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With the Muslim Brotherhood, Washington risks sleeping with the enemy
By Lawrence J. Haas

Recent reports that Washington has turned to a leading Muslim Brotherhood jurist to help cut a deal with the Taliban raises a key question: is the United States making a bet that it will come to regret?

That depends on whether the Muslim Brotherhood, the controversial Islamic group that dates back to 1928, has sincerely moderated its views (as its supporters argue) or whether it remains dangerously fundamentalist (as I suspect).

“Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a Doha-based Islamist scholar who once called on his followers to back jihadist groups in Jammu and Kashmir, has emerged as a key mediator in secret talks between the U.S. and the Taliban,” *The Hindu*, India’s third most widely read English newspaper, wrote on December 29.

In fact, *The Hindu* continued, al-Qaradawi suggested the following deal: the United States would release all of its prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, lift United Nations sanctions against Taliban leaders, and recognize the group as a legitimate political entity; and the Taliban would cut its ties to all transnational groups like al Qaeda, end violence, and share power with the current Afghan government.

Washington’s strategy of deploying a key Muslim Brotherhood figure for such sensitive deal-cutting probably reflects the belief in some quarters, as Jeffrey Goldberg wrote recently for the news service Bloomberg, “Scratch a Muslim Brother... and you’ll find the Middle Eastern analog of a European Christian Democrat.”

Well, perhaps. Optimistic Western experts point to the Brotherhood’s participation in recent Egyptian parliamentary elections as a sign that it means what its leaders now say – that it renounces violence and wants to work for change within the existing society rather than tear society apart.

The question, however, is what the Brotherhood will do if it ever assumes legitimate political power. We’re likely about to find out in Egypt, where the group recently won nearly 40 percent of the popular vote (while the far more fundamentalist Nour Party won almost 25 percent).

The early evidence is hardly reassuring. For starters, the Brotherhood retains its motto: “Allah is our objective. The Prophet is our leader. The Qur'an is our law. Jihad is our way. Dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope.” Moreover, a recent Brotherhood-sponsored rally in Egypt featured calls to “one day kill all Jews.”

If the Brotherhood remains committed to its motto, then it’s hard not to fear that the group (along with the Nour Party) will employ a “one man, one vote, one time” strategy – gaining power

through the ballot and then using that power to dispense with short-term democracy and impose “shariah” for the long term.

As for al-Qaradawi, an outraged Andrew McCarthy, author of *The Grand Jihad* and prosecutor of Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman and eleven others who engineered the 1993 World Trade Center bombing in New York, reminded us in a January 1 piece for “Family Security Matters” that al-Qaradawi promotes Islamic rule for the world under a global caliphate; supports Hamas, mass murder, and suicide bombings; calls for Israel’s destruction; issued a 2003 fatwa that called for killing U.S. troops in Iraq; and publicly prayed in 2009 that Allah would kill all Jews.

“Oh Allah,” al-Qaradawi implored in his 2009 sermon, “take this oppressive, Jewish, Zionist band of people. Oh Allah, do not spare a single one of them. Oh Allah, count their numbers and kill them, down to the very last one.”

To be sure, al-Qaradawi also endorsed political pluralism in 1993 and condemned al Qaeda’s September 11 attacks and its “mad declaration of war on the whole world.” But, those steps seem more tactical than transformational – that is, designed to carve a more effective path to power and victory.

The United States has made this mistake before, associating itself with radical forces that later prove embarrassing, if not harmful, to U.S. interests.

In the 1980s, Washington helped Afghanistan’s mujahedeen in its war with the Soviet Union, only to see elements of the group transform themselves into a terrorist group, al Qaeda, that declared war on the United States in 1998 and launched a series of attacks that culminated on September 11, 2001.

With regard to the Muslim Brotherhood, Washington would be well advised to recall its own history and the philosopher Santayana’s caution: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

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