

Hello from the Other Side: An Investigation into a Musical Pro-Muslim Brotherhood Disinformation Operation

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1 Introduction

On November 5, 2020, Facebook announced the takedown of 25 Pages, 31 profiles, and two Instagram accounts affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. According to Facebook, the operation originated in Egypt, Turkey, and Morocco. The network targeted audiences both in Egypt directly and across the Middle East, North Africa, and East Africa. Facebook shared this network with the Stanford Internet Observatory on October 24, 2020.

Many social media disinformation campaigns—and associated take-downs—have been linked to Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt. But we believe this is the first takedown linked to opposing pro-Muslim Brotherhood actors. Interestingly, this network appears markedly similar to networks from anti-Muslim Brotherhood disinformation campaigns on Facebook. Both sides create professional branding for Pages, share polished, custom videos, and in this case even released original songs. We conjecture that like anti-Muslim Brotherhood operations, this network may be linked to a digital marketing firm in Egypt. These firms have a particular signature.

Facebook suspended this Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated network not due to the content of its posts, but for coordinated inauthentic behavior: The Facebook Pages and Instagram accounts were managed by fake accounts.

Key takeaways:

- This was a complex cross-platform operation with a substantial audience. The Facebook Pages the Stanford Internet Observatory analyzed had nearly 1.5 million followers. The operation was also linked to many Twitter accounts, YouTube channels, and Telegram channels, many of which boasted large followings.
- The network created and shared hundreds of original videos and dozens of original songs.
- While most of the profiles linked to this operation were stub accounts, one of the profiles ran a social media advertising agency in Egypt.
- Central messages included:
 - Praise for the Muslim Brotherhood-supporting governments of Turkey and Qatar.
 - Criticism of Saudi Arabian, Egyptian, and UAE governments.
 - Accusations that the Egyptian government had imprisoned and killed Muslim Brotherhood supporters, and that Muslim Brotherhood supporters were being detained across countries.
- The Facebook Page names were direct and unsubtle. Examples include Tunisia Against the UAE, Hearts with Qatar, and YemenAgainstKSAUEA [sic].

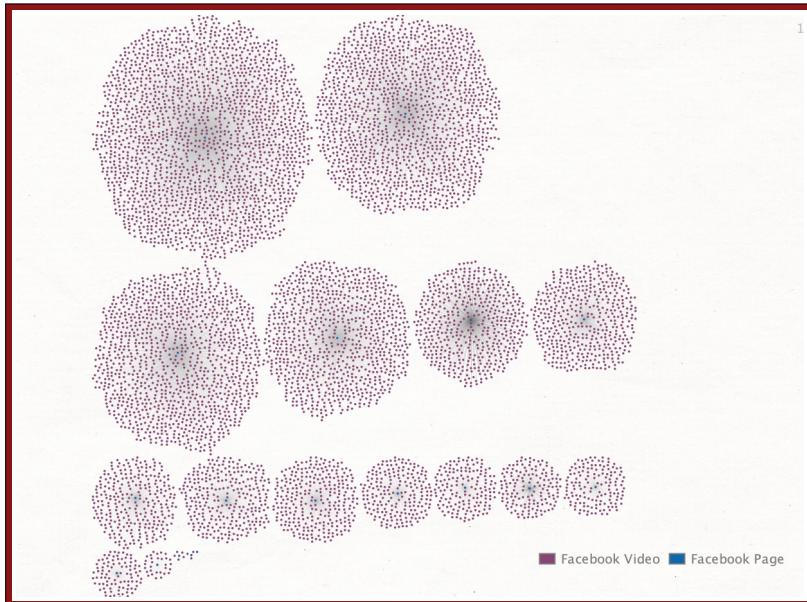


Figure 1: The network created hundreds of videos. Blue dots represent Facebook Pages, and the purple dots show unique videos. This figure was made with Maltego and Social Links.

2 Political Context

Facebook linked this network to individuals affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. The Muslim Brotherhood is a religious and political Islamist Sunni group [founded in Egypt](#). Historically, its supporters have been [repressed in Egypt](#) – but following the Arab Spring, the party was legalized. Muslim Brotherhood politician Mohamed Morsi won the Egyptian presidential election in 2012. He was president for just one year, before being ousted in a military coup.

Today, Egypt and Saudi Arabia label the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization, while the Qatari and Turkish government [support the group](#). Several North African governments have links to the Muslim Brotherhood, including Libya's Tripoli-based Government of National Accord and Tunisia's parliament speaker Rachid Ghannouchi. Ghannouchi co-founded the Tunisian version of the Muslim Brotherhood party, the Ennahdha movement, which currently holds the most seats in parliament. Turkish and Qatari influences have extended as far as Somalia in order to grow their power within the region. Damul Jadiid, a sub-branch of the Somalian version of Muslim Brotherhood ("al-Islah"), has received funding and support from both countries in the past.

3 Summary Statistics

As part of the takedown, we analyzed 18 Pages, 30 profiles, and one Instagram account. The Pages featured straightforward viewpoints, praising governments that support the Muslim Brotherhood and critiquing its foes. Eight of the Pages discussed Egypt, focusing on claims that the government imprisoned and killed Muslim Brotherhood supporters. The single Instagram account, People and Hearts with Qatar, mirrored the content on the eponymous Facebook Page.

Country Discussed	Page Name	Page Admin Location	Creation Date	Followers
Egypt	Alexandria Time	Egypt (14); Saudi (1); Location hidden (1)	1/21/2017	162,393
Egypt	Revolution Homeland	Egypt (6); Location hidden (1)	9/26/2019	62,809
Egypt	Stop Executions	Egypt (2); Location hidden (2)	2/11/2016	5,848
Egypt	Association of Detainees' Families in Alexandria Prisons	Location hidden (2)	3/21/2017	94,675
Egypt	Voice of the Cell - Official Page	Egypt (3); Location hidden (2)	10/14/2019	106,597
Egypt	Arab-African Center for Rights and Freedoms	Egypt (1); Location hidden (3)	8/23/2015	49,884
Egypt	Youth Against Coup	Egypt (4); Nigeria (1)	1/7/2020	51,438
Egypt	Echo of the Revolution	Egypt (7); Syria (1)	4/6/2019	17,597
Saudi Arabia	Never NEOM	Location hidden (4)	7/6/2020	2,404
Saudi Arabia	Fall of King Salman	Location hidden (5)	6/21/2017	98,463
U.S.	U.S. Monitor (English)	None visible	8/14/2017	62
U.S.	U.S. Monitor	None visible	5/18/2017	3,870
Qatar	Peoples and Hearts with Qatar	Location hidden (5)	6/11/2017	323,769
Somali	Somali and Proud	Location hidden (5)	9/9/2018	7,354
Tunisia	Tunis against UAE Intervention	Location hidden (5)	9/6/2018	25,488
UAE	Black Hands	Location hidden (6)	5/28/2017	364,409
Yemen	Free Yemen Against the Saudi Emirati Intervention	Location hidden (5)	9/3/2018	14,938
Libya	Free Libyan Youth	Location hidden (5)	9/9/2018	58,830

Table 1: Suspended Pages

The majority of the profiles did not look authentic. Profile photos included custom-made emojis, flower illustrations, and stock photos. Many profiles had just a handful of friends—but one stood out for having more than 1,000 followers. We found this man’s LinkedIn profile. He said he lived in Egypt, was self-employed in digital advertising, and was skilled in social media content and graphic design. Given that this operation originated partially in Egypt, our theory is that this individual and his firm may have created at least some of the content for the network. If correct, this follows a pattern of takedowns likely linked to Egyptian digital marketing firms. Prior takedowns, however, have pushed anti-Muslim Brotherhood content—messaging in direct opposition to that of this one.

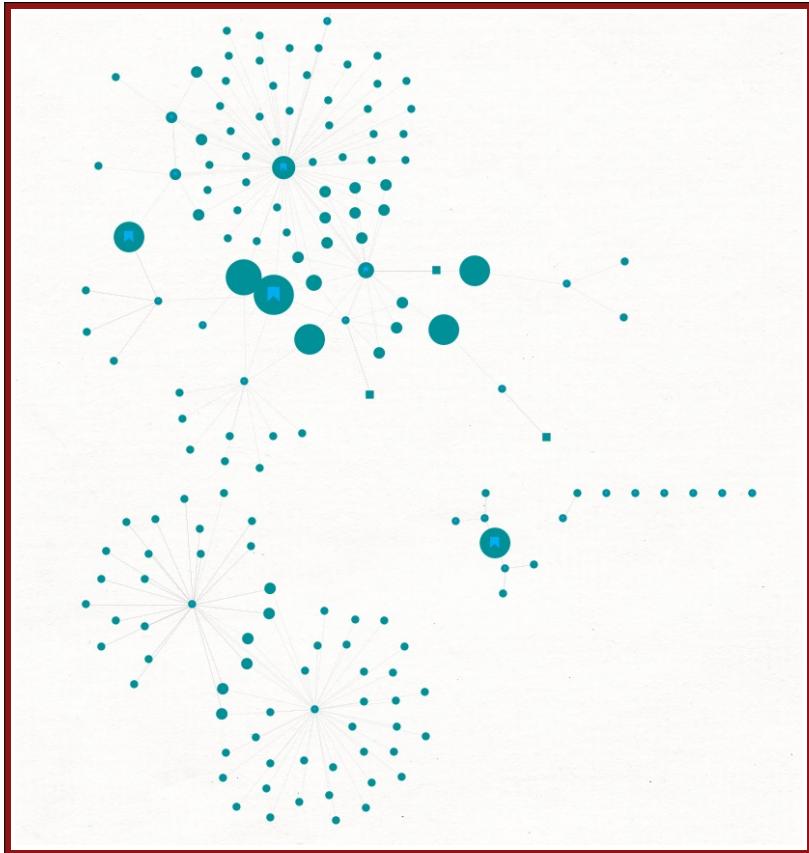


Figure 2: Most of the profiles only had few friends. Green nodes with blue icons inside represent suspended profiles, while the plain green nodes are their friends. This figure was created with Maltego and Social Links.

The network had a large cross-platform presence, as shown in Table 2.

4 Narratives

4.1 Focus on Pro-Muslim Brotherhood Parties

One Page, Tunis against UAE Intervention, focused on Tunisian politics. This page was created in September 2018. Cross-platform presence was noted on both [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#). The most activity was focused on Facebook, although this may change in coming weeks, given the Page’s suspension.

Facebook Page	Linked Entity	Platform	Followers	Creation Date
Tunisia Against UAE Intervention	https://twitter.com/TunisiaVsUAE	Twitter	594	September 2018
Tunisia Against UAE Intervention	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-qP-L3NCpCUL0qKW7pJ0lA	YouTube	2,870	September 2018
Never Neom	https://twitter.com/NeverNEOM	Twitter	46,400	November 2013
Never Neom	https://neomm.co/ar/	Website	NA	May 2020
Free Libyan Youth	https://twitter.com/libyayouth1	Twitter	27	September 2018
Free Libyan Youth	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCz3iUy9ArwsOPQ-fKUBAhrg/featured	YouTube	1,180	September 2019
People and Hearts with Qatar	https://twitter.com/PeopleWithQatar	Twitter	327	June 2017
Voice of the Cell – Official Page	https://twitter.com/ZenzanaVoice (suspended account)	Twitter	31,700	April 2017
Arab-African Center for Rights and Freedoms	https://t.me/arabyefriky	Telegram	49	March 2017
US Monitor (English)	https://twitter.com/NewsMonitorUS (previously: https://twitter.com/USMonitor)	Twitter	1,855	August 2017
US Monitor (Arabic)	https://twitter.com/USMonitorArabic	Twitter	118	May 2017
The Fall of King Salman	https://twitter.com/KharefSalman	Twitter	4,152	June 2017
The Fall of King Salman	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCm0P8grKosyhHabU3JD0gZg/featured	YouTube	58,000	June 2017
Black Hands	https://twitter.com/theblack_hands	Twitter	10,600	January 2018
Black Hands	https://t.me/s/BlackHandsEmirates	Telegram	157	October 2018
Black Hands	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCj8XO2AWPpC4Q43EEzaQAJA/about	YouTube	6,400	May 2017
Black Hands	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCsQGIUX-FZRm5QA-B9k2ULA/	YouTube	30,800	December 2017

Table 2: YouTube, Twitter, and Telegram accounts and websites linked to the now-suspended Facebook Pages

Along with day-to-day Tunisian political news and COVID-19-related updates, the Page highlighted the Ennahdha movement's positive contributions to the government and Tunisian politics at large. The Page frequently messaged allegations of UAE interference, often accusing the government of sponsoring members of parliament in a plot to derail Tunisian democracy.



Figure 3: A post from the Tunis Against UAE Page reads, “campaign that aims to tarnish Ennahdha movement and its leader Rachid Ghannouchi.”

This Page's content followed a consistent format, often posting videos with dramatic music and localized titles. Compared to other Pages in the network, it boasted comparatively high engagement. This suggests the network may have had more success in reaching Tunisian audiences than other countries targeted. The overall themes highlighted nationalism, civilian duty to protect the country, and the potential threat the UAE poses on Tunisia.

The Page also warned its followers against allowing divisions between the government and the Ennahdha majority parliament, citing examples of interference in Libya and Egypt. One poetry video titled “The Answer is Still Tunisia” labels the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt as evil actors who have lost battle after battle to try and destroy Tunisia.



Figure 4: Screenshot of the poetry video, “Tunisia is Still the Answer,” with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Saeed Hussein Khalil el-Sisi, Saudi Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (left to right).

A similar song video, “On the Pathway Dear Tunisia,” celebrates occasions,

including the ninth anniversary of the Jasmine Revolution. The political power of youth is juxtaposed against images of Tunisians protesting Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Saudi Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan. Lyrics included: “On the road, my kind Tunisia,” “for Tunisia’s sake, we are here,” and “to commemorate the ninth anniversary of the Tunisian Revolution.”



Figure 5: A post from a song video on the Tunis Against UAE Intervention Page. The text translates to: “Resists ‘Barsha’ a lot and wins”. This demonstrates that the song lyrics were localised to use familiar dialect words, in this case the song was referring to the Tunisian youth that were resisting Mohammed bin Zayed and Mohammed bin Salman influences on their country.

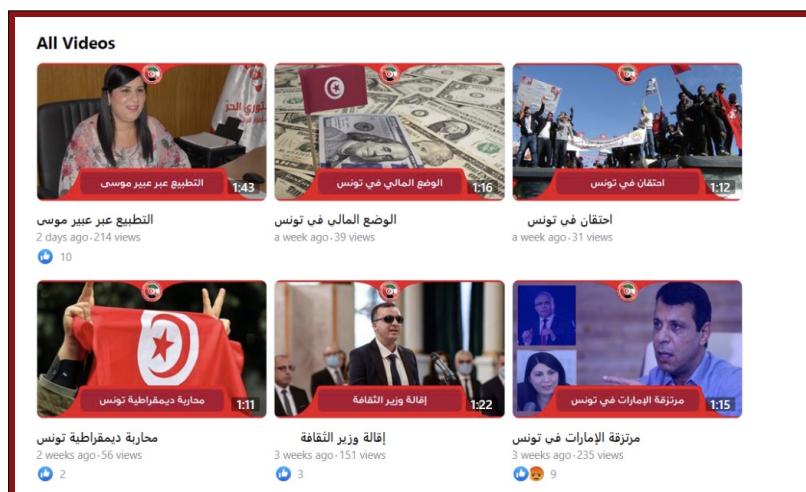


Figure 6: Recent videos posted by the Tunisia Against UAE Intervention Page include “UAE mercenaries in Tunisia” and “fighting democracy in Tunisia”.

4.2 Criticism of Saudi Arabia

One of the suspended Pages called Never NEOM was created on July 6, 2020, and is associated with the website of the same name, which was created on May 17, 2020, lists the now-suspended Page as its Facebook Page, and has similar visual material. Neom is a planned futuristic city in northwestern Saudi Arabia. The city's fate is uncertain given the financial strain the COVID-19 pandemic has placed on Saudi Arabia; the original budget was \$500 billion.



Figure 7: The Never NEOM Page

The Page, which posted in Arabic and English, criticized the Neom project and the Saudi government. Posts used existing, authentic critiques of the planned city's development, including poor treatment of migrant workers. It also highlighted international boycotts of events in Saudi Arabia and condemned Saudi Arabia for the fate of Jamal Khashoggi, the journalist who was murdered inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in 2018.

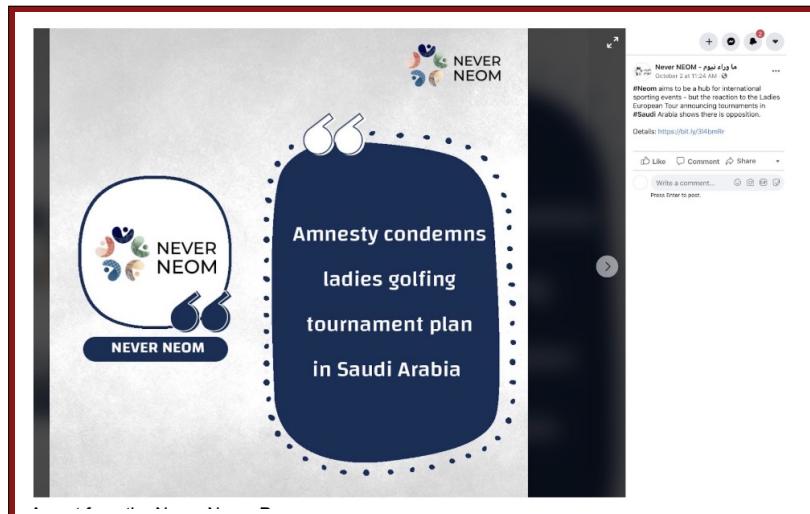


Figure 8: A post from the Never Neom Page noting that Amnesty International criticized a ladies golfing tournament in Saudi Arabia.

The Never Neom website parallels the Page's branding and messaging, highlighting international criticism of Neom. The website states: "Never Neom is a group of human rights defenders committed to providing the truth about Saudi Arabia's Neom project and informing the world of the reality

behind the hype.”

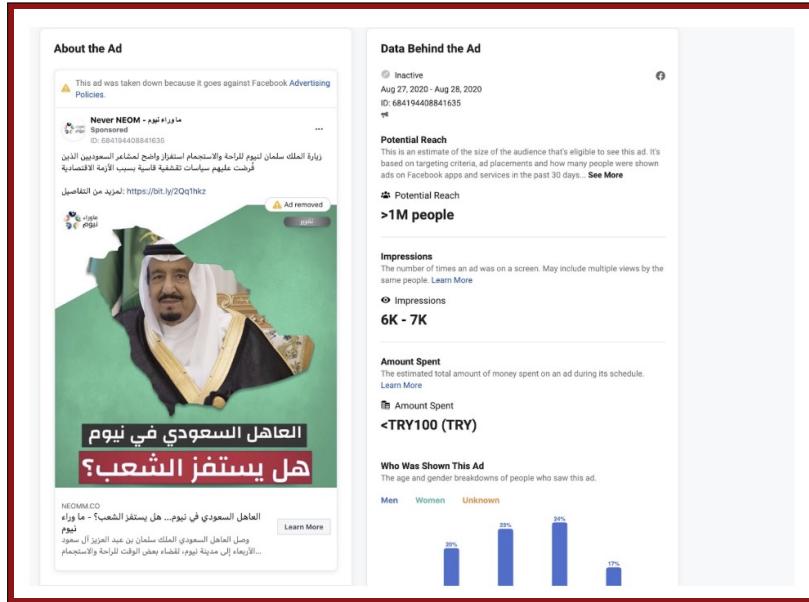


Figure 9: A removed ad run by the Never NEOM Page.



Figure 10: Left: The Never Neom Facebook Page logo. Right: The neomm.co logo.

The Facebook Page ran one political advertisement, which Facebook removed prior to the takedown. The ad, which was purchased for less than 100 Turkish Lira (\$12 USD), had potentially 6,000 to 7,000 impressions. The ad stated that the visit of Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud to Neom was “a clear provocation to the feelings of the Saudis” (translated from Arabic) who are living under austerity policies due to the country’s economic crisis. The ad linked out to an article on the [Never Neom website](#).

While both the Never Neom Facebook page and website were created in 2020, the [Never Neom Twitter account](#) dates back to 2013. It has 46,500 followers, but only 221 tweets and extremely low engagement. Interestingly, its first visible tweet is from July 2020, the same month the Facebook Page was created. There are no mentions of this account prior to 2020. The account may have changed its handle this year, and wiped its previous tweets, a strategy we have seen employed by disinformation operations linked to Saudi Arabia. This strategy can make accounts look more legitimate, when perhaps in their previous form they gained followers through inauthentic follow-back tactics.



Figure 11: The Never Neom website



Figure 12: The Never Neom Twitter account

Alongside anti-Neom content, posts throughout the network were critical of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the UAE. As mentioned above, messaging highlighted international boycotts of Saudi events due to human rights violations. One post highlighted a Human Rights Watch report condemning the Saudi judicial system. The tactic of amplifying these sort of reports is not new. Disinformation campaigns linked to Saudi Arabia and the UAE have used a similar tactics. However, these networks have also fabricated Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International content.



Figure 13: An October 2020 post saying that Human Rights Watch has criticized the Saudi judicial system.

4.3 Posts Critical of Libya's Khalifa Haftar

Only one Page in the takedown focused on Libya: Free Libyan Youth (شباب ليبيا) (الأحرار), created in September 2018. The Page also has connected profiles on YouTube and Twitter, were created during the same month, but neither have high activity or engagement. The YouTube channel has only 1,190 subscribers and three uploaded videos, while the Twitter profile has 641 tweets over two years and 27 followers.

The Page logo and header feature peace sign designs reminiscent of imagery associated with the February 17th revolution. Overall, the Page's professional-looking content and branding suggest it may have been managed by a digital marketing firm.



Figure 14: The Free Libyan Youth logo

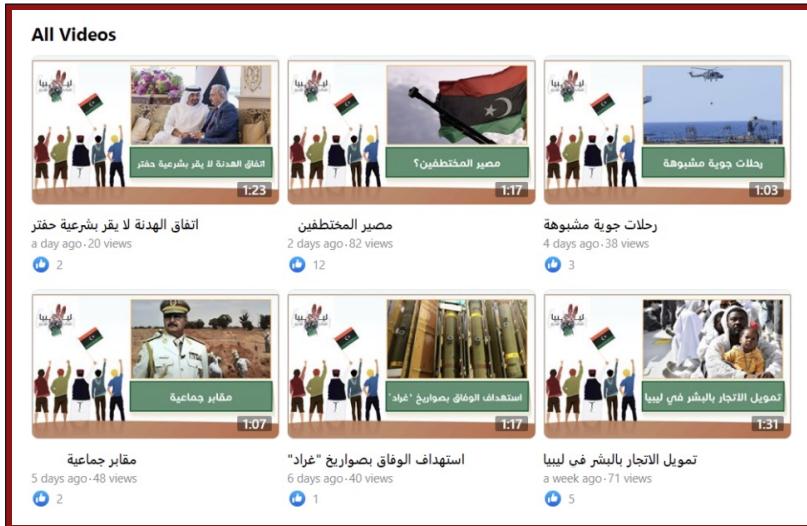


Figure 15: The video section of the Facebook Page. Video posts followed a standard template.

The Page regularly published political video updates – but they had low engagement overall with minimum commentary and interaction. Messaging on the page included criticism of Gaddafi supporters and Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, head of the Libyan National Army forces. The Page also expressed distinct positions that imply a nuanced understanding of intergroup grievances within the Libyan political scene. For example, one [video](#) highlighted dissatisfaction with the appointment of journalist Mohammed

Baaio as head of the Libyan media office due to previous support of Haftar and Gaddafi. **Baaio** was kidnapped from his home and arrested unlawfully by a GNA affiliated group on October 20, 2020.

Relevant English-language international news coverage that painted Haftar in a negative light was repurposed and converted to Arabic language content. Video titles aimed to be appealing and included terms like “Libyan Holocaust” and “Libya’s Khashoggi” that might imply goals of trying to reach a wider Arabic speaking audience unfamiliar with the Libyan domestic political scene.

Abducted House of Representative member **Seham Sergewa** and the **Tarhuna mass graves** were examples of political content that was promoted by the Page and fit an overarching theme of highlighting political prisoner and detainee cases within the region the network operated in.

In one video a seemingly random Twitter account was used to promote the hashtag “who will revenge Sergewa” (من سيثأر لسرقوة). The same Twitter account was mentioned **by Al Jazeera** in an article covering the leaked recordings that discuss Sergewa’s alleged murder.



Figure 16: A screenshot from a video on the Facebook Page. Translation: “Sergewa was murdered, leaks exposed how she was killed #khashoggi was killed and his body disappeared, his killers denied their act, Seham Sergewa was also killed and her murderers denied her death, the murders repeat themselves and the killers have united on human tables #who will revenge Sergewa.”

Resistance-themed songs created by the network were filled with revolutionary symbols, nods to historical figures like Omar Almukhtar and anti-imperialist sentiments. The songs made subtle comparisons between the UAE interference and the previous Italian rule.

Translated excerpts from songs created for Free Libyan Youth:

Song 1: "You lose the bet"



أهل قصرُ التاريخ؟
ئَلْمُوا يَا حميرُ
الشعبُ فِي، انتخوا
عسى بطيءُ المصيرُ
فِيمَا الشّعبُ يَتَهَرُّ

خسارةً فِي الرَّهانِ
ما دام جحشاك حفتر

Translation:

Did history become short?!
Learn, donkeys
The people have risen,
May fate be good
For the people will overcome
A lost bet
As long as your donkey is Haftar

This song focuses on the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt losing a bet by supporting Haftar against the Libyan people. It repeatedly refers to Haftar as the Donkey's son. It highlights the wasted money and effort these powers have invested to fight the Libyans, but argues that similar to historical battles, Libyans will be victorious.

Song 2: "A song in dedication to the inspirational leader Omar Almukhtar"



Image of Omar Almukhtar with the text "History jumped and was not buried".

حفترُها أخْبَثَ مِنْ فِيهَا
أوْ مَا فِيهَا
لَكُنْ أرْضَ طَبِيعَةٍ
مِنْ طَيِّبِ دِينِهَا
(لَا زَایدَ يَمْلِكُ (مِنْ وَهْمٍ
أَنْ يَسْرُقُهَا
أَوْ يَمْنَعْ جَيْلًا مُقدَّامًا
أَنْ يَبْنِيهَا!

Translation

He haftarised it, the most insidious
Or what was in it
But the good land
From the goodness of its builders
No Zayid has no right (out of an illusion)
to steal it
Or prevent a courageous generation
From building it

In this song, Omar Almukhtar's memory is celebrated as being the ultimate resistor of outside influence. The lyrics remind Libyans of the importance of freedom and warn that Italians (i.e. foreign interveners) have returned decades later. It compares foreign interference to a relapse after healing from disease. Lines mention Haftar as being a malicious actor that ruined the land many Libyans fought for. Mohammed bin Zayed is also mentioned as being deluded to think he could steal Libya from Libyans.

4.4 Pro-Qatar News

Hearts and People with Qatar, a suspended Page within the takedown, was created in June 2017. The second-most followed Page in the network, it boasted roughly 320,000 followers. Following the format of many of the takedown's Pages, it had an original logo and videos which followed a templated style. Posts provided information on Qatar government policy, resembling an official government Page or a pro-Qatar news outlet. Other narratives included pro-Palestine messaging and the strength of Qatar's relationship with Turkey (Figure 17).



Figure 17: Translation of the caption of a post: “Made in Turkey...The State of Qatar today received a frigate named “Doha”, which is one of two ships manufactured by a Turkish company under the supervision of the Turkish Ministry.”

Videos posted followed similar messaging to the Page’s overarching pro-Qatar content. Background music varied depending on the narratives, which included tourism promotion, foreign affairs, and infrastructure development. This Page was the most prolific poster of videos in the network.



Figure 18: Translation of the caption of a video: “Qatar: The occupation must be ended and the State of Palestine must be established, with Jerusalem as its capital #Peoples_hearts_with_Qatar.”

This Page has a still-active Twitter account, also created in June 2017, but with significantly fewer followers (325) than the Facebook Page. The Twitter account mirrored the Facebook Page, sharing the same information at the same time (see Figure 19):



Figure 19: A tweet (left) and Facebook post (right) feature identical content. Translation: “The State of Qatar has reaffirmed the central importance of the Palestinian cause, and that it is an issue that affects security and stability on a large scale, and it is an issue of inalienable rights #Peoples_hearts_with_Qatar.”

Facebook also suspended an Instagram account with a similar name. Like the Facebook Page and Twitter account, the Instagram account started posting in June 2017. The Instagram account had 34 posts and 1,033 followers. Figures 20 and 21 show the first and last posts.



Figure 20: The first post from the Instagram account Peoples and Hearts with Qatar. Translation of caption: “I have not seen Qatar support terrorism to this day.”

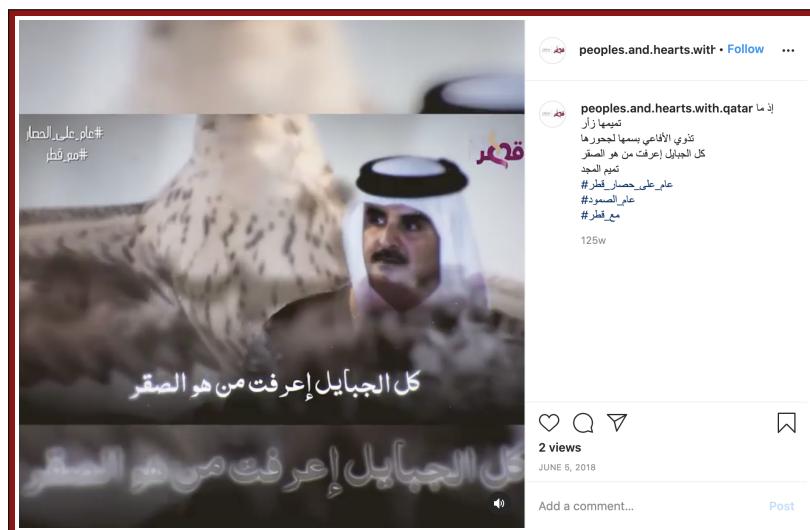


Figure 21: The last post from the Instagram account Peoples and Hearts with Qatar. Translation of caption: “As Tamimha roared Snakes with their venom to their holes All tribes knew who the falcon is Tamim glory #General_Sarade_Qatar #Yearoftheday #With_Qatar”

4.5 Content Supportive of Turkish-Somali Relations

One Page called Somali and Proud was created in September 2018 and had just over 7,000 followers. Like many of the other Pages, it had an original logo and style for posts. The Page emphasized Turkey’s positive contributions to Somalia. For example, posts discussed Turkish medical assistance to Somalia and humanitarian aid from Mesut Özil, a Turkish-German soccer star. Posts also highlighted the two countries’ diplomatic relations, with one post showing the Somali Prime Minister and Turkish President shaking hands. Posts were generally critical of the role of the United Nations in Somalia.



Figure 22: An October 2020 post from the Somali and Proud Page. The caption reads: “The health center established by the Turkish Society of Doctors around the world provided its services to 17,000 people in the Somali capital Mogadishu.”



Figure 23: Images on the Somali and Proud Page with consistent professional branding.

4.6 Messaging Critical of Countries Normalizing Relations with Israel

In recent months, Bahrain and the UAE have normalized diplomatic relations with Israel, and in October 2020, [Sudan announced](#) steps to do so as well. This Facebook network was critical of Israel writ large and of diplomatic relations with the country. On Black Hands, a Page critical of the UAE, a video post labeled the UAE's relations with Israel as treasonous. A post on the Page Kharef Salman shared a rumor that the king of Saudi Arabia paid millions of dollars to the U.S. on behalf of Sudan to accelerate normalization with Israel.



Figure 24: A post claiming Sudan was paying money on behalf of Sudan to normalize relations.

Posts on the Page People and Hearts with Qatar were critical of Israel and supportive of Palestine. One post read: “At a time when its northern neighbor Bahrain, and its southern neighbor, the Emirates, welcomes Israeli delegations, and the flags of the occupying state flutter in their capitals, Qatar continues its international demands to stop Israeli transgressions on the Palestinian territories, usually the issue of Palestine is a priority in its foreign political agenda #Peoples_hearts_with_Qatar” (translated). Another post read: “The State of Qatar has reaffirmed the central importance of the Palestinian cause, and that it is an issue that affects security and stability on a large scale, and it is an issue of inalienable rights #Peoples_hearts_with_Qatar” (translated).

4.7 Content About Egyptian Prisoners

While Pages across the network discussed what the network called political prisoners, eight of the Pages focused on prisoners in Egypt specifically, many of whom were associated with the Muslim Brotherhood. In total, these Pages had amassed more than half a million followers. These Pages often posted updates on the status of particular prisoners.

The Facebook Page Stop the Executions was created in February 2016 and had 5,800 followers. The original name of the Page, Innocent Kafr El Sheik Stadium, referred to the **execution of four members of the Muslim Brotherhood** accused of bombing the gate of the Kafr El Sheikh Stadium. The name of the Page

evolved to condemn the executions in Egypt, in particular in North Sinai, and the **abuses** that took place in the “scorpion prison” in El Cairo (see Figure X). The Page branded itself as a platform highlighting the alleged unjust deaths in Egypt since 2014.

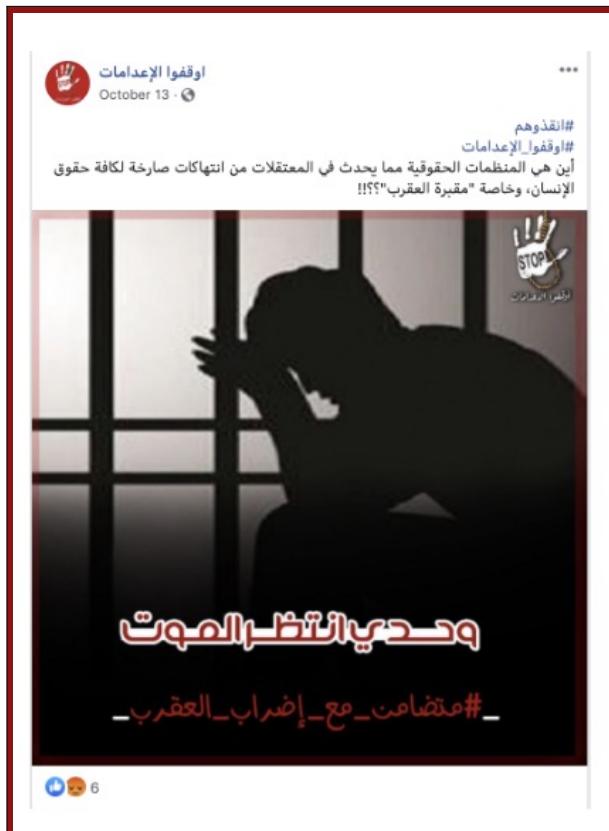


Figure 25: A post from the Stop the Executions Page. Translation of caption: “#Save them #StopExecutions Where are the human rights organizations about the flagrant violations of all human rights, especially the ”Scorpion Cemetery“??!!”

The Facebook Page Voice of the Cell had more than 100,000 followers. This Page claimed to provide a voice for Egyptian prison detainees. The posts in the Facebook Page occasionally linked to a suspended **Twitter account** with nearly 32,000 followers. Figure 26 shows an archived version of the account from May 2020.



Figure 26: An [archived version](#) of the Twitter account Zenzana Voice. Profile translation: “The voice of Egyptian prison cells...and the pulse of its detainees of all sects and orientations...the sound of the groans of the cries of the oppressed and tortured in prisons.”

Another suspended Page claimed to be a nonprofit organization called Arab African Center for Rights and Freedoms. Like the other Pages, it criticized unfair imprisonment practices in Egypt. This Page, as well as Stop the Executions, condemned the death of Dr. Essam Al-Arian, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Scorpion Prison. Posts also criticized prisons for preventing detainees from meeting with their families due to COVID-19 restrictions, detaining people for their political positions, not providing fair trials, and denying access to healthcare in prisons (see Figure 27).



Figure 27: A post on the Arab-African Center for Rights and Freedoms Page. Translation of the caption: “The former parliamentarian and leader of Muslim Brotherhood, Dr. Essam Al-Arian, died at the age of 66 in prison in Al-Scorpion. The leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Essam Al-Ariyan, died in his prison today at the age of 66.”

This Page has a [linked Telegram channel](#) which links out to the Facebook Page (see Figure ??) and has similar imagery.



Figure 28: The Telegram channel for the Arab African Center for Rights and Freedoms.

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Figure 29: A post highlighting the alleged execution of 15 political prisoners.

4.8 U.S. Narratives

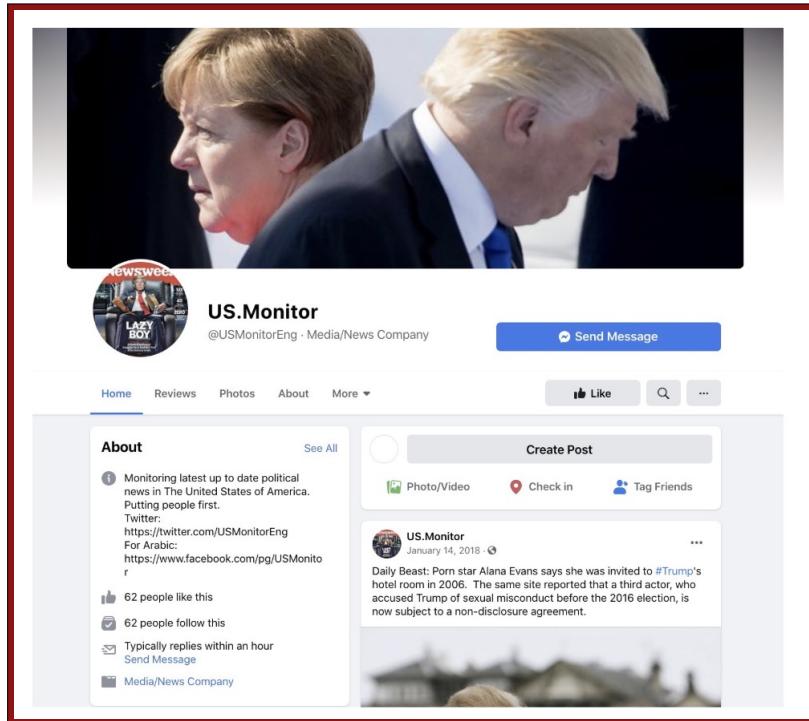


Figure 30: The now-suspended U.S. Monitor Facebook Page

Two of the Pages focused on U.S. politics: US Monitor Eng (62 followers) and US Monitor (3,870 followers). Both were created in 2017 and posted similar content in English and Arabic. The Pages, and their associated Twitter accounts, were critical of U.S. President Donald Trump. Posts criticized Trump for his derogatory remarks about African countries, and highlighted the Palestinian response to Trump moving the U.S. Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem. Other posts highlighted Trump's low approval ratings.

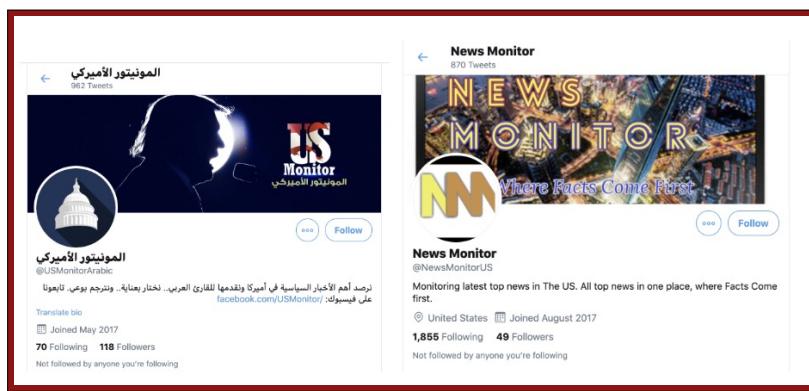


Figure 31: Twitter accounts linked to the suspended U.S. Monitor Facebook Pages.

5 Tactics

5.1 Songs and Poems

A defining characteristic of the network was the prevalence of musical videos with original songwriting and recording. The song lyrics featured strong geopolitical themes and touched on points of controversy across different Arab countries. Songs weaved together localized historical and nationalistic topics within a broader narrative to resist UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt.

The production of songs and poems in this network is novel for Arab information operations. We have not previously observed this tactic from information operations linked to the governments of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt.

The songs were reminiscent of Arab Spring music, Arabic chants, and cartoon theme songs that are popular in the region. There were also rap songs, several of which appeared to be sung by people with Moroccan accents. Accents were utilized to send political messages. One song against the UAE normalizing relations with Israel was sung with an Emirati accent, but may have been sung by an Iraqi or Kuwaiti.

5.2 Pages about Documentaries

Two of the Pages existed to promote documentaries critical of Saudi Arabia and the UAE. One of these pages, Black Hands, had roughly 364,000 followers. The location of its six administrators were hidden. The Page creation date coincides with the release of an anti-UAE documentary of the same name in May 2017. It also has a live Twitter account with 10,600 followers.

The documentary focused on the supposed role of UAE and Saudi conspiracies targeting Arab people. It discussed the alleged crimes of Abu Dhabi against the Arab Spring.



Figure 32: An image of the documentary, as shown on the Black Hands Facebook Page. The text says: “the Emirates secret files, we reveal for the first time”.

On YouTube there are two duplicate channels of Black Hands Emirates with different logos. The **first**, a non-active channel created on May 26, 2017. The **second** shares the same branding as the suspended Facebook Page. It has 30,800 subscribers and cites that it is located in Turkey.

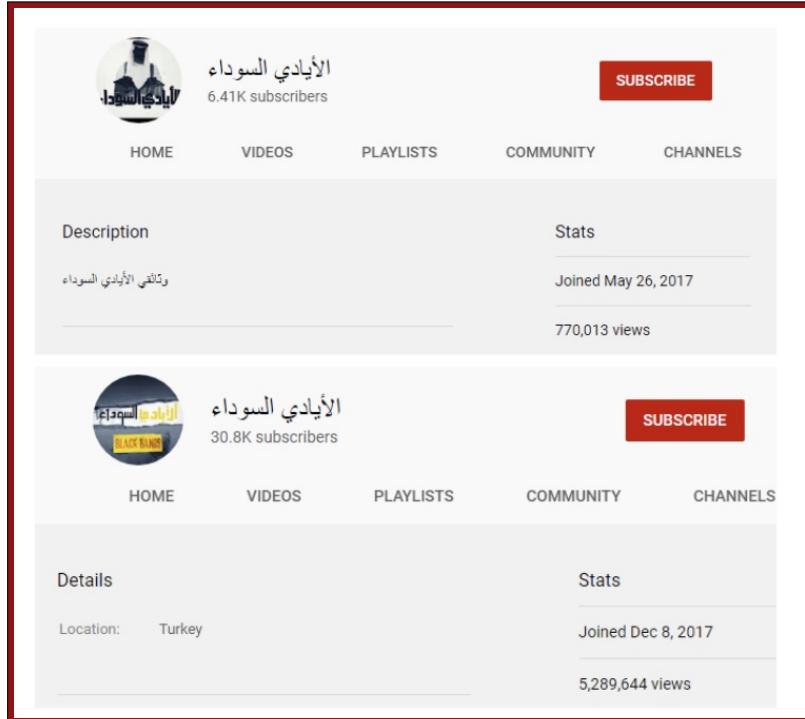


Figure 33: The two YouTube channels linked to the Black Hands Facebook Page.

The Page has evolved since 2017 and acted similarly to a media organization. It appears to have targeted people in many countries in the region. Regional economic, political, and cultural headlines were used to create infographics, videos, songs, and poems of a high production quality. It specifically focused on UAE interference in conflict zones like Yemen and Libya.

The Page frequently addressed human rights issues of detainees and political prisoners. Posts raised a long list of crimes committed by the UAE in several countries. One example was the resharing of the BBC investigation into the [lethal drone attack in Libya](#).

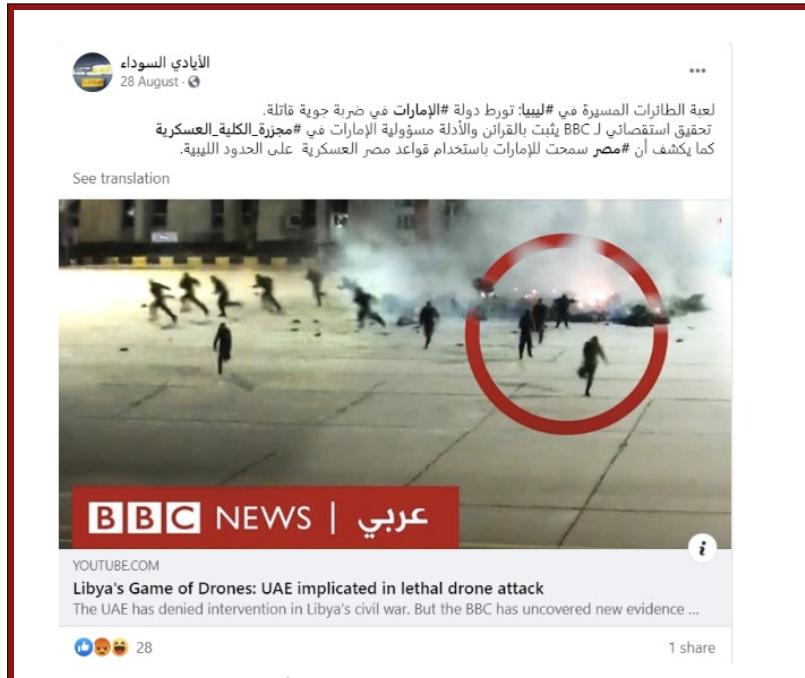


Figure 34: A post from the Black Hands Page

Videos also fabricate both Emirate opposition tweets and uproar about the UAE's normalization of diplomatic relations with Israel. Some of the accounts mentioned in the videos have either been restricted or suspended by Twitter.

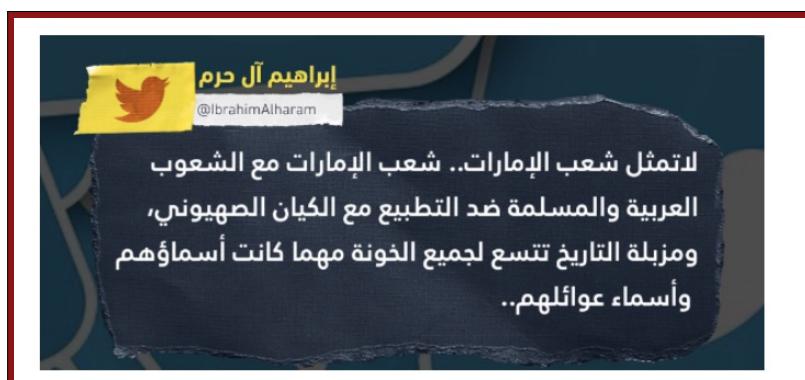


Figure 35: A screenshot of a video from the Black Hands Page. The text translates to: "It doesn't represent the Emirate people, the Emirate people are with the Arab and Muslim nations against normalization with the Zionist entity, the trash of history is wide enough to fit the traitors no matter what their names and the names of their families are."

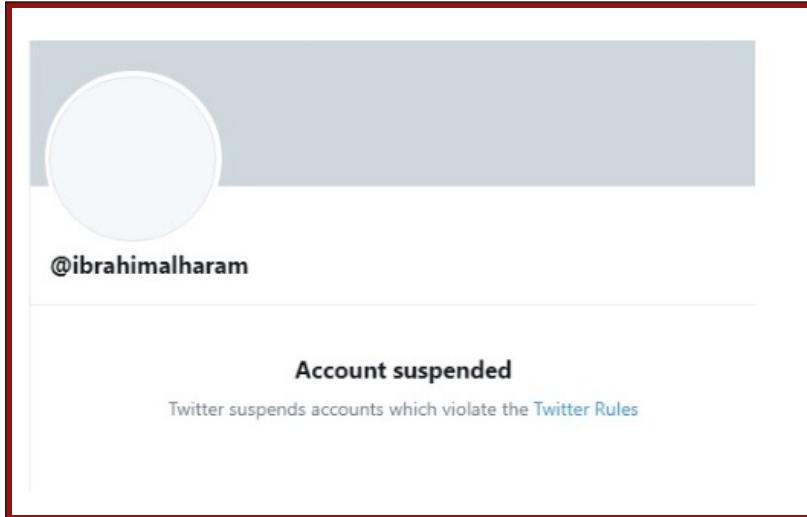


Figure 36: The Twitter account mentioned in the video above has been suspended.

6 Conclusion

In identifying this network, Facebook has uncovered a large and important disinformation campaign linked to the Muslim Brotherhood. We believed this is the first Muslim Brotherhood-linked disinformation network suspended by a large social media platform. The operation shows that anti-Muslim Brotherhood actors are not alone in running sophisticated disinformation operations in the region. We encourage reporters and researchers to further investigate the accounts discussed in this network that are still live, including the YouTube and Telegram channels.



The Stanford Internet Observatory is a cross-disciplinary program of research, teaching and policy engagement for the study of abuse in current information technologies, with a focus on social media. The Observatory was created to learn about the abuse of the internet in real time, and to translate our research discoveries into training and policy innovations for the public good.