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Problems with Designation of the Muslim Brotherhood as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO)

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There is no single international entity called “the Muslim Brotherhood.” While there are numerous movements, political parties, associations, and informal groups that take some inspiration from the original Muslim Brotherhood movement founded in Egypt in 1928, there is no single "Muslim Brotherhood" organization with global command and control over followers. As experts Will McCants and Benjamin Wittes [describe](#), the Muslim Brotherhood as a whole is "simply too diffuse and diverse to characterize. And it certainly cannot be said as a whole to engage in terrorism that threatens the United States."

The Muslim Brotherhood does not meet the evidentiary standard for a terrorist designation, and a broad designation could be interpreted to include a large number of loosely affiliated groups, including many that engage exclusively in peaceful political and social activity. Because of the diffuse multinational nature of the Brotherhood movement and the many groups that have evolved from its various branches and offshoots, designating the entire “Muslim Brotherhood” as a terrorist organization would likely be interpreted as lumping together a large number of very loosely affiliated groups, including many that engage exclusively in peaceful political and social activity.

Designation would undermine serious and important efforts to combat genuine terrorist threats. Intelligence and national security experts agree that the primary terrorist threats to Americans remain Al Qaeda and ISIS. Designating the Muslim Brotherhood as an FTO could divert crucial counterterrorism resources from efforts to uncover and combat the groups that represent a proven threat to the United States and its citizens. In addition, as a January 31 CIA memo (as reported in [Politico Magazine](#)) concludes, “US designation would probably weaken MB leaders’ arguments against violence and provide ISIS and al-Qa’ida additional grist for propaganda to win followers and support, particularly for attacks against US interests.”

Designation would create problems for many U.S. allies and counterterrorism partners. Political parties that have in some way evolved from various Brotherhood-affiliated groups are currently represented in the parliaments of many key U.S. allies, including Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, and Tunisia. In addition, the current Prime Minister of Morocco and cabinet ministers in both Morocco and Tunisia are from national political parties that evolved from offshoots of the Brotherhood. A broad designation of “the Muslim Brotherhood” as an FTO could needlessly complicate the U.S. relationship with these allies, making military and counterterrorism cooperation extremely difficult.