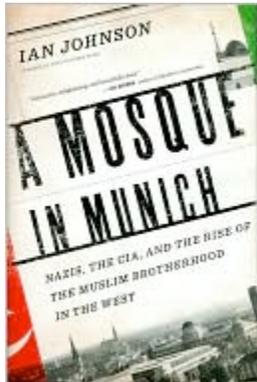




A Mosque in Munich: Nazis, the CIA, and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in the West

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Introduction

ZARINÉS NEGRÓN: Welcome, everybody, to tonight's Carnegie New Leaders Event. As [Devin Stewart](#) said, my name is Zarinés Negrón. I am one of the New Leaders.

Tonight we have Ian Johnson, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and Berlin bureau chief for *The Wall Street Journal*. Mr. Johnson won the Pulitzer Prize in 2001 for his coverage on the persecution of [Falun Gong](#) practitioners in China. His reporting from China also received accolades from the Overseas Press Club and the Society of Professional Journalists.

Mr. Johnson's work also includes [Wild Grass: Three Stories of Change in Modern China](#), which was published in 2004 and translated into several languages.

Tonight Mr. Johnson is here to speak to us about his new book entitled [A Mosque in Munich: Nazis, the CIA, and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in the West](#).

Remarks

IAN JOHNSON: Thanks. I'm happy to be here.

I want to draw a picture of a specific time in U.S. history, when times are fairly grim and the U.S. is in a battle against an implacable foe, where the prospects for success are bleak unless we can somehow win the hearts and minds of the Muslim world. We have tried reaching it, but it failed.

Our president is a man of faith, a churchgoer, who isn't a Muslim but has an affinity for Islam. He wants to reach out again and is now willing to make allies with a group of Muslim thinkers that his administration knows to be undemocratic, maybe even bordering on fascist, but whom he is willing to court to bring victory in the ideological struggle.

I'm referring not to [Barack Obama](#) or [George W. Bush](#), but to [Dwight D. Eisenhower](#) and 1950s America. This is a period often overlooked in our discussion of Islam and our dealings with radical Islam.

Many of you are familiar with what happened in Afghanistan in the 1980s, the story of blowback, when

we armed the [mujahideen](#), some of whom later morphed into al Qaeda. But this is something that happened about 20 or 30 years earlier. It doesn't have as direct a link to today's issues of terrorism, but it does parallel many of the decisions that our society has to make today—for example, how or whether we should engage with groups that are antithetical to our ideals.

I focus on the history of one mosque, the Islamic Center of Munich. There are two reasons for this. One is that the mosque itself is quite important. It was the first Western base for the [Muslim Brotherhood](#) and, for many years, was a key center for this group. The Muslim Brotherhood you may have heard of, you may be familiar with. It is the core Islamic group; if you think of political Islam as a tree, the Muslim Brotherhood might be thought of as the trunk of the tree, out of which many other groups shot out over the years.

The Islamic Center of Munich was a place of refuge for Brotherhood leaders for many years, especially the 1970s, the 1980s, the 1990s, on into this decade. Its board of directors was a global "Who's Who" of political Islam, with people from South Asia, the Arab world, and Europe serving on its board of directors.

Several key figures in recent terrorism were also linked to the mosque. For example, the person who planned the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993 frequented the mosque immediately before the attack, and also the man widely regarded as al Qaeda's financier was arrested there in 1998 while visiting members of the mosque around Munich.

So all this means that the mosque has a direct link to the radical milieu of today and, in its own right, is probably worth a closer look.

But I also found that the Islamic Center of Munich had a past that predated all of this, and it went, in fact, back to World War II. Archives that I looked at in Germany, Switzerland, and the United States showed that there were two other groups that were part of the mosque's history. This included the Nazi government in Germany and the CIA.

The Nazis had a fairly sophisticated strategy for harnessing radical Islam for propaganda purposes. This was organized by people who, after the war, took on similar tasks in the Cold War to combat the Soviet Union. The book focuses on three main characters. I have a few pictures of these people, because I think some of the pictures are somewhat interesting.

One of them is [Gerhard von Mende](#), who was a brilliant academic in Germany. He hit upon the idea that the soft underbelly of the Soviet Union was the non-Russians, who believed that the Soviet Union was just a continuation of the czarist empire. He predicted in about 1933 in a book that he published that the Soviet Union would break down along ethnic lines and end up in various fragmented countries that might not be viable on their own.

Had he limited his work to that, he probably would have been viewed as a brilliant analyst who foresaw the breakdown of the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, when the Nazis came to power, he allied himself with them very closely and ended up working for a ministry called the [Ostministerium](#), the Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories.

When World War II started, the Nazis had a plan to colonize large swaths of the Soviet Union. In the first year of the war—not even the first year; the first six months or so—the Germans took 3 million Soviet prisoners of war. The Nazis at first thought that these were all enemies. Von Mende and other like him in the government realized that many of them were potential allies, because they were non-Russians who could fight for the Germans. So under the leadership of von Mende and others like him, several were organized into units that fought for the Germans in World War II. This is the patch of one of the groups that fought, one of the SS units [shows image].

The reason this is important is that von Mende also set up a propaganda operation using some of the better-educated Soviet minorities—set up newspapers, radio broadcasts into the Soviet Union, all trying

to convince people not to fight for the Soviet Union and to lay down their arms.

Whether that was successful or not, to some degree, doesn't matter. What happened was that at the end of the war, about 100,000 of these troops were left in displaced-person camps. Under the [Yalta Agreement](#), about 95 or 99 percent of them were repatriated to the Soviet Union, but about 1,000 were left in Munich.

About 1,000 Muslims were left in Munich after the war. Many of them claimed to be Turkish. That wasn't so farfetched, because they come from today's countries of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and spoke a Turkic dialect. In fact, the Turkish Student Union at that time, in 1945-1946, sent representatives from Berlin down to the displaced-person camps and handed out Turkish student IDs to many of these people. So the ones that were quick-thinking ditched their uniforms, threw away their ID cards, grabbed hold of one of these Turkish student and cards, stayed on in Germany after the war.

This picture is a DP camp, a displaced-persons camp, where many of them were living at the time. This is a propaganda photo taken by a charity of the time that came up in the archives.

Von Mende resurfaced after the war and ran a freelance intelligence organization that was funded by various West German ministries and organizations. He wanted to harness these people for West German foreign policy, to lobby against East Germany, to try to recoup some of the territories that Germany lost in the war.

The problem that West Germany had was that it was pretty much at that point, in the mid-1950s, a client state of the United States. It didn't have as much money. The United States was also facing a need for Muslims, if you will, in its propaganda war. It realized that in the years after World War II there were many new countries that were being formed. This was actually where a lot of the Cold War was fought.

We think of the Cold War, of course, as taking place in Europe—the Berlin Wall, et cetera. But the bloodiest conflicts took place in what was then called the Third World. Many of these countries were Muslim countries. The United States felt that it needed these countries. It didn't want them to go communist. It thought Islam could be a useful tool.

The problem that the United States had is that it didn't have very many Muslims who could credibly go to the Muslim world and say the United States has freedom of religion and it respects Islam. The Soviet Union, by contrast, might have been oppressing Islam, but it had a lot of Muslims that it could send out on propaganda missions, because it had all the people in modern-day Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, the Caucasus, Azerbaijan, et cetera. So there was a problem that the United States had. It needed covert propaganda agents and saw these people in Munich and said, "We can make use of them."

So here we have a Tartar who had been a German prisoner of war [shows image]. He ended up staying on in Munich after the war, worked for von Mende for a while, was recruited by the CIA, and he is dressed up for the Hajj. He made the trip to Mecca in order to counter Soviet propaganda there. The Soviet Union would send people down to Mecca because it was a great opportunity, Muslims from around the world congregating there for the pilgrimage, and they could say, "The Soviet Union is reopening mosques. We love Islam. We love your country."

In this particular visit in 1955, the Soviets were trying to meet King [Saud](#). This agent went, with several others, and put up handbills around Mecca saying, "The Soviets are bad. They're closing down mosques," et cetera, et cetera. When they tried to speak in meetings in various tents, they heckled them, threw tomatoes at them. I don't know if that was the reason or not, but the meeting with King Saud didn't take place.

He came back and held a press conference in Munich that was widely attended by German and international journalists, and they presented themselves as just some really devout Muslims who happened to be in Mecca and somehow happened to come back to Munich and hold a press conference.

Of course, the point of all this was propaganda. It was propaganda aimed at the Muslim world, but also at the Western world, to say, "Look, there are Muslims who are opposing the Soviet Union. Isn't the Soviet Union really terrible?" and all that.

[Shows pictures] Here we have this beer hall that has been converted, given some sort of Muslim touch or something, with rugs put up on the wall from Central Asia. You can't see it, but the napkins on the table are green, because they thought it was the color of Islam, so they wanted to make everything sort of green. It was a little bit fanciful and orientalist, but still creative, I suppose.

Here was another field of battle, international conferences around the world. There was an effort to organize Islam under various competing conferences, Islamic conferences.

Here we have a group of Soviet Muslims who show up at a conference. The same guy and several others went also on behalf, not of the United States, but of oppressed Soviet Muslims and tried to talk these guys down.

The next major figure in my book is a CIA agent called Bob Dreher. He was an advocate of rollback, a more aggressive approach toward combating communism. Initially the idea was containing communism. Dreher and others wanted to push back, and they thought, again, that Islam could be a useful tool.

Dreher noticed that there was a very key person, [Said Ramadan](#), who was based in Europe at the time. Ramadan was the son-in-law of the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, [Hasan al-Banna](#). The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in 1928, very influential throughout the Middle East and had strong ideological links to South Asia as well.

Ramadan was sometimes described as the foreign minister of the Muslim Brotherhood. He traveled widely and, in his life, would travel on passports from Pakistan, Jordan, Saudi Arabia. He went to Europe early on. When the Muslim Brotherhood was banned in 1954 in Egypt, he fled to Switzerland and took up residence in Geneva, where he lived the rest of his life.

Just as an aside—people are probably going to ask this question—yes, he is the father of [Tariq Ramadan](#), the famous Muslim intellectual scholar who was denied entry into the United States.

But Said Ramadan is probably a more influential figure in the history of political Islam. He was living in Geneva at this time. Around this time, the West Germans decided that they would try to bind the Muslims in Munich more closely to them by building a mosque. The cables in the State Department and the German Foreign Ministry, at least, were all very explicit: We need to build a mosque. We need to get these Muslims back under our control. This would be a way to do it, by showing how great we are by building them a mosque.

So they set up a meeting. Said Ramadan was invited down, probably supported by Bob Dreher, who definitely supported other endeavors of Ramadan, paid for some of his conferences, for some of his travels around Europe at the time.

Ramadan showed up at the meeting and immediately captivated everyone. He was a superstar of the political Islamic world, well-spoken, charming, debonair, a very well-educated person. In comparison to these poorly educated ex-soldiers, he was head and shoulders above them. The CIA began to realize that it would be much better if somebody like Ramadan could do work for them. He was more credible in the Middle East and better known around there.

What happened at that time was that the United States decided to bring Ramadan and a few other key Muslim leaders to the United States and have a meeting with Eisenhower. I want to read about two pages of my book, because it describes this meeting and the machinations in the White House and in the State Department over whether to do this or not. To me, it also parallels a lot of the discussion and vocabulary that we have today over outreach efforts to the Muslim world.

I'll start here, in 1953, when we have the first brush between U.S. officials and Ramadan. It starts when the White House receives an urgent request from the State Department:

Prominent Muslims were coming to Princeton University for an Islamic colloquium. Would the president meet them? At first, it seemed the encounter wouldn't happen because President Eisenhower was going to be out of town. Then [Abbott Washburn](#), deputy director of the U.S. Information Agency in charge of liaison with the White House, recalled the high priority that Eisenhower gave to religion in his personal life and in geopolitical strategy. The early discussions about using religion more effectively in global politics had already taken place, and one of Eisenhower's advisers, [Edward Lilly](#), had circulated his influential memo, "The Religious Factor." Although it's not clear from the record that Washburn saw this memo, the overall feeling was clear: The United States had to grab this chance.

Washburn sent a note to Eisenhower's psychological warfare chief, [C.D. Jackson](#), who had worked under [Luce](#) at *Time* magazine and had worked in propaganda efforts in World War II as well, and had been recruited by Eisenhower to work in the White House to oversee psychological warfare against the Soviet Union.

Washburn told Jackson that the conference was sponsored by the USIA, the State Department's International Information Agency [IIA], Princeton, and the Library of Congress. As Washburn put it, "It was a four-way play to influence the Muslim world." Hoped-for result," Washburn said, "is that the Muslims will be impressed with the moral and spiritual strength of America."

The White House hesitated. Washburn made one last pitch. He noted that President Eisenhower believed the United States had to push home its spiritual superiority over the USSR: "These individuals can exert a profound and far-reaching impact upon Muslim thinking. Their long-term influence may well outweigh that of the political leaders of their countries."

The White House agreed, and eight days later, the invitations went out. The meeting was entered into the president's appointment book: 23 September 1953, 11:30 a.m. One of the delegates would be "The Honorable Saeed Ramahdan, Delegate of the Muslim Brothers."

The meeting, Eisenhower officials made plain, was meant to complement the Princeton conference's political goals. Some of the attendees were scholars and did present papers, but the conference's principal aim was to show the United States feting Muslim intellectuals.

I have a memo that says, "On the surface the conference looks like an exercise in pure learning. This is the impression desired." This was a memo that was sent to [John Foster Dulles](#). "IIA promoted the colloquium along these lines and has given it financial and other assistance because we consider that this psychological approach is an important contribution at this time to both short-term and long-term United States political objectives in the Muslim areas."

Then there is an interesting aside, where they realize that, for legal reasons—this is supposed to be a cultural event, and people like Said Ramadan are purely political leaders. It was going to be hard for the State Department to come up with funding for people like this. So they lobbied and got [Aramco](#), the oil giant, to pony up some money to pay for people like Ramadan to come over to the United States.

If you want to find conspiracies about oil and politics—not that I believe that, of course.

The conference went on for ten days. Here we have a nice brochure, a booklet, that was published by Princeton University. The bottom picture, second from the right, is Said Ramadan meeting people at the conference. This is the group photo, with Eisenhower, Ramadan, second from the right. So it wasn't a

one-on-one, but it was a classic photo op.

The speakers went down, visited the United States, and then went back.

The CIA did an analysis of the meeting and focused heavily on Ramadan. They were kind of unsure what to make of this guy. They said, "Ramadan was invited at the urging of the U.S. Embassy in Egypt. He was the most difficult element at the colloquium, as he was concerned with political pressure. I felt that Ramadan" —this was the analysis of the CIA person writing this report—"was a political reactionary, a Phalangist or Fascist type, rather than a religious reactionary, as is the case with the three sheiks who attended. Ramadan seemed to me to be a Fascist, interested in the grouping of individuals for power. He did not display many ideas, except for those of the Brotherhood."

Ramadan, however, continued to pop up again and again at U.S. events, meeting U.S. officials. There are a lot of State Department cables, 1956 in Rabat, and so on and so forth.

Afterwards, of course, the Muslim Brotherhood is banned. He goes into exile, lives in Europe, and helps fund the mosque. The mosque takes a while to build, but it becomes over time the most important base for the Muslim Brotherhood in the West.

Ramadan eventually himself is forced out of the mosque. The Muslim Brotherhood at that time was making an alliance with the Saudis. Ramadan had an Islamic center in Geneva and a publication called *Al-Muslimoon*. The Saudis wanted control of it. Ramadan resisted.

People who were closer to the new Saudi-Muslim Brotherhood alliance were put in power at the mosque. That was primarily two individuals, who lived up in Switzerland—actually, in an Italian enclave of Switzerland—called *Campione d'Italia*. One is Ghaleb Himmat, who was head of the mosque from about 1972 to 2001, when his finances were frozen as part of a terrorism investigation and he resigned. The other is [Youssef Nada](#), whose finances were also frozen at that time. This is a picture of his villa overlooking Lake Lugano—a very charming guy.

We'll get to this in a minute, but I think this is one of the problems in our dealings with the Brotherhood. We have looked at it as a terrorist organization, and these guys had their finances frozen. But just recently, I think, the government has decided to unfreeze their finances, because, after almost ten years, there has been no proof between these guys and financing terrorism, although the mosque itself had some people who were involved.

The mosque is now headed by a guy named [Ibrahim el-Zayat](#), who is head of the Islamic Community of Germany, which is one of the more influential groups in Germany, and has set up an umbrella organization in Europe called the [Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe](#).

Here he is with the head of FIOE, meeting members of the European Parliament. It has tried to present itself as the sole representative of Muslims in Europe, despite the fact that it's quite questionable that they represent the ideological leanings of most Muslims. In fact, I would argue that they don't; they represent just a small grouping of political Islamists, and not most people.

I think I can skip the pictures at this point.

The issue, I think, that has direct parallels today is not so much the history of the mosque. The history of the mosque is interesting in its own right. But the issue is the misuse, I think, of religion for political gain.

I think there has been this tendency in U.S. policy, going back to the 1950s, as we have seen, continuing today, to see Islam as some kind of a tool that can be used for foreign policy gains, that we'll somehow reach this part of the world, we'll control it or somehow have some sort of influence, if we can just reach the right headman who runs the religious groups there.

I think the Muslim Brotherhood has lent itself to this. The Brotherhood is the best organized. They have very well-educated people. They speak the vocabulary, the language, of international affairs. They present themselves very well. Just like Said Ramadan looked like a good catch for the CIA in the 1950s and 1960s, so too does the Brotherhood today, not just in the Middle East, but in other parts of the world, seem like a good interlocutor.

I'm not arguing against dealing with any group on the planet. I simply think that one should be careful in politicizing religion. Often we say we don't want religion to be politicized, but then we go after the most politically active groups and put them forward as our official interlocutors, and then wonder why religion is politicized. I think that's probably the biggest risk and the clearest parallel between the 1950s and today.

With that, I'll end my formal comments and we can go to a bit of Q&A. Thank you.

Questions and Answers

QUESTION: I wonder now where all this takes us. We use people and movements as we need to use them. At one point [Stalin](#) was important to us, [Chiang Kai-shek](#) during World War II, the leaders of South Korea, South Vietnam, and various places, the dictator of the Dominican Republic. You have to know that this relationship may not last forever or there may be disadvantages to it. But there's a disadvantage to every policy, if only in opportunity cost.

I get publications from various senior service colleges of which I'm an alumnus, like the *Military Review* from Leavenworth and the *Naval War College Review* and Army War College publications, and their persistent complaint about the U.S. Army or other services is our inability to use these other cultures and religions. A persistent part of our culture seems to be our inability to do it.

For example, there was an article in a recent issue of *Strategy & Tactics* magazine about how during the Korean War, when we were trying to sort out the North Korean prisoners, we had so few people who spoke Korean that we had to use the communist officials that we captured as interpreters. That's crazy. That's impossible.

We have now maybe more Arab speakers—nothing like we need to have. But we have idiot junior officers who will ruin every relationship we try to establish by their buffoonish behavior.

IAN JOHNSON: You're right. The U.S. needs to learn more foreign languages and support all that. I think what I am objecting to more is the purposeful, maybe disingenuous or slightly dishonest courting of groups.

If you want to deal with the Muslim Brotherhood, fine, deal with the Muslim Brotherhood; say you are doing it. But also recognize that the Muslim Brotherhood has consistently over the decades refused to renounce violence, has clear anti-Semitic positions by all of its top officials, all of its top ideologues, and say, "Okay, we're going to deal with a group like that because we need to." But don't put this forward as, "These guys are the moderates. These are the good guys."

Again, it also depends on how you talk about the Muslim Brotherhood. If you talk about the Muslim Brotherhood in the narrow sense of the political grouping in Egypt, let's say, then if you are in the embassy in Cairo, you, of course, have to have outreach to the Muslim Brotherhood, because decades of authoritarian rule have destroyed so much of civil society in Egypt that it's only this sort of battle-hardened group that's left, and they could be running the country in two years, so you have to have some relationship with them—

QUESTIONER: Excuse me, the problem that we run into in tacitly using groups like this—sometimes it's not tacit—is, to which audience are you speaking? In a speech class, they warn you that politicians

especially are speaking to more than one audience. We can understand this. But we are a tiny sliver of American society. As a matter of fact, I run into the same people in meetings like this all over Manhattan. I can run into the same person three times in one day. That's just this little bit, though. On the other hand, most of the public thinks that we could solve the deficit if we did away with foreign aid.

We have a necessity to use these groups, not cynically, but like any—politics is inherently conspiratorial—where you have common interests and common enemies. It can have a benefit. For example, I do realize that [Ronald Reagan](#) and the [pope](#) [John Paul II] don't deserve all the credit for the collapse of the Soviet Union, but there was a common interest involved.

When you say we have to be honest about this, with whom are we going to be honest?

IAN JOHNSON: I think we have to be honest in how we present ourselves in public. One of the problems in dealing with the Muslim Brotherhood is that, by making them sometimes our official interlocutor, we give them a platform and give them credibility that they don't deserve.

You will see groups close to the Muslim Brotherhood that share the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, and when U.S. officials go and talk to them and invite them to conferences, et cetera, these photos are taken and immediately go up on the websites, and people in the Muslim communities will then say, "I guess this group isn't so bad. After all, U.S. officials are meeting them. After all, they are the official interlocutor."

The State Department, for example, especially in the second half of the Bush Administration and continuing on into the Obama Administration, has had specific outreach efforts to Muslim Brotherhood groups in Europe and has, I think, tried to undermine civil society efforts in places like Germany that have opposed the Brotherhood.

This is clearly for political gain. The cables state this very clearly. In my book I have a couple of examples of State Department cables from 2006, a CIA analysis from 2008, that say, "This is helpful for us in the Middle East. This is helpful for us in war in Iraq, if we're seen as supporting these groups."

But it has a real price. It undermines efforts by truly moderate Muslims to organize. Because if there's one thing the Muslim Brotherhood is good at, it's organizing. They are always the best organized. So if you are a moderate in these communities, you are always at a disadvantage, because you are trying to fight against something that is well funded, well organized, and sometimes has the imprimatur of the U.S. government.

DEVIN STEWART: Last week we had the great pleasure of having [Bernard Lewis](#) come to our humble Carnegie Council. It was a real honor to have Lewis [speak here](#) on his vast century of watching the Middle East, of experience and analysis.

One thing that he said over and over again—and he had the courage to say it—"I wish that the Muslims were better acquainted with their own religion." Then some people wouldn't make claims that violence was acceptable and various other things that are, I think, broadly considered unethical.

Going back to your basic recommendation that the United States Government shouldn't look at groups as a means to an end, what about the use of ecumenical, pluralistic political rhetoric? President Obama, for example, likes to try to use some universalistic language and speak directly to Islam. Is that acceptable? And is there any data to support it?

IAN JOHNSON: I'm not sure about the data. I think, of course, it's good to use inclusionary language to express support for different cultures. I think that's what President Obama tries to do. I don't think that's wrong at all. I think that's simply showing some sort of respect for the people you are talking to or the country you are visiting.

In terms of Muslims being more acquainted with their religion, I don't think it's my position to comment on that.

I do think there is an interesting discourse in Muslim communities in Europe about what is called "Engineer Islam." This is often brotherhood organizations that are organized by, especially, engineers. It seems like when you meet people in the Muslim Brotherhood, 75 percent of them seem to be engineers or lawyers. Whether they are well acquainted with their religion or not is not really for me to say. But I think there is a feeling among some people in the community that that leads to a different view of Islam than is ideal, perhaps.

QUESTION: I just wanted to find out why you think the U.S. government continues to make the same mistake in terms of using religion as a tool, as opposed to seeing what the consequences were.

IAN JOHNSON: Part of it, I have to say, is almost desperation. I think now, nine years after 9/11, you could argue that things aren't really looking that great. The U.S. is still involved in a war and a half, or however you want to view all this—several conflicts in the Muslim world. The view toward the United States, despite great speeches and so on by Obama, is not that strong. There continue to be terrorist threats, as we saw a couple of weeks ago in Times Square. So people, I think, are looking for any means.

I think, in some ways, it also goes back to our fundamental error in dealing with groups like the Muslim Brotherhood. This is what I alluded to earlier, the effort to prosecute people as terrorists. In some ways, 9/11 was the best thing that happened to the Muslim Brotherhood. At first, everybody said, "Oh, the Muslim Brotherhood, they're Islamists. They're extremists. Let's prosecute them." Of course, most of these people could not be prosecuted because they had not done anything illegal.

What they had done was, in some ways, more insidious, more problematic, and that was to create the mindset that leads, several steps down the road, to terrorism: It's to create the "us versus them" worldview. That is the sort of fundamental ideal behind Islamism and other extremist ideologies as well.

I think that's the problem. That's where the Muslim Brotherhood should be taken on, should be more debated, rather than prosecuted by law enforcement agencies.

QUESTION: The converse: How are the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic groups using the mosque in foreign countries for their goals, their ambitions, converting people to their viewpoint, and perhaps a worldview of a world caliphate? Can you explore that a little bit?

IAN JOHNSON: The Muslim Brotherhood makes use of Muslims in—I'll stick to Europe, because I know that better, but I think there is a similar situation in many parts of the United States—because of their strength in organizing.

When you had immigration to Europe, in the 1960s and 1970s especially, you had people who naturally wanted a place to worship. The Muslim Brotherhood was already there, already had structures set up, not because they foresaw this immigration, but because of the exile—being banned in Egypt, for example. So they were able to insert themselves in these communities really quickly and set up mosques.

In Germany it tended to the Turkish variant of the Muslim Brotherhood, Mili Görüs, but in France it was Muslim Brotherhood groups—the U.K. also—more South Asian groups. So you have this disproportionate influence by groups that are close to the Muslim Brotherhood. I think they use it as a means to distribute literature, what books are on sale, that sort of thing.

That has changed a little bit in the past few years, because a lot of people are much more aware of the literature and the books that are problematic, and so when mosques sell books like that, people will say, "Hey, what you are doing selling that?" But for years and years, these books were sold there. I think if you are a young Muslim and you see this being sold in the mosque, well, it must be okay, in a way. Maybe people weren't really paying attention to it and a lot of people weren't reading it. But it did have

the sense that it was acceptable.

I think this is the problem that the Brotherhood has. It's in spreading ideology. It's not that there is some XYZ link that leads us to [Osama bin Laden](#) somewhere. I think that has been the problem in how it has been viewed.

QUESTION: I wanted to visit this mosque that was recently built. It's absolutely a beautiful structure. I went in to look at it, from an architectural point of view. I was greeted by a member of the congregation there. He took my name. He was very friendly, very nice. All of a sudden, when I got home, I got a lovely gold-bound Qur'an and subsequent calls. I guess they were trying to recruit me, for some reason.

It was very interesting observing. Washington, D.C., is loaded with Muslim cabdrivers. They would go there for their prayers. It struck me that it could be a center of all sorts of special anti-American activities, if it wasn't properly supervised, or at least controlled in some way.

I was just wondering, as I pointed out the converse, about using these mosques to spread whatever their ideology is.

IAN JOHNSON: I think one has to be careful in looking at mosques, in that they are not analogous to churches. People are not members, necessarily, of a mosque. If they're praying five times a day and they're a cabdriver, it really may depend on what part of town they're in. If they know there is a mosque nearby, they will go in, do their prayers, and be back in their cab 15 minutes later or something.

QUESTIONER: Are they really cabdrivers?

IAN JOHNSON: Yes, I think they're really cabdrivers, probably.

I think what happens in a mosque is often—it's also not quite as well structured. Islam does not have a hierarchy, does not have a church-type structure. So the influence is much more diffuse and subtle, and it's often harder to get a hold on.

A lot of people say, "If we could only get hold of these imams and have them stop radical sermons on Friday." The fact is that most imams, the overwhelming number, are often just senior members of the community who read something and have a few pithy words to say on Friday. It's not like the minister in charge of his flock, which is how a lot of people, I think, see that—not to say that there aren't some really influential imams who especially spread through videos and on the Internet and so on. But in most mosques that's not really the case.

That's why, in dealing with these groups, it's not usually so easy to set up some sort of a flowchart structure and say, "We can get this guy and this guy. Then we have influenced the whole community."

I think that sort of goes back to the problem of dealing with the Brotherhood. We tend to say, "Oh, if we get the Brotherhood, then we have all these people."

QUESTION: I agree with you—probably because I am a secularist of thought—that it is a rather bad idea to use religious movements, religious leaders, religious organizations for political purposes. But I wonder how realistic your suggestion is when it comes to the Islam world.

One of the things Bernard Lewis said when he came to give a talk here was that there is [no separation between the church and the state or religion and politics, in the Western sense of the term, in the Islamic world](#) [link is to YouTube clip with this quote]. If that's the case, is it possible for the U.S. government to talk to secular political leaders and have some impact on the politics?

IAN JOHNSON: I certainly don't want to get into a debate with Bernard Lewis over Islam and politics.

Of course, when you are dealing with countries, you will have dealings with religious leaders, as important members of society. In some countries there will be a closer interconnection between religion and politics than in others. Maybe what I'm arguing is not entirely practical, but I think it's something of a corrective that needs to happen. I think the problem is that the U.S. has been willing to buy too much into this idea that you can't deal with countries of the Middle East without dealing with Islamic leaders.

After all, I think, to some degree, the term "Muslim world" is misleading. Most countries—almost every country, I would say—in the so-called Muslim world has historically had large minorities—Christians, Jews. Now, I would say, maybe because of the influence of this political ideology, a lot of these minorities have decreased drastically over time. But it's still true that almost every country in the world is, in fact, multicultural. So if you are purely looking at politics as a religious play, you are losing some segments of society.

QUESTION: Do you feel there is any learning going on in the Obama Administration? Is there anyone that agrees with you in terms of changing the strategy?

IAN JOHNSON: That's hard for me to say, because I'm not privy to the debates.

QUESTIONER: You haven't seen any evidence of it yet?

IAN JOHNSON: On the contrary. I think the Obama Administration is continuing what the second Bush term—starting around 2005, there has been an effort to reach out to groups that are closely linked to the Muslim Brotherhood or have had ties to the Muslim Brotherhood. I think there is probably a desire to continue this rather than to ratchet it back.

ZARINÉS NEGRÓN: Thank you very much.

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