



House of Commons
Foreign Affairs Committee

**‘Political Islam’, and the
Muslim Brotherhood
Review: Government
Response to the
Committee’s Sixth
Report**

Eighth Report of Session 2016–17



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The Foreign Affairs Committee

The Foreign Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and its associated public bodies.

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Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Chris Stanton (Clerk), Nick Beech (Second Clerk), Dr Ariella Huff and Zoe Oliver-Watts (Senior Committee Specialists), Ashlee Godwin and Nicholas Wade (Committee Specialists), Clare Genis (Senior Committee Assistant), James Hockaday and Su Panchanathan (Committee Assistants), and Estelle Currie (Media Officer).

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1 Introduction

1. The Foreign Affairs Committee published its Sixth Report of Session 2016–17, on [‘Political Islam’, and the Muslim Brotherhood Review](#), on 7 November 2016, as House of Commons Paper HC 118. The response from the Government was received on 6 January 2017 and is appended below.

2. Each section of this report consists of three elements:

- i) The text of the conclusions and recommendations from the Committee’s original report
- ii) The response of the Government
- iii) The commentary of the Committee on the Government’s response.

2 Response from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and Committee commentary

3. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) notes the Foreign Affairs Committee's report on 'Political Islam', and the Muslim Brotherhood Review, published on 7 November 2016. This report sets out the FCO's response to each of the Committee's conclusions and recommendations.

Defining 'political Islam'

The Committee's conclusion/recommendation

4. National circumstances are certainly a relevant factor for assessing political-Islamist groups, but it is also the case that some of the most significant recent developments in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region—from the Arab Spring to the spread of ISIL—show the power of ideas that cross national borders. Political Islamist groups in different countries influence one another, and share elements of political ideology and philosophy. The FCO should supplement its country-specific framework for understanding 'political Islam' with a thematic basis for analysis, which forms policies towards common global, regional, and political ideologies as well as individual countries. (Paragraph 13 of the Committee's original report)

The response of the Government

5. The Government agrees that it is important to continue to develop our understanding of both common factors and distinctions between political Islamist groups, including in different geographical locations. The FCO devotes significant resource to understanding political Islam, with our diplomatic missions reporting regularly on trends and our Research Analysts drawing on these to provide in-depth analysis with links to external expertise.

6. In forming policy and interacting with individual countries, we also recognise that generalisations on political Islam are difficult and can be misleading. Islamist groups operate within different political, as well as geographical, contexts and with varying records on issues such as governance and human rights. As 'political Islam' covers a broad spectrum of movements and ideologies, the Government does not adopt a 'one-size-fits-all' policy.

The Committee's commentary

7. **The FCO agreed with the Committee's conclusion that political Islam comprises a broad spectrum of movements and ideologies, and that a 'one size fits all policy' is inappropriate. When forming a nuanced policy, the FCO should continue to consider to what extent, and how, different political Islamist groups interact with, inspire, or support one another, thus appreciating the inter-connectivity of these groups as well as their diversity.**

Our definition of 'political Islam'

The Committee's conclusion/recommendation

8. We have identified three values that should guide the degree of positive engagement with groups and parties in the MENA region. These values should be applied to political Islamists, but they should also be a benchmark for assessing all political philosophies on an equal basis globally, with the same standards being applied to the Islamists as to all other ideologies in terms of what behaviour is acceptable to the UK and what is not: (i) participation in, and preservation of, democracy. Support for democratic culture, including a commitment to give up power after an election defeat; (ii) an interpretation of faith that protects the rights, freedom and social policies that are broadly congruent with UK values; (iii) non-violence as a fundamental and unambiguous commitment. The aim of this inquiry is to assess the extent that 'political Islamists' fulfil these criteria, and to assess against these criteria the policies and practices of the FCO towards these groups. (Paragraph 17 of the Committee's original report)

9. We partially agree with the FCO's definition of 'political Islam'. We agree with their definition of it as a broad phenomenon that encompasses a wide range of different beliefs, but believe that groups engaged in illegal violence should be included in the definition despite them being excluded from overt engagement with the UK Government. The FCO should use more precise language to differentiate between different types of political Islamist. The FCO told us that there is one form of Islamism that embraces "democratic principles and liberal values", and another form of Islamism that instead holds "intolerant, extremist views". We consider it inappropriate to place these two types of Islamism within the same, single category and—if the FCO wishes to encourage Islamist groups towards democracy, non-violence, and a flexible interpretation of their faith—then we recommend that it devises a vocabulary that doesn't group these types together. (Paragraph 18 of the Committee's original report).

10. As the FCO told us, an effective strategy for countering Islamist extremism is vital for the UK's national interests. But, in addition to outlining the ideologies that the UK is determined to oppose in the MENA region, the FCO should likewise make a clear case for the political philosophies that the UK will commit to engage with. We suggest the above three criteria as a basis for doing so. (Paragraph 19 of the Committee's original report)

The response of the Government

11. The Government's engagement with Islamist political groups forms an important part of our overall engagement strategy with countries across the MENA region, supporting our primary objectives of protecting our security, promoting our prosperity and projecting our values.

12. The Government welcomes the Committee's suggestion for categories to guide our engagement. We can confirm these are broadly in line with our existing general principles for engagement with political Islamist groups: their (i) rejection of violence; (ii) commitment to democratic processes with inclusive governance and tolerance of other faiths and minorities; and (iii) respect for international agreements. Provided Islamist political groups adhere to these core principles, we treat them in the same way as any other political party.

13. Where parties, groups and organisations connected to political Islam are non-violent in their ideologies and in practice, we should continue to engage, including as part of our strategy for countering Islamist extremism. It is also important to reiterate that engagement does not imply the Government's endorsement or legitimisation of a group or its policies.

The Committee's commentary

14. **The FCO has provided three criteria against which political-Islamist groups, like others, can understand whether and why the UK regards engagement with them as appropriate. While these have features in common with our criteria, the Committee would like to see the FCO provide a more detailed explanation of its criteria. This should include an explanation of what is meant by a “commitment to democratic processes with inclusive governance and tolerance”—which our original report described as including a commitment to give up power after an election defeat—and of what examples the FCO is referring to when it describes “respect for international agreements”. The FCO should respond to our recommendation that these criteria should be used as a benchmark for assessing all political philosophies on an equal basis globally, and should not be applied exclusively to political Islamist groups.**

15. **It is also the case that the Government has not responded to our conclusion that it is inappropriate for the FCO to place a form of Islamism that embraces “democratic principles and liberal values” and another form of Islamism that instead holds “intolerant, extremist views” within the same, single category of ‘political Islam’. We recommended that the FCO devise and use a vocabulary that does not group such distinct ideologies together.**

Democracy and elections: winning elections

The Committee's conclusion/recommendation

16. Political Islamists self-identifying as democrats have embraced elections as a mechanism for contesting and winning power. They should be allowed to freely participate in democratic processes, and the FCO should use the ability of political Islamists to take part as one of the key criteria for defining free elections in the MENA region. (Paragraph 27 of the Committee's original report)

The response of the Government

17. The Government supports free and fair elections as an important part of the democratic process, and agrees with the Committee that groups across the political spectrum should be part of this process, in the MENA region, and worldwide, as long as they unequivocally and consistently eschew violence in principle and in practice.

18. Democracy is a core British value, and the form of government most conducive to long-term peace and sustainable development. By “democracy” we mean the existence of properly functioning institutions, pluralism ensured through the protection of minorities,

and the rule of law to protect people from all forms of discrimination and to uphold their human rights. People should have a say in the decisions that affect them through accountable, participative, representative and transparent political systems.

The Committee's commentary

19. **The FCO has agreed with the Committee.**

Democratic culture: sharing power

The Committee's conclusion/recommendation

20. In their definitions of democracy, political Islamists have sometimes emphasised a highly mechanical understanding that equates democracy with elections, and reduces elections to an outcome of 'winners' and 'losers'. There is a risk that this definition fails to take sufficient account of broader aspects of democratic culture, such as power sharing and inclusive governance. In terms of how they have behaved in power, some political-Islamist parties—especially EnNahda in Tunisia—have shown a greater acceptance of broader democratic culture, including a commitment to give up power after an election defeat. The FCO should encourage a broader understanding of democracy, and condemn majoritarian and exclusionary practices whether they are committed by Islamist, their opponents and other governments (Paragraph 37 of the Committee's original report).

The response of the Government

21. The Government promotes democratic values, and inclusive governance. This includes encouraging political Islamist parties, whether they are in power or in opposition, to commit to a real and lasting democratic process. It is important that we continue to follow the way political Islamist groups act whilst in office, in addition to commitments to embrace the democratic process. That is, judging progress not only by what groups say but by what they do.

22. The Government encourages an understanding of democratic values through our engagement and dialogue, also supported by HMG programmes. For example, in 2016/17, we will provide over £15m to support the strengthening of governance and democracy in the MENA region. This includes projects such as the development of freedom of speech legislation in Tunisia.

The commentary of the Committee

23. **The FCO has agreed with our recommendation. We want to see an FCO with sufficient resources to work effectively and have an impact in the region.**

Democracy and sharing power

The Committee's conclusion/recommendation

24. The FCO should have made clearer its concerns over the incompetent, non-inclusive, and narrow nature and behaviour of President Mohamed Morsi's government in Egypt.

The FCO should also condemn the influence of the military in politics as contrary to UK values. The FCO should not let itself be seen as justifying the way in which the FJP was removed from power in Egypt, and it should be forthright in highlighting to the Egyptian Government the contradictions inherent in forcibly excluding the Muslim Brotherhood from taking part in democratic processes. (Paragraph 42 of the Committee's original report)

The response of the Government

25. The Government has been consistently clear that Egypt's stability and success depend on democratic process and principles.

26. During Morsi's time in office, we challenged the narrow and non-inclusive approach of his government. The Government's Review into the Muslim Brotherhood concluded that the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, through the vehicle of The Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), did not do enough to demonstrate political moderation or a commitment to democratic values.

27. After Morsi was removed from power, the UK was clear through exchanges at senior Ministerial and official level (see Mr Ellwood's written response to the FAC for further detail) that we did not support military intervention as a way to resolve disputes in a democratic system.

28. We continue to support political progress in Egypt, including better protection of Egyptians' constitutional rights, freedom of expression and political association, and more space for NGOs and civil society.

The Committee's commentary

29. **The FCO has broadly agreed with the Committee.**

Transparency of organisation, and internal structures

The Committee's conclusion/recommendation

30. The repression that the Brotherhood has faced in Egypt, and other parts of the Middle East, makes the group unlikely to be fully transparent about its structure and operations. We have found the Muslim Brotherhood to be a secretive organisation, but not a secret one. The secretiveness of some political-Islamist groups makes it important for the FCO to have a clear understanding of them, and the resources to enable it to do so. (Paragraph 45 of the Committee's original report)

The response of the Government

31. The Government's engagement with political Islamist parties is governed by the criteria set out above (their (i) rejection of violence; (ii) commitment to democratic processes with inclusive governance and tolerance of other faiths and minorities; and (iii) respect for international agreements). However, we agree fully with the Committee that it is important to have as clear as possible an understanding of these parties/ groups, including those with whom we do not currently engage (for example, the Egyptian Muslim

Brotherhood). The FCO devotes a significant proportion of its resources to understanding the MENA region and within that, political Islam, and the Government can reassure the Committee that it will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

The Committee's commentary

32. The Government broadly agrees with the Committee. However, we remain sceptical about whether it is possible for the Government to gain a clear understanding of the Muslim Brotherhood without at least some engagement with, and questioning of, the group. The secretiveness of the Muslim Brotherhood is, to a significant extent, the result of the repression that it currently faces and has faced historically. We ask the FCO to take this context into account, and to engage with the Muslim Brotherhood so as to understand it better, rather than relying on the accounts of others.

The Committee's conclusion/recommendation

33. The Muslim Brotherhood has a highly defined organisational structure at both a local and national level in Egypt. But the Muslim Brotherhood told us that, incongruously, its international structure comprises a loose and vague affiliation of like-minded groups. The ambiguity of this international structure makes it more difficult to tell which groups around the world are Muslim Brotherhood. (Paragraph 55 of the Committee's original report)

The response of the Government

34. The Committee's findings chime with the Government's Review on the Muslim Brotherhood, which also highlighted the importance of the FCO taking into account the complexity of the movement's role in a range of different countries beyond local and national level in Egypt. FCO policy makers have noted this recommendation.

The Committee's commentary

35. The FCO has noted our conclusion. We invite them to note our commentary in Paragraph 7 of this report, where we urge the FCO to consider to what extent, and how, different political Islamist groups interact with, inspire, or support one another.

Transparency of messaging: Arabic and English

The Committee's conclusion/recommendation

36. In terms of their messaging, we have seen evidence that some political Islamist groups vary their message to different audiences and, in particular, that they vary content depending on whether the message is in English or Arabic. This is hardly a trait confined to political Islamists alone. But, in some communications, particularly from the Muslim Brotherhood, the English and Arabic messages have proved contradictory. In future, the FCO should take account of this in its dealings with, and analysis of, the Muslim Brotherhood's communications in different languages in order to assess the sincerity of their public statements. (Paragraph 60 of the Committee's original report)

The response of the Government

37. The Government notes the Committee's guidance on this point, and agrees that it is not a trait confined to political Islamists. In the FCO network, both in London and in our Posts overseas, our local staff and trained Arabists have the skills to translate (and compare) relevant public statements by political Islamist groups. We attribute a high value to this, and to the resources required to enable us to continue this approach and retain language training as a key aspect of the FCO's internal learning and development programme.

The Committee's commentary

38. **The FCO has agreed with the Committee.**

The Committee's conclusion/recommendation

39. Some statements by the Muslim Brotherhood to us in English gave the impression of reluctance to offer a straight answer to questions, or of playing defensive rhetorical games with fundamental rights. The FCO is correct to judge these groups on the basis of both their words and their actions. The FCO must be provided with sufficient resources to maintain the capabilities—particularly in linguistics training and translations—that are necessary to identify when the messaging of political Islamist groups diverges between different languages. (Paragraph 62 of the Committee's original report)

The response of the Government

40. The FCO welcomes the Committee's ongoing support to ensure it has sufficient resources. This is important for both the FCO's language training programme; and to maintain a robust network including local staff that not only allows us to produce the translations necessary to inform our policy decisions, but also to reach out to local groups, think-tanks, academics and experts to build a better understanding of political Islam and wider issues.

The Committee's commentary

41. **The Committee will continue to point out that in a time of substantially growing demand on the diplomatic service, it is woefully underfunded.**

Pragmatic policies

The Committee's conclusion/recommendation

42. Political Islamists have varied in the policies they have pursued in power. Some have been very pragmatic. Others have been more dogmatic. The PJD in Morocco and EnNahda in Tunisia have generally articulated their Islamist ideology in a broad sense, through the promotion of welfare policies. Fears over the introduction of a restrictive interpretation of 'Islamic law' by the FJP in Egypt were based on both speculation about the future and

on experience. The FCO should see the pragmatism of some political-Islamist parties as an opportunity to engage with them, and to influence their current trajectory, as well as considering their future intentions. (Paragraph 74 of the Committee's original report)

The response of the Government

43. The Government is committed to the development of democratic governance, and agrees with the Committee about the importance of engaging with political Islamist parties, subject to meeting criteria outlined above (their (i) rejection of violence; (ii) commitment to democratic processes with inclusive governance and tolerance of other faiths and minorities; and (iii) respect for international agreements). Growing democracy in the Middle East, including a lasting commitment by these parties to peaceful constitutional politics, in words and deeds, is the best long term basis to achieve stability and to defeat extremism and terrorism. HMG funding has been used to strengthen electoral bodies and parliaments throughout the region to help political parties improve their responsiveness and outreach.

The Committee's commentary

44. **The FCO has broadly agreed with the Committee.**

The Committee's conclusion/recommendation

45. We assess that exposure to free and fair elections, the need to appeal to a broad range of the electorate in order to win elections, and the need to work with other political perspectives in order to govern effectively, will serve to encourage political-Islamist groups to adopt a more pragmatic ideology, and an increasingly flexible interpretation of their Islamic references. Moves by them towards embracing certain universal human rights may be slower, and more tentative. The FCO should do all it can to hasten this process, in keeping with its global commitment to defending human rights. (Paragraph 75 of the Committee's original report)

The response of the Government

46. The FCO's engagement with political Islam is an important element of our engagement with countries in the region, supporting our primary objectives of protecting our security, promoting our prosperity and projecting our values. Defending human rights is a key element. Although some Islamist political groups are committed to non-violence and the democratic process, many still have socially conservative agendas and, as the Committee notes, are slower in embracing certain universal human rights.

47. The Government can confirm that FCO engagement with these groups, including those who are represented in government or parliament, includes dialogue on human rights issues, in particular protecting the rights of women and religious freedom.

The Committee's commentary

48. **The FCO has agreed with the Committee.**

An evolving policy debate

The Committee's conclusion/recommendation

49. The FCO should encourage political-Islamist groups to accept an interpretation of faith that protects the rights, freedoms, and social policies that are congruent with UK values, with the EnNahda party in Tunisia being a prime example of one that has moved in this direction. The FCO is also right to look for indications that political Islamists may act to undermine these values. But it should also hold all governments—in the Middle East and North Africa, and around the world—to the same standards, regardless of their ideology. (Paragraph 81 of the Committee's original report)

The Government's response

50. The Government encourages all groups, and governments, worldwide to adhere to democratic processes, and to exercise tolerance of all faiths and minorities, regardless of their ideology.

51. The Government agrees with the Committee that the Ennahda party in Tunisia is an example of a political Islamist group in the region that has adopted a model of consensual democracy. Since the Arab Spring, this has included a willingness to concede power and to work with a range of Islamists, secularists and technocrats; and in May 2016 to separate religion from its political agenda, albeit with Islamic 'points of reference', becoming a civil democratic party. Since 2011, this approach has been instrumental in ensuring that all transfers of power in Tunisia have been through a democratic process.

The Committee's commentary

52. **The FCO has agreed with the Committee.**

Involvement in violence and terrorism

The Committee's conclusion/recommendation

53. The UK has not designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organisation, and we agree with this decision. The Muslim Brotherhood states that it does not aspire to achieve its goals through violence. But we note the Government believes that the group might be willing to consider violence where gradualism is ineffective. However, the evidence so far in Egypt is that if the Muslim Brotherhood supported or condoned violence, then Egypt would be a far more violent place today. (Paragraph 86 of the Committee's original report)

The response of the Government

54. The Government's Review into the Muslim Brotherhood found that parts of the organisation have a highly ambiguous relationship with violent extremism, and that aspects of its ideology and actions were at odds with UK values and interests. In relation to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood this included evidence from media reports and credible academic studies indicating that a minority of Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood supporters engaged alongside other Islamists in violent acts. In addition, although some

senior leaders publicly reiterated the Muslim Brotherhood's commitment to non-violence, others failed to renounce violence, or more specifically, calls for retribution in relevant statements.

55. We have not met the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood at ministerial or official level since 2013, and encourage the organisation to fulfil the criteria outlined above (Paragraph 12 of this report). We continue to judge the extent to which extremism is evident in the case of any individual group to decide whether UK engagement is appropriate. Such judgements can change over time and are kept under review.

The Committee's commentary

56. **Our report characterised the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood as a fundamentally non-violent group, while acknowledging and examining problematic elements of ambiguity with regard to its relationship with violence, and the FCO does not contradict this assessment. It is an unfortunate commentary on our support for democracy that a political movement that was elected to office and removed in a military coup accompanied by significant violence is not engaged with at any official level at all, in exile or in the UK. We recommend to the FCO that, notwithstanding the sensitivities of the Egyptian government, some discreet relations with formerly-elected officials in exile would be appropriate, not least to encourage and confirm a continuing commitment to non-violence.**

'Firewall' against extremism

The Committee's conclusion/recommendation

57. Based on the experience of Tunisia, political Islam could in some countries be a way of providing a democratic alternative for political, social, and economic development and a counter-narrative against more extremist ideologies. However, there are cases where political Islamist groups have inspired individuals to commit violent acts; the fact that such individuals left the groups to do so does not excuse the groups from some responsibility for inspiring the individual in the first place. Nonetheless, the vast majority of political Islamists are involved in no violence whatsoever. Because of this, and because of their broader status as a 'firewall' against extremism, political Islamists have suffered criticism and attack from ISIL and other extremist organisations. No political movement can entirely control its individual members or supporters, particularly under extreme provocation. Incarceration of political activists without fair trial and the shutting down of political avenues to address grievances is likely to lead some to extremism. Political Islam is far from the only firewall, but in the Muslim World it is a vehicle through which a significant element of citizens can and should be able to address their grievances. The nature of Islam makes it more likely that religion and politics will remain overlapping for the foreseeable future, and emerging democratically accountable systems will need to accommodate this. (Paragraph 106 of the Committee's original report)

The response of the Government

58. The Government agrees with the Committee's conclusion that religion and politics will overlap for the foreseeable future, although also notes that in some cases there is

evidence of political Islamist groups attempting to separate the two, such as Ennhada in Tunisia (see Paragraph 51 of this report). We also agree that the vast majority of political Islamists are not involved in violence.

59. The Government agrees that individuals need a vehicle through which they can address their grievances, including through participation in the democratic process. As events in the Middle East and North Africa have demonstrated, those who are subject to repression, feel disenfranchised, or locked out of the political process, may turn to violence if they are unable to change their situation through peaceful means. The best 'firewall' is to support the democratic process and to ensure that individuals have a voice. Political Islamist groups, including their senior leaders, have a crucial role to play in ensuring that this happens in the MENA region.

60. As the Prime Minister said in her speech to the Gulf Cooperation Council on 7 December 2016, by focusing not just on violent extremism, but on the whole spectrum of extremism, violent and non-violent, at home and abroad, we are not just going after the terrorists but working to address the causes of this terrorist threat by targeting the ideology of extremism and all those who seek to spread it.

The Committee's commentary

61. **The FCO has agreed with the Committee.**

Victims of violence

The Committee's conclusion/recommendation

62. While some political-Islamist groups have failed to unequivocally condemn political violence in the region, they are notable among its historic and current victims. The FCO should highlight and condemn all human rights abuses, including those against political Islamists. The scale of political and civil turmoil in Egypt in recent years is unprecedented. The FCO must continue to do all it can to encourage the application of basic human and political rights in the country. (Paragraph 114 of the Committee's original report)

The response of the Government

63. Promoting human rights is an integral part of our national interest and to achieve our foreign policy goals. We raise human rights issues in Egypt, along with a number of other countries, at every opportunity. Egypt, along with several other countries, was designated as a Human Rights Priority Country in the FCO's 2015 Annual Report. This includes continued calls on the Egyptian Government to review mass judicial decisions. It remains UK policy to oppose the death penalty in all circumstances, as a matter of principle.

64. Human rights, prosperity and security agendas are mutually reinforcing. As the Government noted in its response to the Committee's March 2016 Report on its Human Rights Work Overseas, human rights violations lead to unstable, less democratic societies, in which the conditions conducive to radicalisation can become established. This creates situations in which terrorism can flourish, endangering British citizens both at home and

overseas. Equally, the absence of democratic freedom, good governance, and the rule of law has an impact on prosperity, taking individuals out of markets, reducing innovation, and restricting access to opportunity.

The Committee's commentary

65. **The FCO has agreed with the Committee.**

The Muslim Brotherhood Review

The Committee's conclusion/recommendation

66. There was a delay of a year and a half between the completion of the Muslim Brotherhood Review in July 2014 and the publication of the Main Findings on 17 December 2015, the last day on which the House sat before the Christmas recess. The Government should explain its handling of the Review after its completion. (Paragraph 116 of the Committee's original report)

The response of the Government

67. As in earlier correspondence with the Committee, the Government including former Prime Minister David Cameron, explained that the research for the Muslim Brotherhood Review was completed in July 2014. The Review was always intended as an internal document to inform Government policy towards the Muslim Brotherhood. Material gathered was provided to the Government in strictest confidence. More specifically, as in David Cameron's written evidence to the Committee in July 2016, this material was reflected throughout the Review and could not be redacted. As the information was highly sensitive and provided on condition it would not be shared beyond the Government, he did not agree to provide the full text to the Committee.

68. The Government agreed to publish the Review's main findings. As the Committee notes, these were published in December 2015.

The Committee's commentary

69. **The Government's explanation for why it would not give the Committee sight of the full report under restrictive conditions, or provide it with a redacted copy, remain threadbare. If this was designed to be an internal document only, then it begs the question as to why the Review was publicly announced. The FCO has also offered no explanation for why there was a delay of a year and a half between the completion of the Muslim Brotherhood Review and the publication of the Main Findings, or for what was done with the report during this time. Not having seen the full Report, we are entitled to surmise that elements of the 2010–2015 Coalition Government were not content to publish any findings.**

The Committee's conclusion/recommendation

70. We were disappointed that the Government, despite two formal requests, did not see fit to provide the Committee with access to a full copy of the Muslim Brotherhood Review,

even under controlled conditions; nor was it prepared to provide us with a redacted copy. This was an obvious hindrance to our scrutiny during this inquiry, as was the rejection of our request that Sir John Jenkins give oral evidence, on the grounds that the Minister and a serving official should answer our questions on the review (Paragraph 118 of the Committee's original report).

The Government's response

71. We would refer to our answer in Paragraph 67 and Paragraph 68 of this report.

The Committee's commentary

72. *Since the Government has not allowed either the report of the Muslim Brotherhood Review or its authors to be externally scrutinised, we request an explanation of i) what internal procedures were in place for review and critique of the report and ii) are now in place to inform and update the position of the Government towards the Muslim Brotherhood in the future.*

Reactions to the Main Findings—Undermining the UK's image abroad

The Committee's conclusion/recommendation

73. We criticise the lack of transparency of the Muslim Brotherhood, but this criticism also applies to the Government's Review of the Muslim Brotherhood. The opacity of the process, the obvious charge around motivation for the Review, and the failure to publish it in full, left the Review's Main Findings wholly open to criticism. Given that the Review was led by one of the FCO's most senior diplomats, these shortfalls damaged the UK's reputation for fair dealing more generally. The Government should immediately publish as much of the evidence given to the Muslim Brotherhood Review as possible, in the interest of transparency and the credibility of the process. (Paragraph 125 of the Committee's original report)

The Government's response

74. We would refer to our answer in Paragraph 67 and Paragraph 68 of this report.

75. The decision for the Review to be led by one of the FCO's most senior diplomats reflected his extensive experience and knowledge of the Arab world.

The Committee's commentary

76. We are disappointed that the FCO continues to refuse to shed any further light on the Muslim Brotherhood Review process, and fails to address whether at least some of the evidence submitted to the Review could have been published. *The Government should explain why it chose to publicise the existence of a sensitive internal Review process if it was not going to be willing to allow this process to be externally scrutinised.*

The Committee's conclusion/recommendation

77. The FCO told us that the Review was about “getting to grips with the background behind [the Muslim Brotherhood] in order fully to understand the nature of the organisation”. Given this objective, it is rather more than unfortunate that the Main Findings neglected to mention the most significant event in the Brotherhood and Egypt’s modern political history: its removal from power in Egypt (the Arab world’s most populous state) in 2013, the year after being democratically elected, and through a military intervention. (Paragraph 126 of the Committee’s original report)

The response of the Government

78. The purpose of the Muslim Brotherhood Review was to better understand the philosophy, activities, impact, and influence on UK national interests, at home and abroad, of the movement. The Review’s Terms of Reference did not include an examination of events in Egypt following the fall of the Morsi Government. As Mr Ellwood noted in his follow-up written evidence to the Committee in September, the review did not shy away from references to violence perpetrated against the Muslim Brotherhood, nor from addressing accusations of violence against the Muslim Brotherhood, as reflected in the Main Findings document.

The Committee's commentary

79. **We continue to hold that a complete understanding of the Muslim Brotherhood requires an understanding of the impact on the group of having its elected government removed from power in Egypt by the military in 2013, seeing at least many hundreds of its supporters killed by the Egyptian security forces at protest sites during that same year, and thereafter being both proscribed and broadly repressed in Egypt. The Main Findings only mentioned historic incidents of violence against the Muslim Brotherhood, in the 1950s and 1960s. It ignores the events of 2013 and thereafter.**

80. **The lack of any mention at all of these developments, which had a deep impact on the Brotherhood, from a report that aimed to understand the group, was a glaring omission from the Main Findings of the Muslim Brotherhood Review. The FCO continues to ignore and fails to explain this omission, and does not address why—and by whom—the developments of 2013 and thereafter were deemed irrelevant to the Terms of Reference. *It should now do so.***

The Committee's conclusion/recommendation

81. Additionally, and although the Main Findings mentioned historic examples of the repression of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and 1960s, the FCO’s assessment that understanding the Brotherhood “did not require” an examination of events following the removal of the group from power in Egypt—including the killing in August 2013 of large numbers of protesters who sympathised with the Brotherhood, and the continuing repression of the group in Egypt and elsewhere—is a glaring omission. This violence and repression are clearly factors that affect how the Brotherhood behaves; the Review should have taken them into account when assessing the group, and the FCO should do so in the future. (Paragraph 127 of the Committee’s original report)

The response of the Government

82. As in our answer in Paragraph 78 of this report, this was never part of the Terms of Reference of the Review. However, the Government notes the Committee's view.

83. Our answer in Paragraphs 25–28 of this report, above, includes a reference to the Government's assessment and actions prior to events in August 2013. We made it clear that while there was enormous dissatisfaction in Egypt with the record of the Morsi government, the UK did not support military intervention as a way to resolve disputes in a democratic system. At the time, the then Foreign Secretary, the Rt Hon William Hague MP, condemned the use of force in clearing protests. The UK has stressed the importance of accountability for the deaths of protestors; and for the Egyptian government to release the full findings of the Egyptian National Fact Finding Committee. At the same time, we continue to challenge the Muslim Brotherhood to resolve the ambiguities in its relationship to violence in Egypt and to reject violence more clearly in both Arabic and English.

The Committee's commentary

84. **Please see our commentary in Paragraph 79 and Paragraph 80 of this report. *The FCO should explain how it can effectively “continue to challenge the Muslim Brotherhood to resolve the ambiguities in its relationship to violence in Egypt” if officials have not met at an official level with the group since 2013.***

Perceived pressure from Gulf allies

The Committee's conclusion/recommendation

85. We have high regard for the work and impartiality of all UK diplomats. But, notwithstanding his knowledge, experience, and professional integrity, Sir John Jenkins's concurrent service as UK ambassador to Saudi Arabia made his appointment to lead the Muslim Brotherhood Review misguided. It created the impression that a foreign state, which was an interested party, had a private window into the conduct of a UK Government inquiry. Whilst we have seen no evidence to suggest that Saudi Arabia was able to exercise undue influence over the report, the appointment of Sir John Jenkins created the perception that this was the case. This has undermined confidence in the impartiality of the FCO's work on such an important and contentious subject. (paragraph 132 of the Committee's original report)

The Government's response

86. Sir John Jenkins was chosen to lead the Review given his vast experience and expertise of the region. We welcome the Committee's note that it has seen no evidence of bias in the Review's conclusions, or to suggest that Saudi Arabia exercised any undue influence over the report.

The Committee's commentary

87. **The Committee did not comment on whether it had seen evidence of bias in the Review's conclusions. We instead stated that we had seen no evidence to suggest that Saudi Arabia had exercised undue influence over the report. But we were working from the publicly-available material. And, while agreeing with some of the Main Findings of the Muslim Brotherhood Review, other aspects of our report expressed significant misgivings about others, not least the failure of the Main Findings to address the events that occurred in Egypt in 2013 (see our commentary in Paragraph 79 and Paragraph 80 of this report).**

Conclusions and recommendations

Response from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and Committee commentary

Defining 'political Islam'

1. The FCO agreed with the Committee's conclusion that political Islam comprises a broad spectrum of movements and ideologies, and that a 'one size fits all policy' is inappropriate. *When forming a nuanced policy, the FCO should continue to consider to what extent, and how, different political Islamist groups interact with, inspire, or support one another, thus appreciating the inter-connectivity of these groups as well as their diversity.* (Paragraph 7)

Our definition of 'political Islam'

2. The FCO has provided three criteria against which political-Islamist groups, like others, can understand whether and why the UK regards engagement with them as appropriate. *While these have features in common with our criteria, the Committee would like to see the FCO provide a more detailed explanation of its criteria. This should include an explanation of what is meant by a "commitment to democratic processes with inclusive governance and tolerance"—which our original report described as including a commitment to give up power after an election defeat—and of what examples the FCO is referring to when it describes "respect for international agreements". The FCO should respond to our recommendation that these criteria should be used as a benchmark for assessing all political philosophies on an equal basis globally, and should not be applied exclusively to political Islamist groups.* (Paragraph 14)
3. It is also the case that the Government has not responded to our conclusion that it is inappropriate for the FCO to place a form of Islamism that embraces "democratic principles and liberal values" and another form of Islamism that instead holds "intolerant, extremist views" within the same, single category of 'political Islam'. *We recommended that the FCO devise and use a vocabulary that does not group such distinct ideologies together.* (Paragraph 15)

Democracy and elections: winning elections

4. The FCO has agreed with the Committee. (Paragraph 19)

Democratic culture: sharing power

5. The FCO has agreed with our recommendation. We want to see an FCO with sufficient resources to work effectively and have an impact in the region. (Paragraph 23)

Democracy and sharing power

6. The FCO has broadly agreed with the Committee (Paragraph 29)

Transparency of organisation, and internal structures

7. The Government broadly agrees with the Committee. However, we remain sceptical about whether it is possible for the Government to gain a clear understanding of the Muslim Brotherhood without at least some engagement with, and questioning of, the group. The secretiveness of the Muslim Brotherhood is, to a significant extent, the result of the repression that it currently faces and has faced historically. *We ask the FCO to take this context into account, and to engage with the Muslim Brotherhood so as to understand it better, rather than relying on the accounts of others.* (Paragraph 32)
8. The FCO has noted our conclusion. *We invite them to note our commentary in Paragraph 7 of this report, where we urge the FCO to consider to what extent, and how, different political Islamist groups interact with, inspire, or support one another.* (Paragraph 35)

Transparency of messaging: Arabic and English

9. The FCO has agreed with the Committee. (Paragraph 38)
10. The Committee will continue to point out that in a time of substantially growing demand on the diplomatic service, it is woefully underfunded. (Paragraph 41)

Pragmatic policies

11. The FCO has broadly agreed with the Committee. (Paragraph 44)
12. The FCO has agreed with the Committee. (Paragraph 48)

An evolving policy debate

13. The FCO has agreed with the Committee. (Paragraph 52)

Involvement in violence and terrorism

14. Our report characterised the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood as a fundamentally non-violent group, while acknowledging and examining problematic elements of ambiguity with regard to its relationship with violence, and the FCO does not contradict this assessment. It is an unfortunate commentary on our support for democracy that a political movement that was elected to office and removed in a military coup accompanied by significant violence is not engaged with at any official level at all, in exile or in the UK. *We recommend to the FCO that, notwithstanding the sensitivities of the Egyptian government, some discreet relations with formerly-elected officials in exile would be appropriate, not least to encourage and confirm a continuing commitment to non-violence.* (Paragraph 56)

'Firewall' against extremism

15. The FCO has agreed with the Committee. (Paragraph 61)

Victims of violence

16. The FCO has agreed with the Committee. (Paragraph 65)

The Muslim Brotherhood Review

17. The Government's explanation for why it would not give the Committee sight of the full report under restrictive conditions, or provide it with a redacted copy, remain threadbare. If this was designed to be an internal document only, then it begs the question as to why the Review was publicly announced. The FCO has also offered no explanation for why there was a delay of a year and a half between the completion of the Muslim Brotherhood Review and the publication of the Main Findings, or for what was done with the report during this time. Not having seen the full Report, we are entitled to surmise that elements of the 2010–2015 Coalition Government were not content to publish any findings. (Paragraph 69)
18. *Since the Government has not allowed either the report of the Muslim Brotherhood Review or its authors to be externally scrutinised, we request an explanation of i) what internal procedures were in place for review and critique of the report and ii) are now in place to inform and update the position of the Government towards the Muslim Brotherhood in the future.* (Paragraph 72)

Reactions to the Main Findings—Undermining the UK's image abroad

19. We are disappointed that the FCO continues to refuse to shed any further light on the Muslim Brotherhood Review process, and fails to address whether at least some of the evidence submitted to the Review could have been published. *The Government should explain why it chose to publicise the existence of a sensitive internal Review process if it was not going to be willing to allow this process to be externally scrutinised.* (Paragraph 76)
20. We continue to hold that a complete understanding of the Muslim Brotherhood requires an understanding of the impact on the group of having its elected government removed from power in Egypt by the military in 2013, seeing at least many hundreds of its supporters killed by the Egyptian security forces at protest sites during that same year, and thereafter being both proscribed and broadly repressed in Egypt. The Main Findings only mentioned historic incidents of violence against the Muslim Brotherhood, in the 1950s and 1960s. It ignores the events of 2013 and thereafter. (Paragraph 79)
21. The lack of any mention at all of these developments, which had a deep impact on the Brotherhood, from a report that aimed to understand the group, was a glaring omission from the Main Findings of the Muslim Brotherhood Review. The FCO

continues to ignore and fails to explain this omission, and does not address why—and by whom—the developments of 2013 and thereafter were deemed irrelevant to the Terms of Reference. *It should now do so.* (Paragraph 80)

22. Please see our commentary in Paragraph 79 and Paragraph 80 of this report *The FCO should explain how it can effectively “continue to challenge the Muslim Brotherhood to resolve the ambiguities in its relationship to violence in Egypt” if officials have not met at an official level with the group since 2013.* (Paragraph 84)

Perceived pressure from Gulf allies

23. The Committee did not comment on whether it had seen evidence of bias in the Review’s conclusions. We instead stated that we had seen no evidence to suggest that Saudi Arabia had exercised undue influence over the report. But we were working from the publicly-available material. And, while agreeing with some of the Main Findings of the Muslim Brotherhood Review, other aspects of our report expressed significant misgivings about others, not least the failure of the Main Findings to address the events that occurred in Egypt in 2013 (see our commentary in Paragraph 79 and Paragraph 80 of this report). (Paragraph 87)

Formal Minutes

Tuesday 28 February 2017

Members present:

Crispin Blunt, in the Chair

Ann Clwyd	Daniel Kawczynski
Mike Gapes	Ian Murray
Stephen Gethins	Andrew Rosindell
Mr Mark Hendrick	Nadhim Zahawi
Adam Holloway	

Draft Report (*'Political Islam', and the Muslim Brotherhood Review: Government Response to the Committee's Sixth Report*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 87 read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Eighth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Tuesday 7 March at 2.15pm]

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2016–17

First Report	The UK's role in the economic war against ISIL	HC 121 (HC 680)
Second Report	Equipping the Government for Brexit	HC 431 (HC 704)
Third Report	Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK's future policy options	HC 119
Fourth Report	The use of UK-manufactured arms in Yemen	HC 688
Fifth Report	The future operations of BBC Monitoring	HC 732 (HC 921)
Sixth Report	'Political Islam', and the Muslim Brotherhood Review	HC 118
Seventh Report	The United Kingdom's relations with Russia	HC 120
First Special Report	The UK's role in the war against ISIL following the Cessation of Hostilities in Syria in February 2016: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2015–16	HC 209
Second Special Report	The FCO's administration and funding of its human rights work overseas: Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2015–16	HC 545
Seventh Special Report	Committees on Arms Export Controls: unauthorised disclosures of draft Report on Use of UK-manufactured arms in Yemen	HC 935

Session 2015–16

First Report	The FCO and the 2015 Spending Review	HC 467 (HC 816)
Second Report	The extension of offensive British military operations to Syria	HC 457
Third Report	The UK's role in the war against ISIL following the Cessation of Hostilities in Syria in February 2016	HC 683
Fourth Report	The FCO's administration and funding of its human rights work overseas	HC 860
Fifth Report	Implications of the referendum on EU membership for the UK's role in the world	HC 545
First Special Report	The FCO and the 2015 Spending Review: Government response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2015–16	HC 816