

Texas Governor Abbott designates CAIR and Muslim Brotherhood as terrorist organizations

Kevin Reed
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On Tuesday, Republican Texas Governor Greg Abbott issued a proclamation designating the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and the Muslim Brotherhood as “foreign terrorist organizations.”

The action, which is politically and legally dubious, fits directly within the far-right and xenophobic drive that has defined Abbott’s administration and the trajectory of the Republican Party nationally during the second term of Donald Trump as US President.

Abbott’s official statement describes the Muslim Brotherhood as a “group that supports organizations, including Hamas, that conduct terrorism in various countries,” noting that “a series of countries have already imposed restrictions on their local Muslim Brotherhood branches.”

Regarding CAIR, Abbott’s proclamation calls it a “successor organization” to the Muslim Brotherhood and “an effective front group for Hamas in the United States,” further accusing CAIR of seeking “to spread Sharia law in the country by infiltrating public office and other areas of public life.”

Abbott maintains in his statement, “Today, I designated the Muslim Brotherhood and the Council on American-Islamic Relations as foreign terrorist and transnational criminal organizations,” adding that the move will “ban both groups from buying or acquiring land in the state and allow the state’s attorney general to sue to shut down the two groups and potentially impose fines on those involved.”

The provocative language and tone of Abbott’s proclamation notwithstanding, US states do not have the legal authority to designate organizations as foreign terrorist entities. According to federal law, such authority rests solely with the US Secretary of State,

following consultation with the Attorney General and the Secretary of the Treasury.

Abbott’s announcement is more about generating an atmosphere of hysteria and inciting anti-Muslim sentiment than about any legitimate action. As CAIR’s response states plainly, “Greg Abbott is an Israel-First politician who has spent months stoking anti-Muslim hysteria to smear American Muslims critical of the Israeli government ... By defaming a prominent American Muslim institution with debunked conspiracy theories and made-up quotes, Mr. Abbott has once again shown that his top priority is advancing anti-Muslim bigotry, not serving the people of Texas.”

While the legality of Abbott’s action is dubious under federal law, the threat is clear: Texas will seek to curtail the ability of these and similar organizations to function by threatening their operations, finances and physical presence in the state.

CAIR is the largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy group in the United States, with a stated mission to “enhance understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, protect civil liberties and empower American Muslims.” It was founded in 1994 and works both in the courts and broader society to push back against anti-Muslim discrimination, defend free speech, and represent the interests of Muslim Americans facing state harassment, media defamation, or discrimination in employment, education and housing.

CAIR responded forcefully, reiterating its mission as “an independent American civil rights organization that has spent 30 years protecting free speech, advancing religious freedom, and promoting justice for people here and abroad. We have consistently condemned all forms of unjust violence, including hate crimes, ethnic

cleansing, genocide, and terrorism. In fact, we condemn terrorism so often that ISIS once put a target on our national executive director.”

The group further stated, “Although we are flattered by Greg Abbott’s obsession with our civil rights organization, his publicity stunt masquerading as a proclamation has no basis in fact or law.” CAIR promised vigorous legal resistance by threatening to sue the Governor as it has done successfully on three previous occasions.

The Muslim Brotherhood is a global Sunni Islamist organization founded in Egypt in 1928 as a religious, social and political movement. While some governments, including Egypt’s military regime, the UAE and Saudi Arabia, have designated it a terrorist group, the Muslim Brotherhood’s activities in the US are limited and primarily revolve around cultural and religious engagement, student groups and overseas political advocacy. US intelligence and legal authorities have long found no evidence of terrorism links within Brotherhood-related entities in the US.

The Muslim Brotherhood has not issued a distinct public response as of this writing, but global Muslim organizations and their US supporters have condemned the move as part of an intensifying crackdown on Muslim civil society organizations.

Civil rights groups and advocacy organizations have denounced Abbott’s declaration as an “escalation of anti-Muslim bigotry.” The groups have emphasized that the move threatens basic rights to association and religious freedom, and puts a legal bullseye on Texas’s Muslim community.

Texas has seen a marked increase in anti-Muslim hate crimes and violence in recent years, consistent with national trends since the rise of Trumpism. The FBI and civil rights groups have reported yearly surges in mosque vandalism, physical assaults and anti-Muslim harassment.

In 2023 and 2024, these attacks—which have included bomb threats, mosque arson, and assaults on students and activists—have often followed incendiary rhetoric from Republican political leaders and policies targeting Muslim immigrants and activists. There is a direct link between state policy and anti-Muslim violence.

Abbott’s proclamation must be viewed as part of the reactionary nationalism unleashed throughout both of Trump’s terms as president. The campaign to vilify

Muslims in the United States reached a high point with Trump’s infamous “Muslim travel ban” in 2017, which criminalized entire populations based on religion and country of origin.

This was combined with the relentless anti-immigrant hysteria mounted by Trump and Abbott. Among the first executive orders issued by Trump for his second term was to declare a national emergency at the southern border and slander immigrants as “invaders” who are “rapists,” “criminals,” “murderers,” “animals” and “monsters.”

Since then, Trump and his backers like Abbott have used family separation, detention in concentration camps, forced deportations and other draconian measures which violate the basic constitutional rights of immigrants and US citizens alike.

Abbott has functioned as Trump’s attack dog in Texas, willing to defy federal law, target civil rights groups, and assist in the mobilization of police and National Guard troops as part of the ongoing establishment of an authoritarian regime in the US.

Greg Abbott’s anti-Muslim proclamation, while likely unenforceable from a legal standpoint, serves as an encouragement to far-right and fascist forces in Texas and nationwide. In the face of such attacks, the working class must unite across national, religious and ethnic lines to defend democratic rights and oppose all forms of bigotry and repression.



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