

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Political Islam](#), HC 118

Tuesday 12 July 2016

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Members present: Crispin Blunt (Chair); Mr John Baron; Ann Clwyd; Mike Gapes; Mr Adam Holloway; Daniel Kawczynski; Yasmin Qureshi; Andrew Rosindell.

Questions 106-153

Witnesses

Mokhtar Awad, Research Fellow, George Washington University; **Ed Husain**, Senior Adviser, Centre on Religion and Geopolitics; and **Dr Machteld Zee**, Research Fellow, the Henry Jackson Society.

Examination of witnesses

Q106 **Chair:** Welcome to this afternoon's session of the Foreign Affairs Committee connected with our inquiry into political Islam. I am extremely grateful to the three of you for coming to give us evidence. I know, Mr Awad, that you have made strenuous efforts to get here, for which I am extremely grateful. Could you identify yourselves for the record?

Dr Zee: My name is Machteld Zee. I am from the Netherlands. I am currently employed by the Henry Jackson Society as a research fellow, and I did my PhD in jurisprudence at Leiden University on the topic of Sharia councils in the United Kingdom.

Ed Husain: Good to see you again. I am Ed Husain, a senior adviser at the Centre on Religion and Geopolitics.

Mokhtar Awad: I am Mokhtar Awad. I am a research fellow at the programme on extremism at George Washington University. I work on Islamist groups, with a specific focus on the politics and security of Egypt and Egyptian Islamist groups.

Q107 **Chair:** To kick off, I will put this into context. There should be a vote at 4 o'clock, it being an Opposition day, but we have just been advised that it might not happen. Some of my colleagues have to go to an IPU meeting at 4 o'clock, and the rest of us are then off to Paris later to give evidence on Brexit to France's Foreign Affairs Committee. I am hoping we can complete this session in an hour. If you think you have not been able to give us full enough answers because of the time constraints, I welcome you to look at the transcripts and then give us further evidence. If we keep questions and answers reasonably crisp, we will be able to get through a fair amount of questioning in an hour. Can I ask how each of you would define the phrase "political Islam"? How much do different political Islamist groups actually have in



common? Dr Zee, do you want to start?

Dr Zee: It is an interesting question. It was good to read in the notes from the previous panel that the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood themselves do not distinguish between Islam and political Islam. This is a big debate in academia as well—is there a difference between Islam and political Islam? I would say there is, because there are secular Muslims who can distinguish between law and religion and actually fight the Islamists. To keep it brief and crisp, I would say political Islam is the political ideology that Sharia should be the law that regulates all behaviour; Sharia should be the state law. That is political Islam.

Chair: That is how you would define it. Ed?

Ed Husain: I would broadly agree with that. Islamism is a political project that seeks to equate Sharia and state law. There are different strands to Islamism. There is revolutionary Islamism. There is “democratic” Islamism, and there is violent Islamism, specifically defined as Salafi jihadism. Islamism as a political ideology was only born in the last century. It was a direct result of the global developments in the emphasis of communism and socialism and the development of mass movements, which led Hassan al-Banna in Egypt in 1928 and Maududi in Pakistan in the 1940s to adopt that kind of activism. Rather than workers of the world unite, it became Muslims of the world unite. There are different kinds of Islamism, but ultimately it is a modern movement. It is an offshoot of politicised revolutionary movements of the last century, and it breaks decisively with 1,400 years of Muslim scholarship.

Mokhtar Awad: The only thing to add to what has been said is that political Islam, simply put, is the idea that Islam holds a theory for politics and state, and that Islam is an all-encompassing religion. As Ed said, there are different types of Islamist; there is a spectrum. The most important thing to understand about Islamism is that it is borne out of a crisis of modernity that Muslims in the Middle East and South Asia faced in the late 18th century, the 19th century and the early 20th century. With the dissolution of the Ottoman caliphate, the Muslim Brotherhood was founded. For that reason, Islamists believe that the modern world they live in is fundamentally un-Islamic. They attempt, through different methods and theorisations, to bridge a gap that they say exists between Muslims’ current political structures, economic structures and social structures and how Islam holds that those things should be.

Q108 **Chair:** Do you think that critics of the political Islamist movement—all of you can chip in on this; Mr Awad, you can lead—take enough account of the diversity within political Islam?

Mokhtar Awad: I think academic criticism appreciates the differences as one of the critiques of political Islam. As was mentioned, you had an earlier panel where the now deputy morshed or supreme guide of the Muslim Brotherhood was present, and they objected to the term “political Islam”. That is precisely because of who they are. They see themselves as the manifestations of Islam in society. The fact that there are different Islamist strands means that the fundamental notion that there is one Islam or one general way to do things is flawed, because they disagree among themselves. Critics of the movement point to that and shed much light on it, because it is one of the ways to get masses of Muslims to understand that, fundamentally, what these people are advocating is not of the essence of Islam.



Q109 **Chair:** Do both of you concur with that answer?

Dr Zee: I would like to add that you can focus on the differences between political Islam. That is a choice you can make, to place your focus on the different strands. You can also choose to study the similarities, for instance. Then you can say that there are certain differences, of course, but most often those are differences in method—for instance, the use of violence or slow Islamisation, as the Muslim Brotherhood review also showed.

From my position, which is studying women's rights, there is overwhelming overlap between Islamist strands. In Islamic theory you can say that acts are usually classified in five categories, ranging from forbidden to obligatory. Then you can say that these differences sometimes range between, is it permissible or recommended, obligatory or recommended, reprehensible or forbidden? Those are very detailed jurists' discussions in Islam.

So, yes, there is a difference, but you can also say you can study the difference between Belgian, Dutch and German law, but in general there are large similarities. I think that is what applies to political Islam as well.

Q110 **Chair:** In our study of this, or any critique of political Islam as a phenomenon, with women's rights you suggest we should look at the entire movement and try to find the similarities, but with other issues, such as the relationship with violence, should we be looking at it group by group, country by country? What would your advice be to this Committee on how we examine political Islam in this inquiry?

Ed Husain: That is a great question and I would like to draw out the broad parameters. Yes, Islamism philosophically tries to create, through mass mobilisation and infiltrating the political process, Sharia-based states. Their interpretation of Sharia, incidentally, is not historically the interpretation of most Muslims. That said, Islamism has led to violence and jihadism. That is one fork in the road, without doubt. We have seen Islamists adopt violence—we can go into the details in a moment—but it is vitally important for us to understand that Islamists have also produced democrats.

With all their flaws, we ought to look at Tunisia and Turkey and their recent developments in trying to foster a democratic culture, in trying to uphold the rule of law. In the case of Turkey—again, despite all the recent mistakes—the AKP has broadly been pro-Israel, aspiring to be members of the European Union and free-market capitalists. They were also an outcome of global Islamism.

Our challenge is how to apply sustained pressure on Islamist movements, especially that elite within them that is westernised and wants to be pro-western, to move towards a world order that is not confrontational. Our problem currently, whether it is in Jordan, Egypt or Syria, is that large chunks of the Muslim Brotherhood are not in that pluralist space. I have cited Tunisia and Turkey, but I would also cite individuals in the west who have undergone that journey and, rather than go towards jihadism, have moved towards democratic pluralism.

So it can be done, but it is incumbent, as you highlight, for our policymakers to understand—country by country, community by community, organisation by organisation, history by history—the bases of these operations, rather than adopt a blanket approach and say, "We are not going to be engaging with the Muslim



Brotherhood across the board,” based just on Hamas’s activities. Yes, Hamas is a problem, but Tunisia has proven that there can be pluralists within the Brotherhood.

I would say this one last thing. When the Muslim Brotherhood, and especially President Morsi, attained power in Egypt, I was working for the Council on Foreign Relations in New York and had sustained engagement with Mr Morsi’s office and several of his senior advisers. One thing that struck us repeatedly was their desire to be recognised, to be walking the halls of power in Washington DC and to attain aid packages from western organisations. They fully understood that none of those things would be forthcoming unless they were to become pluralist democrats. That is not to say that Morsi adopted that world view, but there were sufficient numbers of people in the upper echelons of the Muslim Brotherhood who could be corralled and incentivised and pressurised.

As all of you on the panel know only too well, political parties are led to some extent by an elite at the top. If that direction of travel is set from external pressure at the top, there is every hope that in years to come we will see an Islamist movement that need not be of the Egypt, Syria or Jordan variety, but much more of the Tunisia variety.

Q111 Chair: Mr Awad, is there anything you want to add to that?

Mokhtar Awad: I largely agree with what Ed said. The only thing I would want to clarify first is the issue of violence—of course, I think we are going to go into that in detail later on. It definitely has to be group by group and country by country. With that being said, we should not be blinded by the issue of violence or non-violence. This is not the indicator to judge whether a group is extremist in its views or not. You can be non-violent and still be extremist: white supremacists are the best example of that—at least that we have in the United States.

So with that understanding, fundamentally there is a shared view among Islamist groups of Islam’s place in society and how states should look. Even if it is through non-violent means, the end result that they all collectively seek would restrict people’s liberties and freedoms. At the same time, as Ed said, they can be incentivised—I think pressured is the best way to put it. With that being said, that, too, can be tactical in how it is presented.

Many theorists inside the Muslim Brotherhood and the Freedom and Justice Party in Egypt believe that, at some point or through some methods, you can get the United States, the UK and even Israel to let you be if you simply check some boxes and let them have something—for instance, as we saw with Gaza, they were willing to pressure Hamas to stop war with Israel in order to appease the United States. But fundamentally, I think what they hope for is that if they manage to get the bare minimum approval from the international community, they would have the necessary cover to implement whatever agenda they had.

So yes, at some point they may respect treaties and play along with the international community, but some of them believe that this is simply a price to pay to get cover to implement their agenda. These groups have to show that they fundamentally reject foundational notions in their texts that are anti-pluralistic and anti-liberal. Without that, the problems will continue where you have non-Islamists in these societies who continue to be suspicious towards them and continue to fear that, if they come to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

power through whatever method, ultimately they are going to restrict the liberties and freedoms of non-Islamists

Q112 Daniel Kawczynski: A review has been undertaken here in the United Kingdom into the Muslim Brotherhood. Would you give us an assessment? Do you think it has provided an accurate characterisation of the movement?

Mokhtar Awad: I found it to be very fair. I am someone who does not study the UK and the Muslim Brotherhood in the UK, but, to give you a sense of its significance and how I came across it, the mere news that there was a review seemed to apply some sort of pressure on leaders here who suddenly became more powerful as related to the situation in Egypt. That forced them to rethink some of the approaches that their Egyptian counterparts were taking and to rein in some radical and violent elements.

So not only was the review fair, but, inadvertently I believe, it helped to make the situation in Egypt somewhat better in that it applied the necessary pressure that was not applied by any Government on the Muslim Brotherhood: that we are looking at violent elements in your organisation, that this is not something we are ignoring and that ultimately you have to do something about it. I believe that the leaders in this country took necessary steps—unfortunately it was delayed—to rein in some violent elements in Egypt. I can go into detail about that later.

Daniel Kawczynski: Would either of you like to comment?

Ed Husain: Sure. On balance, yes, the review was fair, it was relevant and overall it was objective. It was led by two of our sharpest brains on this subject, Charles Farr and John Jenkins, and I think it came down on the right side to say that the Government will continue to have the Brotherhood under review. That illustrates the nature of the organisation being in flux and, therefore, those who monitor the organisation understand the fluidity of the organisation.

It was right not to go as far as to call the Muslim Brotherhood terrorists outright, but it was also right to say that the Brotherhood has had terroristic leanings in the past, from its very founder's involvement in the Palestine-Israel conflict to the assassination of Egyptian Ministers. So all that is now documented in a Government publication in a way that it had not been previously. On balance, I think the review's findings were just and fair, and it is right to continue to research and review the Brotherhood.

Dr Zee: I do not think I can add anything else other than I also think it was a good review and it is corroborated by many other works on the Muslim Brotherhood. It is a decent, fair review.

Q113 Daniel Kawczynski: So generally a good review rather than the fudge?

Ed Husain: When you say “fudge”, this Government—and I am not a spokesperson for the Government—was never going to say that the Brotherhood is a terrorist organisation and that we should deny all their people visas. It was never going to be in a position to appease some of the Governments that were applying pressure to this Government. We are a democracy. There are tens of thousands of people in this country who are Brotherhood members.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

I don't think it is the Government's place to be designating non-violent extremists as terrorists. Yes, they play the mood music of terrorism, which I think the review highlights, and that should be switched off. It puts the right amount of pressure on Muslim Brotherhood front organisations here in the UK, and rightly so, but I don't think it was a fudge. I think it did what it set out to do, which is to highlight the ideological, intellectual, philosophical underpinnings of the terrorist threat that this country and multiple countries around the world face.

- Q114 **Daniel Kawczynski:** So you think that the review was never going to have the remit, or was never designed, to assess whether or not the Muslim Brotherhood was a terrorist organisation? That is what you are saying, isn't it?

Ed Husain: Governments around the world will concur with the fact that the Muslim Brotherhood is not a terrorist organisation. It is a problematic organisation and has given birth to terrorist organisations, indeed, but as I have said it has also given birth to broadly democratic, or aspiring to be democratic, organisations, and it has given birth to individuals who have left the Muslim Brotherhood and become democrats, so the fork in the road goes in both directions.

- Q115 **Chair:** I know our immigration figures are off the scale, but how much of a domestic Muslim Brotherhood organisation is there in the UK? Obviously, the people we have seen have largely been refugees from other countries. You just referred to tens of thousands of Brotherhood members in the UK.

Ed Husain: Yes. I say that on the basis that I am not applying the Muslim Brotherhood's very narrow idiosyncratic definition of membership. Here, I am thinking about the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology and its adherents. I include the Jamaat-e-Islami, the east London mosque, the Muslim Council of Britain's large section—

- Q116 **Daniel Kawczynski:** But they would not think that they belonged to the Brotherhood, would they? They don't go to groups in that sense of Brotherhood meetings and religious instruction sessions and everything else that they do, do they?

Ed Husain: With respect, in the same way as Jeremy Corbyn and others would not say that they are members of the Socialist Workers party, but they adhere to a broad world view that is in confrontation with the west, that rejects Israel's right to exist, and wants to politicise and activise—

Yasmin Qureshi: That's rubbish.

Ed Husain: We are talking about ideology and a world view. In that sense, the MCB, the MAB, the east London mosque and others seek Muslims to be activists rather than pietistic, quietist, faith-observant Muslims who are Tories, Labour party members, Liberal Democrats and what not. It is that issue that we are highlighting. In terms of adherence to that ideology, yes it is tens of thousands, measured by the fact that there are annual conferences in this country that have attendees that are in that region.

- Q117 **Daniel Kawczynski:** Can I finish my questioning? This is to all three of you, but in particular Mr Husain. Many of our Gulf states allies have accused this organisation of being a terrorist organisation and of implementing or supporting acts of terrorism within their jurisdictions. How would you respond to that?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Ed Husain: I respond to that by looking at the behaviour of the current King of Saudi Arabia. He has welcomed Rached Ghannouchi, who is leader of the Tunisian Ennahda Movement on no fewer than three occasions, on one occasion going as far as the airport to welcome him.

If the Muslim Brotherhood and its more democratic individuals such as Ghannouchi were terrorists, why is the leader of all the Gulf countries going out to the airport to welcome him, and going out at the funeral of the last king to seek him out and, again, warmly welcome him to the Saudi capital?

The situation is much more complicated than the headlines make out. The trajectory of Saudi Arabia—indeed Qatar, parts of the Emirates and certainly parts of Kuwait—is a recognition that there is a plethora of thought patterns within the Brotherhood, and that we ought to divide and rule, so to speak, or in other words identify those we can work with and move them to a position where they, too, recognise Israel, work with the west, are pluralistic and believe in gender equality.

That is the position we ought to get them to. If there is any engagement by us or our Gulf allies, it should be principles-based and get them to that space, rather than protecting and promoting the Brotherhood for what it currently is.

Q118 **Daniel Kawczynski:** So when Saudi Arabia and, let's say, the Emirates come to us and highlight their concerns about us protecting this organisation within our jurisdiction, you are saying that, basically, we should tell them where to get off?

Ed Husain: Far from it. I am friends with people in the region. I am not saying that that should be our response. Our response should be that we are not the mothership of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood is not based in this country. We did not promote and fund the Muslim Brotherhood for the past 70 years. We did not provide a home for them when Gamal Abdel Nasser persecuted them.

If there is going to be a rooting out of the Muslim Brotherhood, it does not happen here. It happens in the countries that many of our Gulf allies are currently funding—Egypt, Syria and Jordan. For us, the battle should be thrown back into the Middle East and not absorbed here. For our citizens, we can be held responsible and we can fight the battle of ideas here, but for Middle Eastern issues, our Gulf allies are in a much better position to uproot the extremism, terrorism and literalism that exists in the Middle East.

Q119 **Chair:** I think Mr Ghannouchi would now deny that he was a Muslim Brother and say that he was Ennahda. To that extent, has he been on the same journey as King Salman, as far as you are aware?

Ed Husain: Forgive me—as King Salman? In terms of moving from where he was to—

Q120 **Chair:** Yes. I have heard it reported that he was, once upon a time, a Brother.

Ed Husain: You touch on something that is very important and sensitive. The key reason that lots of people in Saudi Arabia and the Emirates are concerned about the Muslim Brotherhood is because they have younger princes who are sympathetic, and they then shift. I cannot comment on the current King.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Dr Zee: I want to add that, last week, the leader of the Tunisian Ennahda met the King of Saudi Arabia in Mecca and Youssef Qaradawi, the spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, last week. The links are obvious.

Q121 **Mr Baron:** Is it fair to hold the entire Muslim Brotherhood responsible for any violence by its individual members or affiliates?

Ed Husain: No. I don't think we are and you are right that we should not.

Q122 **Mr Baron:** Would you accept, therefore, that we are perhaps being a little too critical—I am probing slightly—of the Muslim Brotherhood? Any ideology can be interpreted by individual members and affiliates both in a peaceful and in a violent manner. Mr Awad, you made the point that the Muslim Brotherhood may not be jihadist, but that it does believe or call for “the establishment of Islamic governance and the implementation of Sharia.” On the other hand, ISIL are tearing chunks out of the Muslim Brotherhood, thinking that they are softies and peacemakers and all the rest of it. You could paint quite a broad canvas of the Muslim Brotherhood as you could with other ideologies, couldn't you? Is one being a little naive?

Mokhtar Awad: Respectfully, it is not necessarily as clear-cut when it comes to Islamism and specifically when it comes to the Muslim Brotherhood. When we talk about the Muslim Brotherhood, it is always important that we look at that group. Of course, you can always give other examples of who is worse, but that does not make the other group better by default. When it comes to the Muslim Brotherhood, the issue is twofold. First is the hierarchical nature of the organisation. I am talking about the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood because it is really the most relevant group to talk about when we talk about the Muslim Brotherhood. It is deeply hierarchical. There is blind obedience to the supreme guide. You can have people who split, but, in that subset, there is still a modicum of continuation of obedience of your superior.

On the other hand, you have a general idea that you need to Islamise and achieve your objective. Ironically, the Muslim Brotherhood does not have the same set and defined jurisprudence, curriculums and so forth as the Salafis. It is actually quite broad. That opens the door for people inside the organisation to introduce ideas and constantly reinterpret them, but it is all in the context of, “How do we get to our end goal of a form of Islamic governance?” When you have that kind of structure, I would go as far as to say that you fundamentally just need a catalyst to put things in motion. That is what we saw with Sayyid Qutb. Why is one person able to put forward such a radical, revolutionary idea that Islam, effectively, is not being practised in the world? It is because of the nature of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Let me continue with Sayyid Qutb. He puts forth this idea, he is in prison, he is able to not only win many followers inside the organisation, but he is credited with helping revive the organisation during the period that he was alive. Of course, after his death there were revisions, but again it is because of how the organisation is, and its fundamental theological framework, that you can have people who just simply put forward their idea of violence or the need for violence to achieve this objective, and it is accepted and able to take hold. So it isn't like anything else. One example used, which is not necessarily a political ideology, is Egypt and the Coptic community in Egypt, which has suffered large degrees of persecution over the ages. You don't have



HOUSE OF COMMONS

a theological framework in the Coptic group inside Egypt for armed resistance against the state. But you can have that with an Islamist organisation.

- Q123 **Mr Baron:** Okay. I would like to bring in the others on this. I hear what you say, but in almost any ideology you can find extremists and the opposite end of the spectrum. Surely, then, the answer is to fall back on what the leadership actually says, and more importantly does, by way of leading by example? Do you think that the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood—perhaps we could focus on Egypt specifically, if that would help—has been strong enough in its direction on this? Has it condemned violence, for example? Has it distanced itself from it? We can have this debate about what any ideology actually means on the ground, but you have to come back to the leadership and what they actually say and do at the end of the day as a guiding light.

Ed Husain: If I may, I disagree with the premise of the question, which is that it is the leadership that is the direction provider and that the rank and file adhere to that. I say that because at one level you are right, but what we have seen with the Muslim Brotherhood, especially the current leader—he is currently in prison—is that he was in fact the gentleman who helped smuggle “Milestones”, the book of Qutb, out of prison and into wider publication. Yes, the Muslim Brotherhood has tried to put distance between Sayyid Qutb’s pronouncements and ideology and the organisation, but what they have not done is to say, “We will not be reading Sayyid Qutb’s materials in our educational infrastructures,” which, incidentally, are vast across the country, nor disowned him. In the absence of doing both those things, I think that the current leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Mohammed Badie, is to be held responsible for some of the extreme currents that we have seen both inside and outside Egypt unfolded in the name of Sayyid Qutb, because the Brotherhood’s leadership—and indeed its rank and file—have not provided adequate distance between Sayyid Qutb’s contribution to global jihadist thought and the current surge that we are seeing in the name of Sayyid Qutb’s writing.

So yes, you are right, the leadership has a responsibility, but what we have seen here is that the leadership condemns violence. By the way, that is a low bar. Anyone condemns violence. But the ideological underpinnings and the author of that world view that then propelled people like Abd al-Salam Faraj and others has not been rejected by this leadership or the previous leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood. I would go one further. I have met with the previous leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood and interviewed Mahdi Akef in great detail. I have written about this, so it is public and I am not making this stuff up. He is on the record as saying that al-Qaeda was a creation of the west. He thinks that 9/11 was an undertaking by Mossad. That is the leadership of the Brotherhood, Mahdi Akef, on the record. So when the Brotherhood produces people like that at the highest level, people have every reason to be concerned about the direction of travel of that organisation.

- Q124 **Mr Baron:** Very briefly, that is my point. If the leadership is producing people like that—people where you judge them by their actions rather than by their words—that is when you should get worried. Very briefly, because I know other Members want to come in, do Dr Zee or Mr Awad want to comment on that specific point?

Mokhtar Awad: If I may, on your specific question, because this is something on which I have published a lot, there is no easy answer when it comes to the situation that unfolded in Egypt. What we did have, in the beginning, were public messages:



“Our peacefulness is stronger than bullets”. Here we actually have an example where it is not so much the words but the actions. In other words, some of the leadership did say some of the right things, but then there was the other question of which leader. You had people saying certain things, but they weren’t actually following up with action to rein in certain people who were doing violent action. Then you started to have people saying, “Well, we are with so-called creative non-violence,” and this bastardised the idea of non-violence and peacefulness into equating their struggle with that of Nelson Mandela’s. So they manipulate words.

A Brotherhood leader can tell you that they are with non-violence, because they fundamentally see what they are doing as religiously legitimate defending—Daf’ al-Sa’el is the Sharia-based term for that. That being said, people like Ibrahim Munir, as far as I know—the people that you have in this country—have not supported violence and definitely don’t support violence, but they stepped in only after two or so years of things going out of control in Egypt. When you go to them, they say, “We didn’t know,” or, “We couldn’t do anything.”

That aside, you did have a leadership saying one thing, but people who were actually executing on the ground were a completely different matter. What we realised is that they were saying that the group was non-violent, but they were putting under their non-violence a lot of violent actions. In fact—sorry; just to summarise—there are growing indications that at least one Muslim Brotherhood leader, Mohamed Kamal, sometime in early 2014, did give the go-ahead for something called the special committees. These were violent cells that operated in Egypt. Supposedly their directive was, “You can use any kind of violence, just so long as you don’t use bullets.”

They look for different ways to justify fundamentally violent actions, but they hide behind certain terminology to make it seem like they are in a non-violent struggle.

Dr Zee: I would like to address a methodological issue. I think I can extract that from your question, “Is any political ideology multi-interpretable?” I would like to address that issue because I think it is very important.

I believe that in any political ideology there is a certain core that makes it possible for us to point at it, so you can recognise communism or liberal democracy, or here, the political ideology of political Islam. Yes, there are differences and there is a range, but there is a core, and that core is that whatever question these ideologists are dealing with, they turn to Sharia. They will never turn to Aristotle, as I see behind you. That is a core that we can address, and should address too, instead of focusing on the wide range. It is important because I fear that if we follow your approach, we might never be able to draw conclusions, and I think it is important here at least to leave today with certain conclusions.

My colleagues here focus on violence, but my position is, as a researcher on women’s rights, and especially when it comes down to women’s rights, the political ideology of Islamism actually can be brought to a core, that, regardless of the women’s issue at hand, will never be liberal democracy.

Q125 Mike Gapes: I want to get something factually clear here. We are talking about Sunni political Islam?



Ed Husain: Correct.

- Q126 **Mike Gapes:** The Muslim Brotherhood is a Sunni organisation and they have a view of Shi'a Islam, which is that Shi'as are apostates and that people like Ahmadis are not Muslims. Is that correct or is it the shared view of all people who hold a political Islamist ideology, coming out of the Muslim Brotherhood? Or are there differences?

Mokhtar Awad: It shifts, when we get into this. First, there is a general predisposition to be anti-everything that is not Sunni, period. However, that being said, if you look at the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, for instance, in its historical context and its political development it is less inclined to dabble in anti-Shi'a rhetoric. But we also saw this change during Morsi's presidency. In the beginning, he went to Iran. He received Ahmadinejad, but then a few weeks before he was ousted, he held a major conference for jihad in Syria and they had invited Salafist scholars who called Shi'ites "dogs". In that month, four Shi'as were lynched. So it shifts for some Brotherhood chapters, depending on the political context, but they are fundamentally orthodox in their outlook on non-Sunni Muslim movements.

- Q127 **Mike Gapes:** Thank you. Ed Husain, your written evidence says that political Islamists who are not extreme or militant share the same goals. Can you summarise what those goals are and which political Islamist groups share those goals? We are trying to get a grip of a very complex spectrum here.

Ed Husain: Mike, you are absolutely right, it is complex. We are pointing to the fact that non-violent Islamists, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, which is active here, are both in their current formation not jihadists operating in conflict theatres. What they share with jihadists and Salafi jihadists in particular in Syria and in Libya is the aim to make one interpretation of Sharia state law. That then means their interpretation is supreme. I will give you an example: as a Muslim, I don't drink alcohol, but that is my choice; the state has no bearing on this. But if I were living in an Islamic state ruled by Hizb ut-Tahrir or the Muslim Brotherhood or Salafi jihadists, drinking alcohol is not a question of halal and haram, right or wrong, forbidden, it is a question of legal or illegal. In other words, they change the entire dynamic of observing the faith. Their interpretation then means they impose their very literalist, black and white, rigid, confrontational form of religion on mass populations and that is exactly what we are seeing play out with ISIS today.

The Muslim Brotherhood may not share ISIS's methodology of taking up arms, but it shares the end result of creating a state that is compliant with their reading of Sharia. I gave a small example with alcohol, but it applies in geopolitics: rejecting membership of the United Nations, not recognising the state of Israel, not recognising other Muslim states because they don't apply their form of Sharia and being at constant war—its perpetual war theory—in order to conquer and occupy. If I had said all of this five years ago, and I did, one would be mocked for being alarmist. What we have now got is an entity in the Middle East proving to be our exhibit A. This is not theory; this is fact and it is being played out as we speak.

- Q128 **Mike Gapes:** You also said in the document you sent us that 51% of prominent figures in a sample you had studied in jihadi movements from the Middle East and Africa had previously had "clear links to non-violent Islamist organisations, before joining militant groups" and "Half of these" had had "links to the Muslim



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Brotherhood.” Can you explain these findings with some more information?

Ed Husain: I am happy to circulate this report afterwards. We undertook a study at the centre with highly intelligent researchers looking at 100 of the world’s leading jihadis. We are talking about Aymen al-Zawahiri, Osama bin Laden, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Abd al-Salam Faraj. The leading lights of the jihadi world coming out of the Middle East and North Africa.

We applied academic software that you code by putting in the common backgrounds of all the subjects you are studying. We looked at where they were born, where they went to school, which organisations they interacted with as they grew up, where they travelled, which families they came from, which country, a whole set of facts available about these 100 leading jihadis in the world. Of those findings, of the coding of that data, 51% of them had been members of or supporters of or interacted with the Muslim Brotherhood.

This applies to leading jihadists in the world. Ayman al-Zawahiri, arrested age 14 because of his circulation of and reading of Sayyid Qutb’s material. Abd al-Salam Faraj breaks away from the Muslim Brotherhood and goes and writes and creates a new organisation after his exposure to the Muslim Brotherhood. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, in Zarqa, exposed in Jordan to the Muslim Brotherhood. So 51% of our global sample was exposed to the Muslim Brotherhood. That is not to say that the 49% was not. Our difficulty is that we do not have the data that we can then code through our software.

Q129 Mr Holloway: But Ed, Sinn Fein-IRA—Catholic—probably 51% of people in the active service units sometimes have something to do with, say, the Jesuits. How does that fit as a smoking gun?

Ed Husain: The Jesuits, as far as I am concerned, are not advocating the creation of a new—

Q130 Mr Holloway: No, I am just saying that, just because at some point you have been associated with a particular strand of Islam—

Ed Husain: Our contention is that it does this. Three things happen, when you are either associated with, or a member of, the Muslim Brotherhood—by the way, it is a minority organisation. We are focusing on it, but it is a tiny organisation. It needs to be said that out of 1.6 billion Muslims around the world, no more than about 3%, if we are lucky, are members of the Muslim Brotherhood. That said, three things happen. One: if you are a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and you are not happy with the status quo or your inability to gain power or be in government, you stagnate. You go along and you are a kind of zombie-type character. You grow up and you carry on. That is one option, and most Muslim Brotherhood members are in that position. Either they are in prison or they are happy with the status quo and to take directions. That is the bulk of the Muslim Brotherhood membership.

Two other things happen. At one point, you are so committed that you realise there is no way that the Muslim Brotherhood, as it stands, is going to be able to deliver on the

¹ Clarification by witness: 51% of the sample had been linked with a variety of non-violent Islamist groups and, of this 51%, half had been linked with the Muslim Brotherhood.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

golden aim of an Islamic state. It is not just a philosophy: you believe that it is your religious duty to create this Islamic state. If you don't create it, you are sinful, and if you are sinful you will burn in hell for it. Those views are taken very seriously. If you are not going to be creating it with the Muslim Brotherhood, you go over to organisations that do create it—for example, ISIS and others that have been more successful in it. So you take the violent path because the so-called non-violent path isn't working. That is the second outcome.

The third outcome, which is a smaller outcome and not measured so much, is the outcome that we have seen with entire organisations such as the repressed Refah party of Erbakan, which becomes the AK party in Turkey, or the rejected Ennahda's initial aims and their exposure to democracy here in the West, which leads to Ghannouchi becoming a democrat. Those three strands: you continue, you dog on or you take up arms and become more vociferous in your pursuit—we have seen this again and again play out in history—or you become a pluralist democrat and try to do all the right and noble things in order to be a conducive member of society. What we are able to do in the west is actually influence some of those pressure points, to see the results that I think are conducive to world peace.

- Q131 **Mike Gapes:** A final question. I wanted to go back to your initial remarks where you talked about the beginnings of the Islamist ideological positions in the 20th century. You drew parallels, to some extent, with what was happening in terms of communist or nationalist movements elsewhere. Would it be fair to say that the Islamists are a kind of Islamic Trotskyists, in that they believe in establishing a world revolution, but that some of them have actually become Islamic Stalinists because they believe in doing it in one country rather than creating it worldwide? Is there a parallel?

Ed Husain: Absolutely right. There is a total parallel that some have become Islamic Stalinists and, yes, there are Islamist Trotskyists. I would go one further: some have become the Peter Mandelsons and Tony Blairs of this world—in other words, becoming mainstream democratic politicians. That is the story of ideologies, right? There is a spectrum. What we have seen with communism is that it has produced various strands—Ralph Miliband's sons are David Miliband and Ed Miliband—so it does go in a direction.

- Q132 **Yasmin Qureshi:** I have a couple of questions about the organisations that you represent, Mr Husain, and also the organisation that you represent, Dr Zee. Dr Zee, your organisation is well known—regarded as being neo-cons who seem to want to go and invade most of the Middle East. Whether it is Syria, Libya, Iraq or wherever, you are always advocating overthrows to promote democracy.

Mr Holloway: No, they are not.

Yasmin Qureshi: Come off it. This is what people have said to me.

Ed Husain: I think we need to debate political Islam, not organisations.

- Q133 **Yasmin Qureshi:** I will come on to political Islam, because it is connected. The one thing nobody looks at—the big elephant in the room in all these discussions about geopolitics, globalisation or political Islam—is the kind of leadership there is in the Middle East. Up to now, most of the leaders in these countries—the rulers of the Middle East—have not been democratic; they have actually oppressed their people



HOUSE OF COMMONS

quite severely. There have been a lot of problems in the areas we are talking about—Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Tunisia or wherever—which have effectively had dictatorships for the last so many years. The reason that that becomes important is that there are groups of people who want to go in and invade, to change these authoritarian regimes and put democracy in, and there are organisations like yours, that are accused of taking funding, essentially, to talk about this—political Islam and Islamists who are terrorists. You said that in your research, 51% of the jihadis, out of the 100 you looked at, had links with some kind of Islamic organisation or whatever.

Ed Husain: Those are the facts. We haven't made them up.

- Q134 **Yasmin Qureshi:** You talk about Hizb ut-Tahrir and organisations like that. One of the advantages of being old like me is that I remember Hizb ut-Tahrir when it was being discussed and young people were going to its meetings. I actually attended a number of its meetings and I have to say that when I listened to the speakers—these were some of the people running it—I did not feel for one second that any of them were promoting violence or suggesting going and killing people. Sometimes perhaps we need to reassess. So I come back to the question I asked earlier: why do you assume that people who may be traditionally conservative in religion or who may even have a particular world view will jump to the next level of killing themselves or killing other people? You cannot really give religion as a reason for that.

Ed Husain: I don't think any of us have said that. Our starting point was that Islamism is not Islam. Islamism is a break with 1,400 years of Muslim consensus and scholarship; it was influenced by communism and Marxism more than by the Koran. But you are absolutely right that someone who is traditional and conservative isn't necessarily a terrorist. What we have seen from the AK Party in Turkey and from the Ennahda Party in Tunisia is that both of them describe themselves as democratic conservatives with a small "c". I do not suggest—far from it—that conservative Muslims, in the political or even the observational sense, are somehow terrorists. In fact, I would say the opposite: some of the most robust refutations of Islamist extremists have come from Muslim scholars such as Shaykh Abdallah bin Bayyah in Saudi Arabia and also now in the Emirates, who is as conservative as they come. So forgive me, but I think—

- Q135 **Yasmin Qureshi:** But you also started by saying that it was linked with Sharia or their interpretation of Sharia. What I am trying to ask is whether this is not about religion or Sharia at all, but more about political challenges—the fact that there are dictatorships and authoritarian countries in the Middle East and that there are a number of issues that the international community has ignored and that have led to some of these political—

Ed Husain: I would love to be in complete agreement with you, but when I look at the world now, I think "There are dictatorships in Africa. There is a dictatorship in China. Why aren't the Chinese blowing themselves up?" There is a situation in the Middle East, yes, and there are dictatorships there, but there are dictatorships in other parts of the world. People in North Korea aren't blowing themselves up, for all of North Korea's problems. We have to accept the fact that there is a reading—not the reading, but a reading—of Sharia that justifies suicide bombers as martyrs and that endorses those murderers with a heaven rather than a hell.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q136 Yasmin Qureshi: I have yet to read any bit of the Koran or any of the hadiths that says that you should go and kill yourself. Suicide is considered an immoral sin in Islam, so to suggest that anybody is using Islam, as a religion, as a reason to go and blow up themselves, women, children or other people, or that that has any link with Islam, is complete and utter nonsense. I have never read a single extract that suggests that anybody could draw that conclusion.

Mr Holloway: But we kill people—

Chair: Order.

Mokhtar Awad: If I may, since some of these comments were directed to all of us, your observation that this has nothing to do with Islam is the prime criticism of political Islam. No, it's not just about Islam; there is something very political about it. As I said, Islamism was born out of a crisis of modernity, specifically in the Arab world and south Asia. These are people saying, "The way that we catch up to the West is by returning to the way Islam was 1,400 years ago." They rely on Islam, but fundamentally what they are selling is a political idea. That is why it has traction, and on some level, that is why you can have people who drink alcohol, for instance, or lead deviant lifestyles and support ISIS, as we see with some of the people here in Europe. Why? Because, again, it's fundamentally an idea—

Q137 Chair: Define "deviant lifestyles".

Mokhtar Awad: Deviant lifestyles by Muslim standards. You spend too much time dealing with these people and you sometimes inherit some of their terminology. Now, you are correct—

Q138 Chair: Just what do you mean by "deviant lifestyles"?

Mokhtar Awad: Deviant lifestyles—they go clubbing, they go to bars and so on. There are lots of articles by people amazed by that, who say, "How is it that somebody who owns a bar—"

Q139 Chair: The Saudi bombers who did 9/11 were reported to have gone clubbing before.

Mokhtar Awad: The most recent example is one of the Paris attackers, I believe, but that is beside the point.

Yes, this is not fundamentally just about Islam. These are people selling a political idea, and their political idea rests on the notion that when Muslims fundamentally enact Islam as it was 1,000 years ago, they will go back to their past glory. That is not something that is really challenged by anyone. That is why challenging political Islam is not simply about somebody going to the Koran and telling them that the Koran doesn't say that. They understand that; they are going beyond the Koran. That is why somebody like Imam Yusuf al-Qaradawi fundamentally believes that suicide bombing is okay. Why? Because it's not an issue about whether suicide is right or wrong. They are past that. It is about, "How do we defend ourselves against an aggressor? Can we use this new type of bombing? Yes." The fact that it uses suicide becomes irrelevant.

To finish off my point, that is why it is important, when we talk about these ideologies and these groups, that the response is not about a moderate Muslim alternative, but rather a moderate political alternative and a political ideology that people in the Arab



HOUSE OF COMMONS

world and south Asia can adopt and look forward to, to make their lives better, and I believe that that is liberalism.

Q140 Andrew Rosindell: My question is to Dr Zee. How would you describe the different versions of Islamic law that different political Islamist groups support?

Dr Zee: That takes us back to my response to Mr Baron. Yes, there are differences. For instance, this is an example of a Sharia handbook. I can pass it around later, if people are interested. This is a book of jurisprudence governing one of the four Sunni schools of law, and it has been approved by al-Azhar and many other important Islamic authorities. The basic idea is that 75% overlaps. You do have differences, but these range from, “Should we use violence in achieving a Sharia state or should we use slow Islamisation to crush political opposition?” In the end, the end goal is clear: you have a state with Muslims who adhere to Sharia, then the version, as Mr Husain said, that local Islamists prefer over the others. So, yes, there are differences, but they are differences in methodology mostly. The end goal is the same. Especially for women’s rights, the outcome is unfavourable towards women.

Q141 Andrew Rosindell: How do these different versions relate to Western legal codes?
[Interruption.]

Dr Zee: Should I continue speaking?

Chair: Yes, in 60 seconds.

Dr Zee: Could you repeat the question?

Chair: Order. The sitting is suspended. We will come back in 15 minutes, and we aim to finish no later than 4.30 pm.

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

On resuming—

Chair: We will now resume the meeting and I invite Adam Holloway to pick up the questioning.

Q142 Mr Holloway: Is it too simplistic to say that the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt were trying to entrench themselves in power and force through an Islamising agenda?

Dr Zee: I would think that is correct, yes.

Q143 Mr Holloway: It is too simplistic, so what were they doing?

Dr Zee: No, I think that is a correct account; it is not too simplistic. From my position researching women’s rights, you can definitely see certain developments where they want to implement the Islamist position on women.

Mokhtar Awad: Your question is about Islamising in Egypt. It is complicated by the fact that they had only one year.

Q144 Mr Holloway: Only one year?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mokhtar Awad: One year in power. The Brotherhood had sufficient powers over the state. Morsi was able to replace the head of general intelligence, the heads of the military, the head of the Ministry of the Interior, and the Minister of Defence as well.

They didn't have the necessary time to implement any sort of agenda, let alone an Islamising agenda. What we did see was that the foundations were being laid. I was just discussing the 2012 constitution with someone. It provided that the al-Azhar senior scholars council, over which the Muslim Brotherhood would definitely have had control over the years, were to be consulted in all matters related to Islamic Sharia law. It is Wilayat al-Faqih-esque.

Article 219 of the 2012 constitution of the Muslim Brotherhood was an unprecedented article in almost all Arab constitutions in that it sought to clarify what Sharia means in the constitution. Let me just say the sentence very quickly: "The principles of Islamic Sharia include general evidence, foundational rules, rules of jurisprudence, and credible sources accepted in Sunni doctrines and by the larger community". This tries to lay the groundwork for eventually allowing for the rules of Sharia to be part of the body of laws in Egypt.

They did not necessarily do much, because it was one year, but if we look at the constitution and the kind of powers that they had, it is definitely not simplistic to say that there was some sort of agenda in place.

Ed Husain: I am broadly in agreement. I think that, yes, there was an agenda in place, but to be fair to the Brotherhood, there were multiple strands within their Government. There was the strand of Khairat el-Shater, the deputy of the Brotherhood who gave interviews to the *The Wall Street Journal* intentionally, because he was trying to reach into the US and to reach free trade agreements and so on.

Their immediate priority was not to Islamise Egypt, and they went out of their way to make those reassurances, but I think that the real fear was that it didn't matter what they said and what they did. The perception of large proportions of the Egyptian civil service bureaucracy, the judiciary, the business elite and most certainly the military was that the Morsi Government was in essence there to Islamise Egypt. As long as that was the perception, it didn't really matter how successful they were or not in Islamising the Egyptian body politic.

Q145 **Mr Holloway:** But was that the whole story in terms of their unpopularity? Was there also a degree of incompetence?

Ed Husain: Oh yes, a vast degree of incompetence.

Q146 **Mr Holloway:** Finally, what does the future hold for Islamist parties? Let's hear about Egypt, and then let's go on to Tunisia and elsewhere.

Mokhtar Awad: I will be very brief. In Egypt, the outlook is not so bright, but despite what people might assume, there isn't a blanket rejection of any Islamist parties. In fact, one of the most conservative Egyptian parties, the Nour Party, is still legally working. This regime is actually capable of accommodating Islamists to the extent that they do not challenge its power. So, if the Muslim Brotherhood concedes defeat in Egypt and accepts the status quo, it is more than likely in the next five years to be integrated back at some level, so long as these conditions are met.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

In Tunisia, Ennahda will most likely survive. If the problem of Salafi jihadism in Tunisia is resolved and we are left with non-jihadi Salafis, the question is whether or not Salafi political parties will have a more pronounced role than they used to in that country. There is definitely more room for Islamist activism in Tunisia than there is in Egypt. I will let my colleagues come in on other countries.

Dr Zee: I would like to follow up on that. Research by the Pew centre shows that 75% of Egyptians want Sharia as state law. In Tunisia, half of the population want Sharia law. This in itself is a significant difference between the countries.

With regard to the future of Islamist political parties, there now seems to be the development of the idea that Ennahda inspired Islamist political parties to separate religion from the state, formally at least. The fact is that they were actually forced to do so in Tunisia, because there was unrelenting protest from secularist parties. So to answer your question on the future of Islamist parties, it depends on the level and the success of the protest of opposing parties. You cannot say that this is an independent development; it depends on the counter powers.

Ed Husain: I agree with everything my colleagues have said. Casting our minds back to 2012, when then Prime Minister Erdoğan of Turkey went to Egypt and was welcomed by the masses in the streets and given a huge party in Cairo Opera House, the one message that he wanted to convey to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood leadership was, “Embrace secularism and become pluralists, because it is secularism and pluralism that guarantee your prosperity in opposition, and guarantee the minorities within your country.” The response from the Muslim Brotherhood was to chase him out of town—to say that he doesn’t understand Egypt, that he is part of the problem, and that they are not Turkey and will not become a pluralist, secular, democratic force.

Now look where Morsi finds himself as a result of discarding not only that advice from Erdoğan, but subsequent advice from Rached Ghannouchi. I know from conversations with Islamist leaders in the region that there is this dynamic that Dr Zee speaks about. They depend on one another, they talk to one another and they compare histories. I think that the future of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt has to be to go back to first principles and realise why they failed and to learn from the Turkish experience. By the way, in Turkey there was military suppression and coup after coup, with party after party banned, until it came to the AK Party. I have met AKP members who drink alcohol and then go to pray. More conservative and orthodox Muslims may have a problem with that, but that is where it is.

The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood needs to learn from the way in which the Tunisians and the Turks have taken politics to a secular, pluralistic level. When they do that sincerely and genuinely and break with the past, the Egyptian masses and the Egyptian elite will learn to trust them. Unless they break with the past left over from the last century, I fear that the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood will continue to be persecuted and will spend more time in prison than in the palaces.

Q147 **Mr Holloway:** Are they beginning to understand that?

Ed Husain: Some camps do. The younger ones seem to understand it more, especially those who are now in exile and those living in Turkey and here in the West, but the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

message hasn't yet gone through to the leadership in prison. Again, that is something where we in the West can be helpful in putting pressure on President Sisi and others to instigate that dialogue inside prisons. That shift needs to happen. The old Muslim Brotherhood needs to die, and a new generation needs to come with a new vision that is relevant, globalised and part of the global economy that wants to create prosperity for Egypt, rather than taking it back to an 11th-century Sharia state that never existed, other than in their imaginations.

Q148 Chair: There is always a danger that that advice will be taken rather too literally, if one looks at the behaviour of the Egyptian judiciary.

Ed Husain: You said that; I didn't.

Q149 Chair: Our last couple of questions are on the Muslim Brotherhood and women. Both the Muslim Brotherhood and Ennahda have been rather successful in recruiting women, haven't they? That was certainly my experience of being inside Rabaa al-Adawiya in July 2013. There were rather a lot of women there.

Dr Zee: I have read the transcript of the previous panel. They make the point that they are recruiting women, but it is important to realise that recruiting more women doesn't necessarily mean that the position of women is enhanced in the way that we in the West would think is normal. I have a very powerful illustration that I would like to share with you.

In Egypt, 60% of women do not receive an inheritance from their parents. Under Sharia, women are entitled to half as much inheritance as their male family members. There is movement to change that, which is positive in itself, but Ennahda women themselves oppose it. People should be aware that Ennahda, even though it is recruiting women, is not actually helping women in those aspects. Ennahda women politicians are saying, "We cannot change inheritance laws because our constitution says that Islam is our state religion and the Koran says that women cannot inherit equally."

Q150 Chair: I can sense your frustration that women in the region do not appear to know what's good for them, but there is an issue here as to where the conservative attitudes in the region come from. Are political Islamists responsible for these conservative attitudes or is it simply a reflection of society there as a whole?

Dr Zee: Well, there is an overlap of course. Islamist political parties represent conservative views that live in society there.

Mokhtar Awad: This is one of the more interesting debates. The Islamists say that the society is just conservative. Again, they played a major role in Islamising that society and pushing forward the so-called conservative consensus. I know this is a tired anecdote, but it is true: the Egypt of the 1940s and '50s was completely opposite from that of the '70s and '80s because there were people who were very successful. By the way, I always say that the Islamists have already won the battle. They succeeded in Islamising large sections of Muslim communities across the world and making them more conservative. Yes, society is conservative, but that didn't happen in a vacuum.

Q151 Chair: So the rather difficult truth is that secular Governments in the Middle East haven't done any better than political Islamists in either defending or advancing



HOUSE OF COMMONS

women's rights, gay rights or the rights of other minorities. They have both been a disaster.

Mokhtar Awad: Well, definitely not. Some fundamental things that were unthinkable in Egypt were introduced in the 1940s and 1950s by modernist Governments, if you will—I wouldn't call them secular Governments. Those things included rights, suffrage, the inclusion of women in the workplace, and women not being forced to adhere to a certain dress code. Those were, at the time, revolutionary changes that were happening in different societies.

The problem is that subsequent regimes, which again were not secular, but non-ideological nationalist dictatorships, in large part to appease Islamists and increasingly conservative societies, left the space open for Islamists when it came to societal issues, and did not do as much to defend hard-won freedoms of emancipation for women, again specifically in the case of Egypt. That being said, they did not take decisive steps to roll back again things like women's suffrage and inclusion in the workplace. They did not do as much to defend those against encroaching Islamisation, in part because of political calculations to appease the conservative base.

Ed Husain: I would like to put two examples on the table as food for thought. One is that in Morocco, there is a broadly secular Government, but there are laws now in place to ensure gender equality, on inheritance for women, forbidding polygamy and so on.

On the question of gay rights, we often forget that it was the Ottoman empire in 1858 that decriminalised homosexuality. The fact that we have gone backwards is worth thinking about. When that was decriminalised, there were not large protests, people were broadly tolerant and accepting, but now we are in a situation where it has become one of those issues that Islamists want to bring to the fore in order to drive a wedge between the rest of the world—broadly the West—and their street.

So we have historical precedents, such as the Ottomans in the 1850s and the Tanzimat reforms decriminalising homosexuality, and we also have the example of Morocco and what it has done for gender equality in that space to lean on and say that there is not an inherent "Muslim way" in doing all of this, but that there is an inbuilt pluralism that we can draw on to help build these societies and pull the rug from under the feet of the radical Islamists.

Q152 **Daniel Kawczynski:** I am glad that Mr Husain has raised the issue of Morocco. Obviously, the Arab world is so vast and so different, from Mauritania on the one end to the Emirates on the other. When you think about those countries, which is the one that is making most progress in this area, from what you have said? Is it Morocco? By the way, do they discuss these issues within the Arab League, in terms of trying to see if they can learn from one another?

Ed Husain: On the question of gender equality?

Daniel Kawczynski: Yes.

Ed Husain: I wouldn't want to take away from Dr Zee if you have a comment. My sense comes from looking at the laws and the advance in gender equality at the highest levels. They have female clerics; they have establishments to create Muslim leaders in



seminaries that are dedicated to women. So it is not just a 30,000-feet Government initiative, but they have tried to take this out to the villages and rural parts of Morocco where morchidat and others who are trained theologically justify this on jurisprudential grounds, on fiqh grounds.

From all the evidence we have seen, it is Morocco that is furthest ahead on instituting gender equality within the law, but also in civil society and wider cultural practices. It is not there fully yet, but it is the most advanced. That might be down to its experiences with France and its proximity to French culture. Whatever the factor is, they justify this on religious grounds and they have advanced it through their courts and their political systems and civil society and broader mechanisms, in a way that I have yet to see any other Arab country advance.

Q153 Daniel Kawczynski: Just last week I hosted a reception for people who are writing about the progressive way in which Morocco is dealing with terrorism, in contrast to certain other countries. Do you think Morocco is trying proactively to share its experiences with other Arab League states or not? Or is this something that is not discussed?

Ed Husain: No, I think it is discussing it with other Arab League states, but I can't confirm whether it is done through the Arab League or not. Take for example, the Marrakesh declaration that happened earlier this year, where the Government of Morocco helped facilitate Abdallah bin Bayyah to convene Muslim and other leaders from around the world to bring an end to the persecution of religious minorities—that is, Christians, Jews, Yazidis and others—across the Middle East.

That kind of initiative has not happened in many countries other than Morocco and, secondly, in the United Arab Emirates. Yes, the experience is being shared but it seems to me that it is being shared by the Government inviting others into Morocco, especially civil society and religious leaders, rather than through the strict mechanism of the Arab League.

Chair: I thank all three of you for coming and for your evidence. Thank you very much indeed. As we commented in private, it is an extremely interesting inquiry we are engaged with. Your evidence has been very helpful. Thank you, Mr Awad, in particular for the journey you have made to give us evidence. On behalf of my colleagues, we are extremely grateful.