EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Many western analysts wonder how much longer the Iranian regime will be able to survive under the weight of backbreaking US sanctions. What they are missing is that the regime has been skirting the sanctions through the aid of long-time collaborators around the world. Evidence strongly suggests that the Muslim Brotherhood is chief among those collaborators.

The extremist Shiite regime in Iran and the extremist Sunni organization the Muslim Brotherhood share a similarly apocalyptic vision of the world. They both believe in the totalitarian ideology of “Islamism,” which holds that Islam should forcefully supplant all other ways of life. They both disregard national borders and seek to coercively create an overarching Nation of Islam through conquest of the Middle East and eventually the rest of the world.

Indeed, it was Sayyid Qutb, a leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and 1960s, who opened the eyes of the Iranian Islamists to the possibility of a “pan-Islamic State.” Both groups detest Western civilization, the US, Israel, and the GCC countries, with the notable exception of Qatar. This fundamental ideological affinity brings the two brands of Islamism together despite the appearance of an unbridgeable sectarian difference.

The Sunni Muslim Brotherhood was, in fact, one the major forces that pushed the Shiite Islamists to power in Iran. The Brotherhood taught the Iranian Islamists how to make themselves presentable to the West, infiltrate cultural and academic institutions, and guide public opinion. In the US, the Shiite Student Islamic Association was established as a splinter cell of the Brotherhood’s Muslim Students’ Association in North America. The Islamic Center of Hamburg, the first major Shiite institute of influence in the West, closely followed the Brotherhood model of
sophisticated proselytization and engagement with European public intellectuals. That approach can still be discerned in the lobbying practices of the Iranian regime in the West.

The Muslim Brotherhood also taught the Shiite Islamists how to be soldiers. During the 1960s and 1970s, many Iranian Islamists were trained in guerrilla camps in Egypt and Syria under the auspices of Brotherhood-sympathetic army officers. They then relocated to Lebanon to establish the radical Shiite Amal Movement, the precursor of Hezbollah, to galvanize the Lebanese population against Israel and the West. Along with the exiled PLO, the Muslim Brotherhood and Amal pushed Lebanon toward civil war. Those same battle-hardened guerrillas would later topple the pro-Western regime of the Shah in Iran.

True to form, after the Islamic Revolution and during the Iran-Iraq War, the Muslim Brotherhood actively aided the Iranian regime in evading international sanctions. As Youssef Nada, the financier known as the Brotherhood’s “foreign minister,” admitted in his account Inside the Muslim Brotherhood (2012), the Brotherhood helped Iran with imports of steel and grain. According to Ebrahim Yazdi, the wide-reaching Geneva-based Brotherhood-affiliated Dar Al-Mal Al-Islami Trust was instrumental in procuring game-changing military resources, including Phantom parts, for the Iranian regime throughout the war.

In return, the Muslim Brotherhood has always been welcome in Tehran. As Nada mentions in his memoirs, the Brotherhood and the Ayatollahs maintained friendly relations far beyond the turbulent and transitional 1980s. No wonder as soon as the Mubarak regime was toppled in 2011, the Iranian regime, characterizing the Brotherhood’s ascent to power as an “Islamic awakening,” enthusiastically reached out to the Morsi government and sought to normalize relations with Egypt after three decades of a diplomatic freeze.

President Morsi went to Tehran in August 2012 to attend a summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, and President Ahmadinejad reciprocated by attending a summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Cairo in February 2013. In Tehran they agreed to reopen embassies; in Cairo Ahmadinejad announced that the Islamic Republic was willing to give Egypt a “big loan.”

All that came to naught with Morsi’s ouster. Naturally, the regime strongly objected to the Sisi takeover. Along with Aljazeera, the Iranian regime’s media adopted a one-directional stance toward the unfolding events in Egypt that aligned with the Muslim Brotherhood’s narrative.

During Morsi’s presidency, Quds Force operatives exponentially increased their activities in Egypt and, taking advantage of the post-revolution turmoil, uninhibitedly conveyed arms and missiles to Hamas through the Sinai. The
Brotherhood intermezzo in Egypt therefore saw an upsurge in Hamas belligerence toward Israel, which eventually led to decisive Israeli action against the Gaza Strip-based offshoot of the Brotherhood in 2012. During his trial after his dismissal, Morsi and 35 other prominent Brethren were accused, among other things, of collaborating with the Revolutionary Guards, Hezbollah, and Hamas with the intention of committing terrorist acts in Egypt in the period between 2005 and 2013.

Hot on the heels of Morsi’s ouster, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Iranian regime sought to work together. According to leaked information, in 2014 high-profile representatives of the Brotherhood and the IRGC convened at a hotel in Turkey to plot against their common enemies: Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the US. The Revolutionary Guards would provide the hard power while the Brotherhood would use its vast organizations across 85 countries to provide cover for the terrorist operations.

The Iranian regime has been using financial institutions in Turkey and Qatar, where the Muslim Brotherhood has a heavy presence, for money-laundering and sanctions-busting purposes. Recently, the regime strongly objected to the US designation of the Brotherhood as a terrorist organization.

Appearances can be misleading. While the Shiite-Sunni sectarian divide does exist, it has time and again been transcended by nefarious forces for the sake of exigency. When it comes to countering the US and her regional partners, the same principle stands for all Islamists. As their vociferous objections to the recent US-backed rapprochement between Israel, Bahrain, and the UAE—which, as it happens, is the torchbearer of the anti-Brotherhood campaign in the Islamic world—clearly demonstrate, the Iranian regime and the Muslim Brotherhood are still firmly in cahoots to sabotage all attempts at regional peace, which would spell doom for the appeal of their violent ways. To salvage their common cause in the short term and keep them both alive in the long term, the Muslim Brotherhood is likely a key actor in the skirting of sanctions on the Islamist regime in Iran, a possibility that should be intensely investigated.

*Dr. Reza Parchizadeh is a political theorist, historian, and senior analyst. He can be reached at [https://twitter.com/rezaparchizadeh](https://twitter.com/rezaparchizadeh) and [https://iup.academia.edu/RezaParchizadeh](https://iup.academia.edu/RezaParchizadeh).*