

UK government faces increasing pressure to clamp down on Muslim Brotherhood

The Arab Weekly staff

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The British government is facing increasing calls to clamp down on the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood organisation, which has been banned in several Arab countries.

The calls came after a statement from a retired senior British Army commander warned the British House of Commons that the Brotherhood represented a major threat to British society. Colonel Tim Collins, who served in Northern Ireland and Iraq, highlighted the threat represented by the Muslim Brotherhood and particularly criticised Qatari and Turkish funding of the group.

"There's no doubt that there are people within its [the Muslim Brotherhood's] ranks who are involved in violence, who plan violence, who coordinate violence but it is a nebulous thing. It is hard to pin down. It's almost a franchise. It's almost like Islamic State (ISIS) itself," Collins said January 8 at a briefing at the House of Commons.

Collins described support and funding of the Muslim Brotherhood by British allies Turkey and Qatar as "not the action of friends."

"Sowing discord and encouraging communities as well as individuals to stand apart from our society is the seed of subversion and ends in Manchester with the murder of children, it ends in Rotherham with the rape of children, it ends in London with the murder of strangers on London Bridge," he said.

Collins cited payments of more than \$150 million to various European institutions, part of a bid by the Brotherhood to exert influence across the continent, including through charities and

mosque associations.

"I would urge the government of Qatar to cease their funding of the Muslim Brotherhood and stop assisting these subversive elements in the spirit of friendship and in acknowledgement of the needs, security and wellbeing of an ally," he added.

Colonel Tim Collins, a retired British Army commander, described support and funding of the Muslim Brotherhood by Turkey and Qatar as "not the action of friends."

Collins said the British government needed to do more to counteract the Muslim Brotherhood's influence, pointing to a wide-ranging inquiry into the group conducted by the government in 2014 resulting in an unpublished 2015 report.

The recommendations of the inquiry by former British Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Sir John Jenkins were not taken up by then Prime Minister David Cameron.

"Parts of the Muslim Brotherhood have a highly ambiguous relationship with violent extremism. Both as an ideology and as a network it has been a rite of passage for some individuals and groups who have gone on to engage in violence and terrorism," Cameron said in December 2015.

"The main findings of the review support the conclusion that membership of, association with or influence by the Muslim Brotherhood should be considered as a possible indicator of extremism."

However, the Cameron govern-

ment did not take steps to ban the group, something many Arab countries have been calling for. Collins said it was "regrettable" that "much less has been done" than warranted by the findings of the Jenkins report.

"In this challenging age, where harmful ideology respects no institution or border, the recognition of the extremist nature of the Muslim Brotherhood ideology and activities... should ensure an end to the groups' influence in British society," he said.

"The group should not have the opportunity to engage with public representatives and it should be challenged vigorously and opposed where necessary."

There has been increasing pressure on the UK government to take stronger action against the Muslim Brotherhood and Muslim Brotherhood-tied groups.

In December, Cairo reportedly handed over documents to the UK government implicating Muslim Brotherhood funding in terrorist attacks in the United Kingdom. The same month, the United Kingdom designated two groups – Hasm and Liwaa al-Thawra – with ties to the Muslim Brotherhood to its official list of proscribed terrorist organisations.

"We said we will not leave Egypt alone in the front line in its battle against terrorism and we meant it. Today we use the full force of UK law against two terrorist groups that have murdered many in Egypt and are the enemy of us all," said UK Ambassador to Egypt John Casson.

A December study by the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change also stated there was significant overlap between the Muslim Brotherhood and terrorist groups such as ISIS.

"The evidence shows that there is considerable ideological overlap



New warning. A file picture shows Colonel Tim Collins, a retired British Army commander, speaking at June's Scotland Summer Lecture.

(Combat Stress)

in how Islamic scripture is used by Islamists, like the Muslim Brotherhood and violent jihadists such as ISIS and al-Qaeda," said the head of research at the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change Emman el-Badawy.

Collins could not have been clear-

er in calling on the UK government to take stronger action against the threat represented by the Muslim Brotherhood.

"Its harmful ideology should be contained, mitigated and its threat to a harmonious society should be opposed," he said.

Viewpoint



Justin Salhani

is an Arab Weekly contributor in Milan, Italy.

On immigration, Macron's words and actions do not always match

Emmanuel Macron's election as president of France in 2017 was accompanied by a wave of optimism. He had defeated the far-right National Front candidate,

Marine Le Pen, and rejected her anti-immigrant platform. Macron spoke of France's moral responsibility to those who had left their homes for better lives or safety.

Less than a year into his term, Macron's immigration and refugee policies are coming under heavy fire by those who believe his rhetoric – directed at a European audience that except for Germany has largely failed to effectively handle the refugee flows from Africa and the Middle East – has not been reflected in his policies.

Macron has said he wants to get refugees "off the streets [and] out

of the woods" but activists have complained that his policies are taking refugees out of the public consciousness by removing them from visible areas and preventing them from gathering in groups on Parisian streets.

Macron is implementing the "worst immigration policy since the second world war," Yasser Louati, a French human rights activist, said. "France has had right-wing governments on multiple occasions but he has actually outdone their policies by asking hospitals to denounce undocumented immigrants and asking for the distinction between those with documents and those without. Unfortunately, that is possible because of a shift to the far right in French public opinion."

One of Macron's policies has been to grant police greater power to prevent refugees from gathering in French streets.

"Macron has done a good job of making the problem invisible," said Alberto Bialla, an Italian student who works with the volunteer group Solidarithe to provide blankets and information to refugees.

Macron's professed policy is to speed up the resettlement process so

those who receive refugee status can start their new lives in France and those who are denied refugee status can be returned to their home countries. But human rights organisations have often criticised the standard for who is labelled an "economic migrant."

Macron has said victory over Le Pen was a sign that France disagreed with her beliefs. His own rhetoric at the time was welcomed by some members of the European community, such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who felt abandoned by the rest of the European Union when she welcomed large numbers of refugees in 2015.

"I see the line he's taking as very closely tied with his vision on putting France at the centre of the EU," said Susi Dennison, a senior fellow and director of the European Power programme at the European Council on Foreign Relations. "Macron and Merkel had an agreement... so I see [that as the reason behind] the increased activity coming out of Paris."

On a European level, Macron's pro-immigration rhetoric is welcomed. He's spoken of immigration as a beneficial cultural exchange but his message to Europe does not seem to line up with his domestic policies, which are similar to those of other European countries and may become even more so as right-wing governments have won elections in a number of central and eastern European countries over the last year.

"I would distinguish the role he plays in the EU debate and his policies at the national level," Dennison said. She said Macron's rhetoric, while arguably not going far enough, is still an effective counter

to that of xenophobic government coalitions in Austria, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic.

"I think Macron at the EU level is arguing that migration has a positive impact for the EU from an economic and cultural perspective," Dennison said. "He also emphasises that there is a moral obligation and a historical responsibility on the EU side and not just a legal obligation... that is important in the context of a very toxic EU debate around [immigration]."

This toxic debate has come about from a strong rightward shift in French and European attitudes towards immigration largely caused by the 2015 refugee crisis and a large increase in new arrivals from the Middle East and Africa. Le Pen and her cohorts across Europe may have lost general elections in France, Germany and the Netherlands but they have succeeded in reforming the debate around immigration in their own terms.

Louati said Macron's lack of previous political experience is to blame for his policies that negatively affect the lives of France's refugee communities.

"Emmanuel Macron does not have an ideological or political background," Louati said. "He will say whatever his advisers ask him to say and whatever the majority of French public opinion wants."

In fact, an old law sometimes used under the right-wing government of Nicolas Sarkozy regarding "crimes of solidarity" in dealing with refugees has been utilised under Macron, with Louati saying he's seen activists driven to court for providing help to undocumented immigrants.

"This was done under Macron," he said. "not Marine Le Pen."



Invisible problem. French police intercept migrants inside the fenced off ring-road area of the ferry port in Calais, last September.

(AFP)

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