely grateful for the quality of the witnesses who have come to give us evidence today. You will find that the questions are intended to be quite sharp and direct. That does not mean that we have come to a view. We are testing propositions, and therefore we invite your replies to quite direct questions about the direction of political Islam, which you are responsible for. We will try to direct the questions to individuals, where appropriate. I invite my colleagues to make matters straightforward for the interpreter for Mr Mounir with crisp, short questions. May I say to the interpreter that it is extremely important to understand that, although you might be a person who could have

given evidence to us yourself, you must do your best to translate the questions faithfully and translate Mr Mounir's views faithfully, and not advance your own interpretation.

So that is the context. I believe that we are going to be interrupted for votes at 4 o'clock. I am uncertain as to how long that break will be. It might be 15 minutes, it might be 45—I don't know. It will be my objective to reconvene after that and try to complete this session by 5.30 pm.

I will perhaps ask all of you the same question to start with. In the very substantial amount of written evidence that this inquiry has already received, there is a deal of discussion about the term "political Islam". Some of you have expressed your own reservations about the use of that term. If you have reservations about how the term is used and understood, can you explain to the Committee your concerns and your definition of political Islam? Perhaps I can start with you, Dr Masmoudi.

Dr Masmoudi: Thank you very much. It is a great pleasure to be with you today. I think "political Islam" is probably the most misunderstood and vague term used in politics today around the world. It is used to describe various political parties, some moderate, some extremist, some even violent. It is simply not a clear term and it has been dangerously misinterpreted by people who claim to represent Islam, to work on behalf of Islam or to defend Islam. It is basically used to refer to political parties that have Islam as one of their sources of values or ideas, but it is not well defined at all and I think it has been abused a lot by many groups. It is a dangerous terminology.

Q42 Chair: That caution is noted. Dr Masmoudi, I should introduce you for the record. You are an adviser to Mr Rached Ghannouchi, the president of the AnNahda party.

Dr Masmoudi: I am.

Q43 Chair: Turning to Mr Mounir, you are the Deputy Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood and you were appointed to that position in 2013 after the removal of the Brotherhood from power in Egypt. Is that correct and does it properly describe your position?

Ibrahim Mounir: Yes, thank you.

Q44 Chair: Do you have reservations about how the term "political Islam" is used?

Ibrahim Mounir (Translation): The term "political Islam" is new to Islamic culture, since in Islam we don't know something called "political Islam" and "non-political Islam", because Islam comprises the whole aspect of life. It is a very comprehensive religion and it covers all kinds of activities, whether it is political work, social work or humane work in relief and charitable deeds and actions. Therefore, we find it an alien terminology from the viewpoint of Islam. The Muslim is required, according to Islam, to be active in all these venues, but abiding by the constitution, the laws and the legislation of Government and society.

Q45 Chair: Okay. We will have some follow-up questions on that issue. Dr Altikriti, you are chief executive officer of the Cordoba Foundation and chairman of the Muslim Association of Great Britain?

Dr Altikriti: Correct. I think that the problem with the term “political Islam” is also present in the way this panel was addressed in the email that was sent to us, that we are “senior Islamist figures”. That in itself is also problematic. In today’s language we have several problems of terms which have been coined in themselves and are identifiable, but the meaning of which is far from being agreed upon. From the submissions that you have received, from what you have just told us, and from what you are going to hear today, you will find that same variance. I always have a problem with terms when I see that the players and actors upon whom a term is foisted differ between themselves on what it means. Then we have a problem with the term.

To identify exactly what it is that we hope to address today, I think that we are talking about something which is akin to the Christian Democrats, just to bring an example of something that we all know culturally and historically and from our memories. I think that we are talking about a spectrum of political life today which involves religious movements—Islamic movements—which have something to say on a political level. As I said in my submission, that spectrum is extremely broad. It starts from the extreme right, where we have those who wish to enforce change by any means available to them on a political level. Then there are those who wish to engage with political life, but who abhor violence and reject it in any way and unconditionally. So we have that broad spectrum.

The problem that emerges is from that very spectrum. In Britain we have the likes of Hizb ut-Tahrir, for instance, which dissuades people from any kind of engagement in political systems in Britain or elsewhere. We also have the likes of Ibrahim Mounir, who is from the Muslim Brotherhood, and the kind of thought which promotes political engagement. To have those varied viewpoints and standpoints within one particular label is in itself problematic, but it is something that we will have to contend with simply because it has become an icon and a reality of life. I hope that we can slightly decipher this throughout the discussions this afternoon.

Q46 Chair: Ms Asem, I put the same question to you. I invite you to introduce yourself first. Thank you very much for coming. It is not often that we have had a witness who is under sentence of death. Obviously, the fact that you are a witness to our Committee may suggest some view of the merits of the jurisprudence process you have gone through. Perhaps you could introduce yourself for the record and then, if you have a view on the use of “political Islam”, please give it to the Committee.

Sondos Asem: Thank you very much for this opportunity. My name is Sondos Asem and I am from Egypt. I am currently an independent scholar, but previously I served in the office of President Mohamed Morsi as foreign media co-ordinator. Concerning the topic at hand and the definition of “political Islam”, I agree with the previous comments that it should be dealt with very cautiously. As a term, “political Islam” is not something that Islamic parties or parties with an Islamic reference have chosen for themselves. I think it is mostly an academic term, just like the term “Islamists”. I think it is important to be cautious with the characterisation and the accuracy of it.

Also, it is a spectrum, not one thing. Parties that have an Islamic reference are not one and the same. In Egypt, for example, where I come from, after the Arab Spring different parties were collectively characterised as Islamist. For example, there was the Muslim Brotherhood, on the one hand, which established the Freedom and Justice Party in the

aftermath of the 2011 revolution. There were also the Salafists, who actually had more than one party representing their ideology. There were also parties that were sort of inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood ideology but which chose to have their own independent existence, such as the al-Wasat party or the Strong Egypt party. Each of these parties advocated different political platforms after the Arab Spring.

I think that we should judge these different political parties based on how each party reacted in the aftermath of the revolution, on what their stances were on different policies and on their track record in general. I think it is important to distinguish between them, and not to conflate all parties together as one thing. Of course, I do not consider violent extremists as one form of political Islam. This is a totally independent phenomenon, which I think is terrorism. Terrorism is terrorism. I don't think they even believe in politics as an idea or a practice.

Q47 Yasmin Qureshi: I think there is a perception in the western world that somehow democracy and Islam are not compatible. I think this often arises with reference to what is happening in the Middle East, where there are obviously a lot of kingdoms and a lack of democratic processes. But, if you look at some larger Muslim nations such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia or Malaysia, they seem to have a tradition of elections and parties and yet they would call themselves an Islamic state. Can I therefore ask you, how do you define democracy and its relationship with Islam?

Dr Masmoudi: Of course, that is a very difficult question. I am also the President of the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy, which is based in Washington DC. I have been the President for 17 years, so we have been working on this issue since 1999, even before 9/11.

Basically, Muslims are struggling with modernity—what does it mean to be Muslim in the 21st century, and how can we combine Islamic values with the values of modernity, democracy being probably one of the most important values of modernity? Of course, democracy means tolerance and the accountability of the government. It is not just elections but also freedoms: freedom of expression, freedom of organisation, equality before the law, citizenship, the idea of citizenship. A lot of these values are modern values, they are new values. Most of Islamic jurisprudence was written a thousand years ago, or in the first three centuries of Islam, so you do not find any reference to these terms, or to these ideas in it. So we are struggling in the Islamic world with how we understand Islam in the 21st century.

The overwhelming majority of Muslims believe, of course, that the Koran is the literal word of God. We are bound by the Koran—that is what God wants us to do. But how do we understand it in the context of modern society and modern life? This problem is tough, it is difficult, especially when we have dictatorships ruling most of the Arab and Muslim world, where there is no opportunity for even discussing these ideas. I think this has been the problem. The main reason for the rise of violence, extremism and radicalism in the Arab Muslim world is dictatorship because it has not allowed free expression or discussion of ideas such as what does it mean to be Muslim in the 21st century? How do we understand Islam in the 21st century?

This is why democracy is so important. Democracy is the key to enter modernity, to enter a modern life, even to be able to interpret Islam. Of course, there will be different interpretations: this is normal. That is why we need discussions and we need freedoms to listen to various opinions and ideas, and to emerge from that with a modern interpretation of Islam.

Our goal in Tunisia is to prove that Islam and democracy are compatible, that we do not have to choose between being Muslim and being a democrat. We believe that the two are completely compatible, and that is how we have to modernise. It takes time, so we have to be patient with the process. The process is not instantaneous. There is no country that was able to build democracy in one or two years; it takes time. But it has to be an inclusive democracy. It has to include everybody, whether they are Muslim or non-Muslim, whether they are pious or non-pious, secular or non-secular, the discussion has to include everybody and democracy has to be inclusive. The minute we start to exclude certain groups of people from the democratic process is, I think, when we give the kiss of death to democracy.

Ibrahim Mounir (Translation): The first matter for us is religion before human behaviour and conduct, though we value human conduct very much and praise it highly. But when we come to the religion of Islam, we will find two things: one of them, that democracy is deeply rooted in shari'a—Islamic law or Islamic legislation—and that is in the principle of shura. The principle of shura makes it a must that no decision will be taken unless the majority agrees. When you move to the individual level, the individual enjoys 100% freedom of belief. These are the instructions or the tenets of Islam, and from that starts the major principle of democracy, which will be the basis for other various freedoms and rights.

When it comes to legislation and laws to be adapted by any Islamic or non-Islamic work, the individual has to be considered. Each individual has his own entity and presence and his own status, regardless of his position in society, whether a low or high position, whether rich or poor. Every one of them has to be considered and each one of them has a role in running the affairs of state. We have an expression within the literature of Islam that God has created men free so no one has a right to enslave them.

Q48 Chair: Dr Altikriti?

Dr Altikriti: I would second what Dr Masmoudi said in terms of the problematisation of being a Muslim in the 21st century. It is an ongoing question and discussion. Since the Arab Spring, the question of government and the shape of the state, of what proponents of political Islam are aiming for and envisaging—all these have become recent additions to what is being discussed. If we were asking this 10, 15 or 20 years ago, it would definitely have been a big issue and a big subject of debate. I recall being involved in heated discussions, and in one particular incident being questioned as I was departing the country that had asked me to come and speak about Islam and democracy because of the way in which I proposed that democracy should be accepted and espoused by proponents of political Islam. This particular problem is now much less spoken of, simply because realities have deemed it an actual fact.

We are talking about a reality right now, not something which is theoretical and merely on an ideological or philosophical level. People have found that democracy not only works, but is in their best interests—even those who used to oppose the idea of democracy in Islam, and the marriage of Islam and democracy in the way that was being discussed. The

issue is on two levels, and I would warn against mixing the two. There is the ideological issue and the method—the application. The latter is the most important in our case, because when the time came and the opportunity was there, all those who, ideologically, spoke out against democracy for decades fell in line with the practice of democracy, so the method is what is important here. As for ideas, to be honest, we can throw those about as much as we want, but in the end we are talking about the application of democracy. When the time came, Arab and Muslim communities, societies, groups, organisations and parties actually espoused democracy, and that is what matters.

I would like to end with what Dr Masmoudi mentioned, which is at the crux of the whole issue: in talking about Islam and democracy, the real reason why it was so difficult was the fact that the realities were so abhorrent to the idea, let alone the application, of democracy. That is the biggest problem. You mentioned certain countries where, to a large degree, democratic practice is a given: Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Turkey and so on. These countries accommodate hundreds of millions of Muslims who do not even think about asking the question. The question is being asked in countries where, unfortunately, dictatorships and despotic regimes persist, and that is quite an interesting point.

Q49 Chair: Ms Asem?

Sondos Asem: If your question means: “How do Muslims perceive democracy, or the idea of democracy?” then I think that after the Arab Spring, they made it very clear in countries like Egypt and Tunisia that this is a value to which they aspire, but they have been prohibited from exercising their right to choose their representatives for decades. The problem was not the Brotherhood or Islamic parties or any other party; the problem was the military dictatorships that existed for over 60 years. Muslims in so many countries have proved that they respect the ideals of democracy as understood here in the West—both the thick definition and the thin definition of democracy: whether that is just electoral democracy, or the values that come with democracy, such as respecting the rule of law, human rights, civil liberties and so on.

Chair: I will invite my colleagues to focus their questions on an individual for much of the time. If you violently disagree with an answer that is given, please make that clear—we would want to hear that—but we would like to move things along by inviting one of you to comment on each question.

Q50 Yasmin Qureshi: My question is to Mr Masmoudi. AnNahda’s party conference last month drew a clear distinction between AnNahda’s religious and political activities. Can you explain what that means, and is there an implication that AnNahda is becoming a more “secular” party?

Dr Masmoudi: I think AnNahda is trying to separate religious activities from political activities. AnNahda, like most other Islamic movements, started as a religious movement in the ’70s, basically calling people to religious observation—to prayer, to fasting. There was a crisis of identity in Tunisia. I lived through that in the ’70s. Then it evolved, and it is evolving, into a political party. AnNahda sees that these two things have to be separated. People who are calling for religion or for having religious activities should not also be leaders of political parties, because when they call for religious values, those are things, at least in

Tunisia, that unite us. In Tunisia we are all Muslim, so they should not divide us. We don't want division in the mosques or on religious matters. There are differences of opinion, but the political differences should stay in the political sphere, in the political institutions.

We do not think that secularism is a separation of values. The values are the same, but the institutions have to be separated. The political institutions and the religious institutions should be separated. Those who want to work in a political sphere and political parties should concentrate on what political parties do, which is running for election, developing programmes, trying to govern, governing in coalitions, or if you are in opposition, trying to offer ideas.

If you want to work on religious matters, that should be separate, because you are calling for religion, which has nothing to do with a particular political party. That should be for all Tunisians, no matter what their political affiliation. We are trying to separate the two; political institutions should be separated from religious institutions, to the benefit of both.

May I add one more very important point about why I think Islam is compatible with democracy? We do not have anybody who speaks in the name of Islam. Nobody can represent God on earth in Islamic thinking. These are just opinions. Nobody in the Muslim world believes that we want a religious state or a theocratic state, because we do not have a religious clergy, at least in Sunni Islam, which is at least 90% of Muslims in the world. We do not have a religious clergy or a religious class of people who can speak in the name of God. We do not have such a distinction. So I think the separation is that a political party focuses on politics, and religious institutions focus on religion.

Q51 Yasmin Qureshi: Does that mean to say that AnNahda and the Muslim Brotherhood are heading in fundamentally different ideological directions?

Dr Masmoudi: I do not know, but it is possible that there are different stages or different experiences. Certainly, Tunisia is different from Egypt. These countries are not all the same. Saudi Arabia is not Turkey or Morocco. Each country has its own specificity. AnNahda has evolved. Even in 1981, when it first requested permission to act as a political party, it said, "We want democracy, we don't want shari'a law, and we will respect democracy no matter what the outcome is." It was very progressive in terms of accepting democratic values and ideas, even in 1981.

Q52 Yasmin Qureshi: Dr Altikriti, what do you think?

Dr Altikriti: What is interesting in the AnNahda experience is that this is generally a direction towards which many a Muslim group and Islamic group is moving—this independent thinking about what serves the cause best. I think that is what is most interesting. We see something on a similar but not identical level happening in various countries in the same region; for instance, the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan recently announced that it is disassociating itself from the mothership in Egypt. The same goes for various other countries and contexts.

The interesting point about this is that these groups are finding their footing in a new reality, addressing new demands and new challenges in a region that is changing quite

rapidly, and in a transformative era that is now heaping upon them questions and demanding of them serious answers, some of which are quite existential. On the question of secularism, once again, I think that we reduce the whole issue when we speak merely about the issue of values.

Personally, I would say that it is not essentially a bad thing to be told that you are espousing some of the values of secularism. AnNahda has realised the problems and challenges faced by associated or sister organisations in other countries, and that you can't govern and at the same time have your foot cemented in civil society. It is simply impossible. It is also impossible to carry your religious identity when you govern everyone in society who might not aspire to that particular identity. It is all happening in a transformative manner. The interesting bit about it is that the players within the spectrum of political Islam are responding to these questions. They are realising that we live in challenging and changing times, and they are responding positively. That is what is interesting about the experience of AnNahda.

Sondos Asem: May I come in on the experience in Egypt? After the Arab Spring, the Muslim Brotherhood started along this track. When they participated in elections in 2011 and 2012, they established separate political parties. They had the same aspirations—that is, to have their own political work that is completely separate from the organisation. I do not think the experience of AnNahda is unique in that sense. In Egypt there have been attempts to start this, but of course the military coup of 2013 has obstructed the natural progress of the Muslim Brotherhood or other political parties in pursuing this track.

Q53 Yasmin Qureshi: I come to a final set of questions to Mr Mounir. Do the branches of the Muslim Brotherhood in different states co-ordinate and act as a coherent international movement?

Ibrahim Mounir (Translation): Before I answer this, I have a very brief comment on the previous question about secularism as a term or concept. It has a different meaning or connotation in our countries from what is understood in the West. That is because mostly, the secularists in our countries have failed to present to the people a concept that respects peoples' freedom of choice, so when the term is mentioned to the layman, there is a negative response. Most dictators' regimes adopted, whether they believed in it or not, secularism as a tool to impose their dictatorship on the people. That, coupled with the point mentioned earlier, tells us about the status of secularism in the Arab mind.

To answer the question on the branches of al-Ikhwān outside Egypt, numerous groups in different countries adopt the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood. You will find that it is in line with the aspirations and the understanding of the people. I will give you an example: in Egypt, the last constitution was issued in 2014, after the Ikhwān won power. It was written in collaboration with delegates of the most ancient Church in the world—the Coptic Church. That constitution stipulates clearly that shari'a is a source of legislation. That tells us that this is part of peoples' culture: they find that shari'a is compatible, and that it is constitutional for it to be mentioned in this way.

Q54 Chair: The question was, do the branches of the Muslim Brotherhood in other countries co-ordinate?

Ibrahim Mounir (Translation): Yes, of course there is co-ordination between those who share the same belief or ideology in more than one country. That definitely rotates around the principles, but we have two rules that govern our co-ordinations. First, we do not co-ordinate with someone who is outlawed or violates the law of the country. Secondly, we do not co-ordinate with the leadership of a group unless it came through the election or the agreement of the membership.

We do not have as a prerequisite for co-ordination that groups bear the name of al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun, nor that they adopt our education programmes. What we are looking for is that the major idea is that Islam is a whole and it covers acts in this life and hereafter. The work in different countries should be peaceful and free from any threat or coercion of any persons to participate or become part of it.

Certainly, there are issues which concern everyone in the world, including ourselves. We agree and disagree sometimes regarding these issues and quests, but there is one principle that we never abandon: we have to work to bring peace to this Earth, despite what we face in persecution and ill-treatment, as has happened in Egypt for instance in the last few years.

Q55 Mr Baron: I will direct my question initially to Dr Altikriti, if I may, but I repeat what the Chairman said: if anyone has a strong view on this, please come in with your answers

The Muslim Brotherhood review was commissioned by the Prime Minister. Although it said that the Brotherhood opposed terrorism in the UK, it was broadly critical of the Brotherhood. Can I get your reaction to that review? Do you think it was fair?

Dr Altikriti: The review was problematic on several levels, and I mentioned parts of this in my submission. I mentioned that there is the logistical issue of how the review came about, the running or administration of the review before it was delivered and the delay that has happened, and then the delivery itself—plus, we have the content. In terms of the review itself, I would argue that it was flawed from the point of conception—the point of departure. It sent absolutely the wrong message. The remit was unclear, at least to the general public who had an interest in following the progress of the review panel headed by Sir John Jenkins.

Usually, such reviews are held after something has happened. Particularly as the review's remit was about the UK, you would expect that something would have happened in regards to the Muslim Brotherhood beforehand that called for the review to happen. The fact of the matter—this is something that we wrote about and the Cordoba Foundation held a conference suggesting this—is that the Muslim Brotherhood in terms of their individuals arrived in the UK in the late 60s. They have existed since then as individuals, groups and associations; they have built pillars of the Muslim community and have done some tremendous work. They have mostly been professionals who have contributed to the country in various ways, and there has never been an incident in which a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, or of any of those groups has broken the law or committed a crime. Therefore, the review itself and calling for the review was slightly odd. That is from the departure point of view.

The biggest problem from my point of view is the issue of the delay. If you recall, the Prime Minister said upon announcing the review that a statement would be made before the adjournment of Parliament that year, in July 2014. In fact, the statement came 18 months

later. That is problematic for a number of reasons. The main one is that if there was anything within the report submitted by Sir John Jenkins that suggested, or merely hinted, that the Muslim Brotherhood were engaged in, involved in, or somehow advocating violence, terrorism or extremism then I suggest that sitting on it for 18 months would in itself be highly problematic.

At the same time, the delay came with the constant casting of doubts and question marks as to what might and might not be said. It became a sort of tedious game in which there was a lot of disparagement and a lot of room for accusation. In particular—you have to understand this—while we were sitting here probably somehow understanding the mechanics and how this could be delayed and how the delay could be understandable, the regimes that were oppressing the Muslim Brotherhood, their supporters and anyone who was suspected of being part of the network were using our silence and that delay for their own agendas.

So the delay was problematic on so many levels, and then there was the delivery of the statement, which came at a time that was problematic. It came in the final hours before the adjournment for Christmas, on 17 December. There was no room for appeal, reply, response or coming back before the new year. Also, I may contend, that the report itself came to nothing—to no conclusion. Basically it said, “Well, there’s a big question mark,” which is precisely the point we departed from in announcing the review in April 2014.

On the content itself, we can speak about the statement that was delivered, because the report itself is now kept confidential, so we are not going to see it for a number of years. The statement that was given by the Prime Minister was, I think, also full of problems, not least because it ventured at times into ideology, fear and theocracy, at times into the political and pragmatic mechanisms and dynamics, and much of it was conjecture—it was guessing. It was building on certain events that happened at a certain point in history, sometimes several decades ago, and relating to that in modern Britain.

The review, from start to finish, was littered with problems. It taught us nothing. We learned nothing. The taxpayer has paid a handsome sum for learning absolutely nothing. The delay in which the Government—

Q56 Mr Baron: Can I press you on that, very briefly? I also want to bring Miss Asem in also, if I may. You say we learned nothing but it came out in the executive summary—I agree that the body of the report we have not seen—with some pretty harsh conclusions. One of them was that the Brotherhood has an ideological basis for legitimising violence and is prepared to use violence to pursue its goals. That is pretty harsh, whichever way you look at it. Is that fair in your view? I would like to bring in Miss Asem with regards to that answer as well, specifically that issue of violence.

Dr Altikriti: As a straight answer, I would say no, it is not fair, simply because the evidence for how that theological or ideological base translated in terms of practice is null. There was no outpouring of violence everywhere where the Muslim Brotherhood was. In fact, if anything, there were times when political Islam became engaged with society simply because it totally renounced and rejected the use of any terms of violence.

To come back to the issue of whether we learned anything, that in itself teaches us nothing whatever because that accusation has always been there. That accusation is thrown about by, with respect, dictatorial Governments who are trying to crush the Muslim Brotherhood. It is out there anyway. Once again I say that we didn't learn anything new; we basically ended up exactly where we started off from.

Q57 Mr Baron: Miss Asem, what is your view on that particular conclusion about violence?

Sondos Asem: On the issue of violence, the conclusions of the review are very much unsubstantiated. I think they are very misleading. They fail to contextualise what is happening in Egypt and to mention the very clear evidence that, despite the brutal repression after the coup, the Brotherhood has still abided by peacefulness. That should be the test: how did the Brotherhood react when they were themselves the victims of violence? Interestingly, they have not even reacted to the violence of the coup, despite their own leaders being sentenced to death, and despite the son of the General Guide, the top leader of the Brotherhood, being killed in the demonstrations that followed the coup. He himself, in that context, made a very strong statement about violence. He said, "Our peacefulness is stronger than their bullets." That is a very well documented speech that he made after the massacres that took place after the coup.

On the issue of violence, it is very important to follow the Brotherhood's reaction. If anything, the Brotherhood in Egypt have been the victims of political violence, especially violence committed by the state since the regime of Gamal Abdul Nasser, followed by the other dictatorial military regimes until the regime of Abdul Fattah al-Sisi. What should be condemned at this point is the indiscriminate violence committed by the regime of Abdul Fattah al-Sisi and the military establishment in Egypt against politicians from across the political spectrum including the Muslim Brotherhood, who have been the targets of most violence and state-sponsored terror.

Q58 Mr Baron: Does anybody else have any answers to those two questions? Would anybody like to come in?

Dr Masmoudi: I have three quick points. It is very disappointing, and shameful on western countries in general, when we side with autocratic regimes in the Arab world because we have some interests with them. This has been ongoing for 40 or 50 years and is the main problem we have to face. In my own country, the United States, where I have been living for 35 years, there is a specific law, passed by Congress, that bans giving any support, whether financial, political or anything else, to a country where there has been a military coup. That is the law. The way the Government get around it is by not calling it a military coup. It is ironic. It discredits us all and it discredits the process. The whole world knows that what happened in Egypt is a military coup. Therefore what we are doing in the United States is supporting illegally an illegal regime. We are illegally giving support to such a regime.

On the Brotherhood, we disagree with them on many things, but they have certainly never advocated violence. That is on the record for the past 70 years. They have never advocated violence. Yes, there are members who disobey or leave the Brotherhood because they lose patience because of the state violence. The main problem is the state violence. People are dying in jail. People are being raped in jail. If you hear the testimonies of people who came out of jail or of the families of people who died in jail, it is very moving and very

painful. The silence of the West versus these regimes is extremely dangerous and is, I think, the main cause of the rise in violence and extremism, because people are losing hope in Egypt and elsewhere. If they lose hope in democracy, they are going to turn to violence. We have to stop the support of these oppressive regimes and say, “Enough is enough.” If the Muslim Brotherhood made mistakes, they pay for it at the ballot box, not by military coups. That is how democracy works.

Q59 Mr Baron: May I bring in Mr Mounir? Dr Masmoudi has a point, does he not?

Ibrahim Mounir (Translation): I would say that the conclusion mentioned earlier regarding the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood has overlooked 60 years-plus of military rule in Egypt, which started in 1952 with the coup of Colonel Nasser. Throughout all these decades, there was no proof at all that the Muslim Brotherhood committed any single act of violence. There were courts martial—military courts that dealt with the detained Muslim Brothers. Throughout the trials, they prevented all the accused from defending themselves and prevented the defence from playing its role. They brought the detainees to court after being tortured. The verdict was that they were terrorists and violent people, and they were judged according to that. That is the real situation. Unfortunately, that was reproduced in the literature in Egypt and copied by others to become the pseudo-history of the Muslim Brothers, and hence we see such views.

The report also talked about Sayyid Qutb and accused him of preaching violence. Whoever reads Sayyid Qutb will discover that he did not preach any violence. Additionally, at the time he was writing there was a full ideological confrontation in the area between Islam and Marxism. Qutb was representing the Islamic view and defending his own ideology, so he was acting on behalf of every Muslim who believes in Islam. When Nasser decided to hang him, at least three heads of state interfered and asked for the verdict to be diluted—King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, the socialist President of Algeria and the President of Iraq, who was a nationalist. Those three figures appreciated what Qutb said, and hence they interfered, but unfortunately Nasser did not.

It is a basic freedom that thought should be confronted by thought, not by killing and murder. Qutb was a thinker and a writer. The General Guide of Ikhwan, Judge Hassan al-Hudaybi, issued at the time of Qutb’s writings a book titled “Du’at la Qudat,” which means “We are advocating what we believe, not judging the others.” In that book he tried to clarify the whole matter to make it impossible for some of the youngsters to utilise their own interpretation of the ideas of Qutb to justify violent actions.

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

On resuming—

Q60 Chair: I invite my colleague, Nadhim Zahawi, to pick up the questioning.

Dr Fareed Elshayyal: Mr Mounir was in the middle of his speech when you suspended the sitting. Will you allow him to continue?

Chair: I beg your pardon. You are quite right. Complete the answer.

Ibrahim Mounir (Translation): Thank you. I have to raise a certain historic fact in this particular historic session. Sayyid Qutb defended the whole area against the Marxist attack throughout his period. Thanks to this among other things, this attack failed. If he was not there and if he did not do that job, it might have been that the whole region could have changed—including Muslims, Christians and all the components there.

The book which the Guide of the time, Judge al-Hudaybi, wrote about preachers, not judges, established a rule that anyone who is tending to misinterpret the ideas to go towards violence is outside the Brotherhood. Unfortunately, the report of the review did not find these facts. On the contrary, it suggests that the Muslim Brothers are calling for violence or using it to serve their own political agenda.

In the mid-1980s Hosni Mubarak, who was originally a military man, was facing an acute crisis in Egypt. This crisis, which had a very deep economic grievance, led to the rise of violence by an Islamic group called Jamaat al-Islamiyya. It escalated its operations to the extent that it seemed to threaten the whole regime. Many people approached the Brothers and wondered why the Brothers didn't seize the opportunity and join forces with this small group and take the chance to get rid of Mubarak, who was persecuting them. The Brothers' answer was simple—this is against our belief, we don't believe in violence—and they did not take part in such action.

Chair: Mr Mounir, we are quite limited in time and I have quite a lot I want to get through. There is obviously significant substance in the points you are making. I invite a written submission. We have had plenty and it might be more appropriate to take some of this evidence in writing, if we may. I invite you to complete your answer on his view of the Muslim Brotherhood review in written form and I am now going to invite my colleague, Nadhim Zahawi, to pick up other questions.

Ibrahim Mounir (Translation): I need only one minute.

The report mentioned that after the coup d'état, the Sisi one, some members of the Brothers had committed, or took part in, acts of violence and it mentioned that the leaders of the Brothers condemned that. The report failed to mention that the leader of the coup had given a licence to kill to all his men, the army and the police, in his speeches. This was not mentioned.

Chair: Thank you very much.

Q61 Nadhim Zahawi: Ramadan Kareem to all of you. I know that it is a difficult time of the day for those of you who are fasting, so we appreciate your coming here and making this very important contribution to our inquiry. You all mentioned dictatorial Governments, and I get that and it is noted here, but I want to set that aside for a second because you all talked about democracy as well and how political Islam is going to adopt or adapt to the 21st century. Part of that democracy is not just the ballot box; it is institutions; it is an independent judiciary.

I put it to you that the problem you have, both in Tunisia and in Egypt, is that civil liberties and equality sometimes fall foul of shari'a law. Because the judicial system of Islam is shari'a law, you have problems with that. AnNahda had problems when it tried to change the constitution, where women were not equal to men, and the Tunisian people pushed back.

Quite rightly, you are being pragmatic about that now and trying to navigate a route through that. In Egypt, you alienated half your people, because clearly shari'a law may be hurting people who happen to be gay, or people who are committed atheists and may want to organise other atheists in that way.

The difficulty for you is that you cannot change shari'a law, and it jars against those institutions that protect civil liberties and equality. Putting aside dictatorships, when you took power in Egypt, you alienated half your people. We have discussed what happened next. I just want to get your take. It is almost impossible to deal with that aspect of political Islam unless you denounce shari'a law, so would you denounce it and move away from it to try to protect rights? Democracy is judged by how it protects its minorities, not just the will—many of you talked about the people, but the people are not all the same.

Dr Masmoudi: I completely agree with what you said—

Q62 Nadhim Zahawi: So you are denouncing shari'a law.

Dr Masmoudi: I completely agree with what you said, except when you said shari'a law cannot change. That is not true. What is shari'a? Shari'a is interpretations.

Q63 Nadhim Zahawi: So how does it interpret looking after gay people?

Dr Masmoudi: Shari'a law can be interpreted and changed, and it has been changed all throughout history. The problem is: what is shari'a? There is no clear definition of what we mean by shari'a law. This is why the AnNahda party—okay, we had elections in 2011. When the new Constituent Assembly started at the beginning of 2012, within two months there were discussions in February and March in Tunisia about whether we would include shari'a law in the constitution as one of the sources—but not the only one—of legislation within the constitution. Within the AnNahda party, there were about 15 meetings of the Shura Council, which is an elected body of 150 people from all over the country. They met almost weekly for two months to discuss that point, and then they voted and it was not even close: 80% voted not to include shari'a law in the constitution. That was two months into the process. There was no pressure from the street or anything like that. From the beginning—

Q64 Nadhim Zahawi: Well there was pressure during the constitution—

Dr Masmoudi: No! We were starting the process. I am saying that there was pressure later, but from the beginning AnNahda took a position that they would not require, insist or demand that shari'a be mentioned at all in the constitution. The first clause in the old constitution says that Tunisia is a republic whose language is Arabic and whose religion is Islam, and they said, "That is enough. That is all we need. We do not need shari'a in the constitution, because shari'a can be misinterpreted. We certainly do not want the shari'a of the Taliban, of al-Qaeda or of Daesh. If that is what they mean by shari'a, we certainly do not want that." In fact, as you probably know, in Arabic shari'a means "rule of law". Shari'a can be and has been interpreted, and we need a new shari'a for the 21st century. We reject the old interpretations. They were good interpretations for their time, but that time was 1,000 years ago.

Q65 Chair: Can we hear Mr Mounir's commentary on that?

Ibrahim Mounir (Translation): If the subject of shari'a is discussed outside of a true investigation, atmosphere or environment, it may lead to misunderstandings. I can say simply that shari'a consists of two components. The first one is the divinity things, and those are constant and do not change. Shari'a as a whole is aimed at the public interest—the interests of the people. Wherever that interest is, shari'a is keen to serve.

Q66 Nadhim Zahawi: Yes, but forgive me if I push back on that. You say it is in the interests of the people, but if some of the people—a minority—want to be non-believers or want to be gay, how will shari'a treat them?

Ibrahim Mounir (Translation): In Islam, there is the Koranic text, which is the highest. In that text, it states clearly that it is for man to believe or to disbelieve. Who wants to believe believes, and who does not want to believe does not believe. That cannot be better or stronger as a statement. Another statement stipulates that it is not at all the right of the ruler to coerce or force people to believe. In the Koran, the Prophet Mohammed is saying, in a wandering way, "Would you be forcing people to become believers when they are denying thinking of doing that?" Those two statements of the Koran are fixed; you cannot change them. They are part of the Koran.

Add to that that in any society or any community, you have the norms. Those general norms usually govern people and direct them. But there is a freedom no one can take, because it is not from other people or from the norms; it is from God, who gave it to man, so no one should take that away. When people have their own life and decide which way to live, they always, in any society, take into account the general norms, because they are a guideline and are manifested in the laws that man made to organise his society and community. If someone is violating those, they are not to be met with violence or force. There are other ways to deal with that.

Q67 Nadhim Zahawi: So as long as you are within the norms, that is fine. I will let you come back in one second. I just want to ask Mr Mounir one last question, and maybe Sondas can also answer. Why do you think you lost 50% of your voters? They rejected the Brotherhood's rule.

Ibrahim Mounir: This is democracy!

Q68 Nadhim Zahawi: Okay, fair enough. We will come back to that later. I have some factual questions, and you can perhaps deal with those because I am going to come to you as well, Mr Masmoudi. Who sets the policies of the AnNahda party?

Dr Masmoudi: There is the congress—we had one just two and a half weeks ago—which is about 1,200 elected people. It is the highest institution in the party. Then there is the elected Shura Council, with 150 people, and they set the policy between the two congresses.

Q69 Nadhim Zahawi: Are the Shura the religious figures?

Dr Masmoudi: No, these are elected people.

Q70 Nadhim Zahawi: How do the religious figures fit into policy making?

Dr Masmoudi: We are non-religious. There are no religious people. Everyone is equal.

Q71 Nadhim Zahawi: There is no hierarchy.

Dr Masmoudi: There is no hierarchy and we reject any hierarchy. We reject even the religious scholars—the religious people.

Q72 Nadhim Zahawi: And for the Brotherhood, who sets the policy?

Dr Masmoudi: Can I add one sentence about that? It is very important. Rached Ghannouchi just two months ago was told in an interview, “What you are doing is against shari’a”. He said, “No. The constitution is the new shari’a because that is how we come up with shari’a; it is the consensus of all Tunisians. We all met together and we all believe in laws. That is the new shari’a”.

Dr Altikriti: On this particular point—because it is important—once again we are talking about a term that is used, abused and used in any particular way. I agree with the definition that has been given, which essentially is that shari’a is something that is in evolution—it is evolving all the time, it is moving all the time and it is changing according to context. How it is moving over here is different from how it is moving in south-east Asia and such.

Let us just state a few facts. The first is that every single Muslim Government, as far as I know, and I stand to be corrected, including the most vehemently anti-religious of them—the most secular, if you wish—have in the very first line in their constitution that shari’a is the basis for the constitution. That is one thing. Therefore, shari’a is not the issue to be asked of Islamic parties, the Muslim Brotherhood or otherwise. Societies demand shari’a. In the example that Ibrahim Mounir gave earlier about the 2014 constitution, in the drafting of which the Coptic Church was heavily involved and engaged, the term emphasising shari’a was far stronger than the constitution proposed by Mohamed Morsi during his rule. That is extremely important.

The issue about sidelining has, I think, been stated. You always have 50% who are not happy, but the problem with Egypt in particular—and this is what we try to convince the European Union as well as our own Government—is that we need to either announce our total adoption of democracy or say that we will only adopt democracy and stand by to support it when it suits us. The issue is that, yes, there will always be 50% who are not happy with the democratic outcome, but are we committed enough to stand by the choice that the ballot box gave?

I have just one final point. You mentioned—this is an extremely important point and one of the issues that are now being talked about in various circles—the issue of minorities, the situation and status of women, and the laws pertaining to minorities, whether they be religious, cultural or other. This is very, very important. These are facts and statistics and we do not have time to go through them, but I will tell you this: never ever throughout the history of modern Egypt, since the fall of the monarchy, did the Copts have a share in power as they did during the time of Mohamed Morsi. Never did they have a vice-president, apart from when Mohamed Morsi was in power. Never did they have the numbers that they did in the upper House of Parliament as they did during the time of Mohamed Morsi. The same goes for

women. So the claim that the Muslim Brotherhood sidelined minorities is false from the factual point of view.

Q73 Nadhim Zahawi: We want to get through some of these quick-fire questions. Mr Mounir, who sets the policies for the Brotherhood?

Ibrahim Mounir (Translation): The internal organisation of the Muslim Brothers mainly includes the Shura Council. As explained earlier, a shura is like a parliament where all ideas can be discussed in order to come to a conclusion. Also, the highest executive organ is the Office of Guidance, which works closely and jointly with the Shura Council in drawing up and implementing the policies.

Q74 Nadhim Zahawi: So that is the Supreme Guide and his deputies?

Ibrahim Mounir (Translation): It is bigger than that. It is a bureau that contains about 17 people. It is appointed through election, and they work jointly. It varies from country to country, but I am talking about Egypt. There are 17 members elected by the shura people.

Q75 Nadhim Zahawi: How many members does the Muslim Brotherhood have, either in Egypt or worldwide?

Ibrahim Mounir (Translation): Even the Governments don't know.

Q76 Nadhim Zahawi: Do you know how many members you have in Egypt?

Ibrahim Mounir (Translation): The membership of the Brotherhood is at different grades, and you don't have a vote until you reach the highest. Those who have acquired the right to vote are 900,000, but the total number is much more.

Q77 Nadhim Zahawi: How many members does AnNahda have in Tunisia, or worldwide?

Dr Masmoudi: About 110,000 or 120,000.

Q78 Nadhim Zahawi: Mr Mounir, do members swear an oath?

Ibrahim Mounir (Translation): If we talk about the Ikhwan, there are full-fledged or full-acting members. They are surrounded by scores of other brothers, but they are not reaching the grade of full membership yet. When a person reaches that level, he would give an oath. That oath is a traditional one that has been inherited for centuries and is practised by all Sufi orders. Until now, all the orders have followed the same approach. A member, to be acknowledged and inaugurated in the way of the Tariqa, shall say similar words. We know, from the establishment of Ikhwan, that it had Sufism as part of its components or ingredients.

It is most important that, throughout the history of the Muslim Brotherhood, not a single Government, nor any public body or organisation, contested or protested against this oath, because everyone took it as a natural thing that happens every day in various areas. There are several society organisations in Egypt that are not part of the Brotherhood. Also, they have their own oath, which is very similar and they practise that.

Q79 Nadhim Zahawi: Mr Mounir, you mentioned that the oath has sometimes, unfortunately, been misinterpreted. Can you share the oath with us now? Will you repeat it to us?

Ibrahim Mounir (Translation): If I can remember.

[The speaker continued in English.]

I did it almost 60 years ago!

[The speaker continued in translation.]

I pledge my oath to God to work for the ideas of this society and to obey the commands of its leadership without violating the orders and commands of God.

Q80 Nadhim Zahawi: Thank you very much indeed. My next question is to Sondos and to Anas. In your written submissions to us, you are sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood, and you are both perceived to have organisational links to it. But am I right that neither of you are members of the Brotherhood?

Dr Altikriti: I think that “perceived” is the magic word in your question. It is perceived that there are organisational links. There is no organisation link with the Muslim Brotherhood. But it’s clear, personally as well as organisationally, that the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood and what it symbolises is something that the region—as a whole, a region that has been bereft of humanity and democracy and freedoms and civil liberties for a century at least—is in dire need of.

The ideological basis, the ideology of Islamic values entering all spheres of life, particularly in politics, in peaceful transformation and reform of society, as well as Governments, in terms of including everyone and excluding none—that ideological base I share entirely.

Q81 Nadhim Zahawi: But you’re not a member of the Brotherhood?

Dr Altikriti: Well, in Britain particularly we do not have a Muslim Brotherhood. We do not have a Muslim Brotherhood organisation—

Q82 Nadhim Zahawi: But you are not a member of the Brotherhood anywhere?

Dr Altikriti: No. This is my country; I belong to whatever organisation there is here. And the closest there is to the Muslim Brotherhood, and which espouses the basic tenets of the Muslim Brotherhood ideology, is the Muslim Association of Britain, which I am a member of, I am a founding member of and I was a president of, and now I’m the chairman of.

Q83 Nadhim Zahawi: Miss Asem, you are not a member of the Brotherhood?

Sondos Asem: No. My answer is quite similar to that of Anas. In Egypt, as I have mentioned in my submission, I have worked within the office of President Mohamed Morsi. President Mohamed Morsi was the president of the Freedom and Justice Party, and before

that he was an active member of the Brotherhood and the chairman of its political bureau for more than 10 years. I supported the FJP after the Arab Spring. It's not because I supported it per se, but, from my perspective, I think the Freedom and Justice Party after the revolution was the most respectful of the democratic process. In terms of its ideology, as a whole—I think I shared lots of the ideology of the Freedom and Justice Party.

It is important to know—you asked me a question before that, but you did not give me a chance to answer it.

Nadhim Zahawi: I apologise. It's just because the Chairman was kicking me from under the desk.

Sondos Asem: Yes, you mentioned shari'a a couple of times and you directed this question to the panel and I would like to point out some historical facts with regard to the shari'a in Egypt and the second article of the Egyptian constitution, which mentions explicitly not shari'a but the principles of shari'a as the source of legislation in the country.

I think in your question you suggested that the Brotherhood or President Morsi alienated the majority of Egyptians, or half of Egyptians, because allegedly he used this shari'a, or he used religion to alienate the others, who do not share the same perspective, which I totally disagree with. I mean, I disagree with this allegation.

The second article, if you follow the history, was first introduced in 1923. In Egyptian history, 1923 is even before the Muslim Brotherhood was established; it was even before political Islam was known as a term. Interestingly, the committee at that time that proposed the provision of stating that Islam is the religion of the state in Egypt was composed of western-educated jurists. One of them had the name Abderosec Senhoury. It included Coptic jurists and a Jew, and the Brotherhood was not even established at that time.

The second article, stating that the religion of the Egyptian state is Islam, was actually understood at that time to mean that shari'a is the source of legislation, so to say. The explicit mention of shari'a as a source of legislation had been proposed by President Anwar Sadat in 1971, not by the Muslim Brotherhood and not by any Islamic party, and at that time it was believed that he actually proposed that in order to gain the sympathy of Egyptians to propose other provisions in the constitution that would extend his term in power.

My point is—

Q84 Nadhim Zahawi: I've got it. To follow up for both of you, you clearly believe in this stuff deeply, and rightly so. Why aren't you members of the Brotherhood?

Dr Altikriti: If there was, if there came to be, an organisation registered and operating under British laws and tax, I probably might. I don't know, but I probably might. There's no impediment. But I do not see a reason for it. As British Muslims, we have our own vision, our own mission. We have our own agenda; we have our own interactions. Carrying the basic tenets which represent, let us say, the backbone of the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood suffices, I think, but we must operate within the laws and whatever regulatory issues within Britain, so—

Q85 Chair: Do you think that a Muslim Brotherhood is not required in a free society? Is that what you're saying?

Dr Altikriti: No, I think the tenets that the Muslim Brotherhood aspires to and promotes are quite valid in every society. This is my point; I try to make this clear in my submission. The problem of oppression is that it does not just violate human rights for the Muslim Brotherhood or those who are against the coup. The problem is that it deprives those movements of the ability to evolve, to operate under the sunlight, to change their views and, if you wish, to use the term "moderate". It deprives them of that. If you drive anything—anything—underground, you will find that the extremists within that particular party win the day. They win the argument within the organisation. Therefore, I would say that actually, in free societies, the tenets and ideological and philosophical backbone of what constitutes the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology would be a fantastic addition to the mosaic that makes up the likes of British society or other Western societies.

Q86 Chair: So is that what's happening in Egypt? You said that if you drive a movement underground, the extremists will take control of it. Is that what's happening in the Egyptian world at the moment?

Dr Altikriti: I don't know exactly what's happening—maybe Ibrahim Mounir will know better what's happening, but I am telling you—

Q87 Chair: No, I am asking for your observation of what you have seen since the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood has been either killed, jailed or driven underground.

Dr Altikriti: I am comforted by the constant stream of statements from the leadership, who languish behind bars, hanging under death sentences, and who constantly call for peaceful protests and reject—

Q88 Chair: But you just said the opposite.

Dr Altikriti: No, no. What I am saying is that when you drive any movement underground, you get the extremists to win the day. That might well be what—

Q89 Chair: But that was not how you answered the question.

Dr Altikriti: Yes, but what that means is—

Q90 Chair: You were quite explicit: "The extremists win if you drive it underground." You are now saying that the extremists have not won, and that the leadership remains moderate.

Dr Altikriti: Yes, and that will result in something which has happened time and time again, and that is that the people who want to defy the commands of the leadership will leave, and they will create their own entities. It has happened in the case of the IRA. It's happened in the case of various other liberation movements across the world. It's the very same thing. The leadership constantly emits statements saying, "The only way we will defy this is by peaceful protest." They could not have been more overt. The vast majority, as we can see, because there has not been an outpouring or an explosion of violence despite the immense crackdown on civil liberties throughout Egyptian society—we have not seen it. So it seems

that the vast majority of the Muslim Brotherhood are still obeying and toeing the line of the leadership, but the fact that if we constantly and continuously—

Q91 Chair: But that's the remarkable point, isn't it? The conventional wisdom, which I would have shared, is the point you made in terms: "Put them underground, and the extremists will win." The rather remarkable circumstance in Egypt is that that has not happened. There is a contest between the leadership and the youth.

Dr Altikriti: Absolutely.

Chair: But that is far from over at this stage. There is certainly no guarantee—certainly, the extremists don't appear to be winning, so the statement you made that the extremists will win is not actually correct.

Dr Altikriti: That is to the credit of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and it speaks a lot. I thank you for bringing out this point. It is to the credit of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt that despite the immense oppression that it falls under that until now—we are in our fourth year now—four years after the coup and the continuous escalation in violence against civil liberties, the extremists still have not found a platform within the movement. I will tell you what will happen and what has happened time and again. We mentioned Sayyid Qutb earlier. The people who interpreted the words of Sayyid Qutb—wrongly, I would say, because the vast majority who read—

Chair: I am not too keen on getting into the historic—

Dr Altikriti: No, no; this was in the review. The issue of Ayman al-Zawahiri, and the fact that he read Sayyid Qutb and then became the second in command for al-Qaeda, this actually proves the point of the Muslim Brotherhood defying and renouncing violence. Because had Sayyid Qutb actually invoked and called for violence, then Ayman al-Zawahiri would have led the Muslim Brotherhood down the route of violence. But he could not, so he had to leave and he had to create, or help to create, a different, separate, actually hostile entity to the Muslim Brotherhood, called al-Qaeda, in order to carry out the interpretations which he thought that Sayyid Qutb had spoken.

Chair: Okay; I still don't understand why you are not a Muslim Brother after all that. Nadhim, last question.

Q92 Nadhim Zahawi: Sondos, why haven't you joined the Brotherhood?

Sondos Asem: It is a completely personal issue. I am an academic. After the Arab Spring, I have actually been publicly supportive of the Brotherhood.

Q93 Nadhim Zahawi: I know. I've got it. My last question is to you, sir. Is the Brotherhood still just a Brotherhood? I hope there's a Sisterhood. If there is, how many female members do you have in Egypt, for example?

Ibrahim Mounir (Translation): They are approximately 40% to 42% of the total membership.

Nadhim Zahawi: Of the total 800,000 or 900,000?

Chair: Okay, we have a follow-up from Adam Holloway.

Q94 Mr Holloway: Could a woman lead the Freedom and Justice Party?

Ibrahim Mounir (Translation): It is a democracy.

Q95 Mr Holloway: And the same with AnNahda, presumably?

Dr Masmoudi: Absolutely, yes. Female members are at every level of the leadership in AnNahda. Tunisia is the only country that has parity in the elections for Parliament in the constitution, so about 30% or almost 40% of Members of Parliament are women.

Q96 Mr Holloway: Dr Altikriti, how long do you think it could be before you could conceivably see a woman leading either of these two parties?

Dr Altikriti: In the case of Tunis, not long. In the case of Tunis, I actually know a few women who are more than capable of leading in the next five to 10 years. To be honest, what pleases me in the case of AnNahda, studying it quite closely and knowing Rached Ghannouchi himself personally, is the fact that this is almost a non-issue. Women are quite solidly placed within the hierarchy and it's not even an issue. I know, to give another example, the example of the Muslim Brotherhood in Iraq, that this is a deeply troubling issue. In order to confront this issue there needed to be a provision within the electoral rules in order to give a quota to women to confront that fact that, had it not been for the quota, women might not get elected at all. It was a real problem. In the case of Tunis, I see this as something which is highly comforting.

Q97 Mr Holloway: Mr Mounir, does the Muslim Brotherhood seek unity of Muslims under a Caliphate? If so, what is your understanding of a Caliphate?

Ibrahim Mounir (Translation): Actually, the vision of the Muslim Brotherhood is broader and wider than that. We look forward to an international community in which all the groups and all the components are represented in their diversity and variety. It is like the United Nations and not like what we have with the United Nations now. The idea is that all the nations will be there and well-represented and the basis will be humanity. Humanity should be the basis for that. The aim would be two things: to preserve the wealth of the universe in terms of resources and to have complete freedom of individuals. That is what we are dreaming of.

The word or the term Khilafah, or Caliphate, is not a religious expression. It does not exist in the religion as such. What we are hoping for, nevertheless, is to achieve Islamic unity. A parallel of that is European unity.

Mr Holloway: We should vote to leave.

Chair: Let's not go there.

Mr Holloway: It's a great opportunity. Take the chance while you've got it.

Chair: Order.

Ibrahim Mounir (Translation): This unity will happen in such a way that each country preserves its own character, identity and habits. At the political level, that will be the Islamic idea of globalism and that we all co-operate to achieve prosperity and peace for everyone and to guarantee everyone's freedom.

The Muslim Brotherhood believes that God created this Earth for the benefit of humankind, with all its resources and wealth. Any co-operation in that way to preserve and promote this is welcomed. I may quote the words of the Chairman. Yes, a free society or community is a necessity, because in such a society we can expect a real interaction between its different elements. In such a society Muslim Brothers can offer and take from others and everybody else is doing the same: giving and taking from their fellow citizens.

Q98 Chair: I wonder just how free a society you all want. I am going to ask you a yes/no question. If the answer is yes, it doesn't need more explanation, and if it is no I would be grateful for it. Do you accept that in sexuality an individual is entitled to a private life that the law should not interfere with?

Sondos Asem: Yes.

Dr Masmoudi: Yes.

Dr Altikriti: Yes.

Ibrahim Mounir [*Spoke in Arabic*]

Dr Altikriti: So, yes.

Chair: No, that definitely wasn't yes. I would be grateful for a full translation.

Ibrahim Mounir (Translation): I would say that each society has its own ideals and characteristics. In general, as I said, man is indeed free in what he is doing, because it is only God who will settle accounts with him. When it comes to the level of society, it so happens that society has also got its own ways and it is for the members of society to respect the ways, traditions and norms.

Chair: So that is a no?

Ibrahim Mounir (Translation): No, I said that everyone is free to do what he wants.

Q99 Chair: It is quite an important question, because you said it was within the norms of that society and this is an issue on which the Brotherhood, shari'a and the teachings run straight head-on into universal human freedoms. I want to understand from Mr Mounir whether the Brotherhood and political Islamists have begun to get to terms—as society has here over the course of the last 50 years—with this fundamental human freedom. This is not a choice for people; this is how people are.

Ibrahim Mounir: Yes or no—it is very difficult to decide now.

[*The speaker continued in translation.*]

This behaviour of man—or human beings, in general—is a private thing. If done privately, no one can interfere. It is, as you call it, a human freedom, and yes, it is a recent thing. Until recently, this was not an issue, or the issue. To have it imposed—or we imagine that the whole world forces it on one society or another, or one area or another—is not understood. It is something that may bring many negative things, whatever positive things it might also bring, even in societies that have already started to adapt, because to give it force of law will definitely create a reaction in any society or community, and that might bring more evil than good. To be honest, we in the Muslim Brotherhood did not have a chance to make a real and thorough study of the issue, and this will not be possible in a fully fledged way until we are restored and those who should be in charge are returned. Then we can deal with such important things. Until we reach a conclusion on that, whatever I am saying is premature and before the time.

Considering this and similar issues as part of global policy, globalisation is risky, because it deals with communities, and individuals in different communities have different visions, different natures and different traditions, and so on. Something that might be accepted in one society could not be accepted in another. Therefore, not only are we concerned about the freedom that we cherish—we want everyone to be free to do everything—but we also care for personal security. We are worried that if things are forced, it might bring risks from the rest of society, who do not accept or understand it, against people who champion or call for this idea.

If we want to be honest about such issues, we need to give it enough time to be studied thoroughly and to be looked at wisely from all aspects before taking a decision. Unfortunately, we were not given that opportunity.

Chair: Let me finish with an observation about the freedoms that atheists and other minorities would enjoy in a society run by political Islamists. In the time that the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood now have in forced exile from power, it might be an idea to have this debate and to reconcile some of these issues so that those parts of the world that hold strongly to the universal declaration of human rights and to basic human freedoms get some comfort that the rights of those minorities will be protected. I leave you with that observation.

Q100 Mr Baron: Time is running short. First of all, we thank you because, courtesy of Ramadan, I know that this is already proving a long day. Thank you for sticking with us.

I want to focus on one point, because time is short. This is one of the key questions that we want to try to get to the heart of. In the fragile democracies that emerged post the Arab Spring, are there undemocratic tendencies when it comes to Islamists or is it that you just had a difficult hand to play in a region that does not have a strong history of democracy to say the least and that you were dealing with undemocratic institutions—they had not been elected—that were deeply rooted and conservative in nature? Looking back over that period of great transition, I would like your view on whether you feel that you were justified in those actions, because the results were mixed from one country to the other.

Dr Altikriti: What actions?

Mr Baron: Well, do you feel that, looking back at developments post the Arab Spring, it was more of an issue from your point of view that you were dealing with an area that did not have

a strong democratic tendency and that, as I said, you were dealing with institutions that were deeply rooted in some cases—the military and the judiciary, for example—and undemocratic in many cases? How do you now assess that period, which was in many eyes the first true litmus test of how inclusive Islamists would be and of how they would deal with democracy post the Arab Spring? Can I start with Ms Asem?

Sondos Asem: I think this is a very important question, as I have explained in my written submission. I will focus on the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, who I think were more democratic than all the other parties, whether secular or Salafist. In terms of the track record of Dr Mohamed Morsi, who came to power after the Arab Spring, I think the biggest challenge he faced was, as you mentioned, the undemocratic deep state—the military, the judiciary and their allies in the different state institutions. I think that the military coup in 2013 was actually a reaction to his attempt to democratise Egypt, to turn it into a civilian regime, and his resistance to the military's encroachment on the democratic process and their attempts to block his decisions. I think we can characterise as undemocratic either the military or those forces that helped to bring the military back to power in 2013. That is what I think, very briefly.

Q101 Mr Baron: As you all answer, may I just add one small question, because I am conscious that we have colleagues who have not yet spoken? In addition to answering my original question, what lessons do you think you have learned that you can take forward?

Dr Masmoudi: On your first question, I would say that AnNahda certainly has passed the test in Tunisia. As an Islamic party that believes in democracy, it did everything humanly possible and made the most concessions throughout the past five years to make sure that democracy succeeds in Tunisia. In Tunisia, the Islamists, or the Islamic party, were the champions of democracy and of the successful transition to democracy so far. They really believe that democracy is important and is the key to progress and security.

The goal is not only to prove that democracy is possible in the Arab world; I think that we have proved that. Now, the challenge is to prove that democracy delivers a better life. We have not yet proved that. That is still a challenge in Tunisia. We are concerned that the transition in Tunisia is in danger, not because democracy is not possible, but because democracy has not yet delivered a better life to its citizens, and by that, I mean the economic situation in Tunisia. If I have any comments about that, it is to say that we need help from the West—from the UK and the US. Tunisia needs time—all democratic transitions take time—but the economic situation is in dire need. Tourism is a big sector of Tunisian industry, as is investment, and both of those have basically stopped. The economic situation is bad.

The lesson that we learned in Tunisia is the importance of consensus. We cannot move forward in a transition without consensus. All the parties have to come together, and find the compromises and middle ground on which they can all agree. After you build democracy, you can govern with 51%, but when you are still in the process of building democracy and are in the transition to it, you cannot govern with 51%. You need consensus and dialogue. That is the important lesson, especially on the constitution.

The way Tunisia wrote the constitution should be a lesson for all countries around the world. How we wrote the constitution has not really been explained very well. There were two years of negotiations, meetings and dialogue to come to a consensus, so that, at the end,

94% of members of the constituent assembly voted for the constitution. It was really by consensus; it was unifying all Tunisians.

Dr Altikriti: I have some quick points. The Arab Spring was not done on the say-so of any particular section of Arab societies, whether in Tunisia, Egypt or elsewhere. Up until Egypt, the Arab Spring—the term I insist on and that I promote quite widely—achieved two very important things. First, it has asserted the notion of transformative non-violence and peaceful, civil, mass movement that can change realities. That was incredibly important in a region that, as we all know, is abundant with violence, weapons, conflicts, wars, divisions and the such. The second is quite important, particularly after Iraq in 2003: it showed that societies can actually change and remove their dictators without calling on the direct military intervention of the West. They can do it themselves.

Those two important facts were quite well translated, particularly in the case of Tunisia, which had, fortunately for all of us, the space and the time. It has also had the wisdom and maturity to get Tunis to where we are today. I think that the case of Egypt is quite important.

I understand the question; I understand that we are having a discussion about political Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood, in particular. In all honesty, if I was to comment on this from a neutral point of view, I would say that it is not political Islam that should be held to account here and have its democratic credentials searched and scrutinised; it is ourselves here in Britain and the West generally. For more than a century, we have been calling on this dark region to democratise, reform, engage and open up, but when it did, at the slightest hint of revolt from the anti-Arab Spring, anti-democratic movement, we basically watched as democracy was crushed. I think that we have a lot to answer for—far more than political Islam.

Your question is absolutely valid: what are the lessons to be learned? We can all speak wisely in hindsight, but the fact of the matter is that the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt could have said, “You know what? Things are a total mess. We’re just going to stand on the sidelines and watch as factions burn each other down in the very first phase of this transformative era. Then we will come and capitalise on what remains when things settle down.” But they didn’t. They got engaged at the very first step. Some might criticise them and say, “Well, you shouldn’t have,” but I think that they showed extreme courage in taking ownership of that particular era. Let’s not forget that they were democratically elected. I think that all their policies afterwards, in terms of involving and engaging those who actually voted against them, showed that their democratic credentials are, to be honest, beyond question.

I absolutely agree with the Chairman’s observation that now there is time for people sitting on the sidelines, or maybe languishing in prison, to think about how they would do things differently, and to develop and evolve philosophies and internal theories. That is absolutely valid, but the question I come back to—I speak as a British citizen—is how we behaved at the time of democracy being crushed.

Chair: We do not have too long, as there is a vote at six.

Q102 Mike Gapes: I could ask a lot of questions, but I am not going to. I will just make two comments about the Copts in Egypt. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who was Foreign Minister, was

a Copt, so they certainly had a role under the previous Government. Did they not have churches burned down under the Morsi Administration?

Dr Altikriti: As they did—

Mike Gapes: Let me finish. Were they not rebuilt by the Sisi Government? Mr Mounir said that Sayyid Qutb did not preach violence. You, Mr Altikriti, brushed it aside in your paper to us and said, “He may have said it, but he didn’t really mean what he said because it didn’t happen at the time. It happened later, and it was other people.” Isn’t the takfiri ideology—the labelling of people as apostates; the statements made against the Jews by Qutb in his books “Our Struggle with the Jews” and “Milestones”; the statements about a war against Jews and the subsequent statements of Mr Qaradawi, whom you also mentioned—an indication that there is, within your ideology, a hatred or a violence towards other communities? Isn’t it time that you revised these things and disowned the origins of this—Sayyid Qutb and Hassan al-Banna?

Dr Altikriti: Is the question to me?

Mike Gapes: It is to Mr Mounir as well.

Ibrahim Mounir (Translation): Unfortunately, history is still read in an incorrect way. If you go to Islam or the literature of Ikhwan and their principles, there is no such thing as animosity or hatred towards Judaism or Jews. Hassan al-Banna, for instance, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, in the early formative period constituted a political committee in order to help him make policies and lead the group. He appointed three non-Muslim members to that committee, because he knew that they were part and parcel of society, so their word had to be heard and they had to be active in such things.

A statement in the Koran can explain everything. There is a verse that says, “If they”—here, “they” refers not only to the Jews or Christians, but to believers of any religion—“tend towards peace, you should be peaceful to them.” That means that you should not start any hatred or animosity, and if people are peaceful, you have no justification for having any animosity against them. The problem is that unfortunately our regimes are facing ideas and thoughts with suppression and oppression, hence they produce generations of militant or violent people.

We acknowledge that Sheikh Qaradawi is one of the great scholars of Islam in our time, but in Islam the fatwa issued by a scholar is not obligatory for others; it is his own view of the thing, so he should be responsible for it. We have the right, as Muslims, to argue and debate the rules and findings of any scholar according to the regulations of Islam. Also, despite the fact that we have great respect for him, he himself declared that he is not in the Muslim Brotherhood; I do not understand why the Muslim Brotherhood should be held accountable for him if he himself denies that he is a member of the Muslim Brotherhood.

One last thing: unfortunately, most of the reports coming from the ruling regimes should be taken with great caution, because many of them are not—

Chair: There are still a couple of important issues and my colleague, Mr Kawczynski, has been unbelievably patient, so I will give the last couple of questions to him. Could the answers be crisp, please, as far as is possible?

Q103 Daniel Kawczynski: I ask this to Ms Asem: why did the FJP in Egypt fail to work with its largest opponents, like the Noor and Wafd parties, while AnNahda in Tunisia did form a coalition with its largest opponent, Nidaa Tounes?

Sondos Asem: Did you say the Noor party? Which parties?

Daniel Kawczynski: Noor and Wafd.

Sondos Asem: I think the FJP did, actually, immediately after the revolution. Before the establishment of the Freedom and Justice party, Dr Mohamed Morsi and Dr Mohamed Badie were the most senior leaders in the Brotherhood. They met the military, just like all the other parties, and they proposed joining in elections as part of a cross-ideological coalition that was composed initially of 40 parties. Those parties included the Wafd party and many others. When they joined in elections, the coalition, which the FJP was part of, was the only cross-ideological coalition that was neither strictly secular nor strictly Islamist—the other coalitions that ran in elections were either strictly Salafist or strictly secular—so I think they did attempt to have inclusive representation in Parliament.

The Wafd party is the one that left the Democratic Alliance by the time of the elections. It initially joined the FJP as part of one coalition, and then it left the Democratic Alliance. It preferred to run independently—that was its own choice—just like a number of other parties did. In answer to your question, I think that they did have an alliance, and they ran in elections as part of an alliance. Have I answered your question?

Q104 Daniel Kawczynski: You say they ran as an alliance, but they did not form a Government as such together, did they, at any stage?

Sondos Asem: Concerning the Governments, when President Morsi had the authority to have a Government, his choice for Prime Minister was not from the Muslim Brotherhood. The majority of the Government were not from the FJP. In fact, the largest representation in any Government, after Dr Morsi got elected, from either the Brotherhood or the FJP was nine out of 36 Ministers. That was the largest Arab representation, which was approximately 25% of the Cabinet.

The majority in the Governments under Dr Morsi were non-FJP politicians, whether they were from leftist or liberal parties or were independent technocrats. Those are historical facts, and I have mentioned that in my written submission as well.

Q105 Daniel Kawczynski: I think we have only a minute left, so this question is for Mr Masmoudi. Tunisia has been one of the largest sources of foreign fighters joining Islamic extremists fighting abroad, particularly in Libya and Syria. Could you have done more to clamp down on extremists after the revolution? *[Interruption.]* I do not think you are going to get the chance to answer.

Chair: I'll give you a minute, and then we will have to finish.

Dr Masmoudi: In general, yes, I think we could have done more to clamp down, but you have to remember that in the first year after the revolution, there was a very weak security system in Tunisia after the collapse of the old regime. The Salafists took over many mosques literally by force. The Government then came back when AnNahda came to power in 2012 and took back most of those mosques. The root cause of the fact that many Tunisians have gone to these extremist groups is the Ben Ali era 23 years before the revolution. There was no religious education at all in Tunisia, so young people do not know—

Chair: I am sorry, Dr Masmoudi. If I do not bring things to a close, we will not make the Division and I will not have time to thank you all for your evidence. I am extremely grateful. There are some issues, particularly around attitudes to violence and its use and justification, that I wanted to explore but we have not had time to get into them. I will write to Dr Altakriti and Mr Mounir, if I may, with follow-up questions on those issues. On behalf of the Committee, may I say that we are extremely grateful for your evidence? Thank you very much.