THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF ĦASAN AL—BANNĀ

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The Muslim Brotherhood, (al-'Ikhwān al-Muslimūn) founded by Ħasan al-Bannā in 1928 in Egypt, is the biggest and most influential revivalist Islamic movement of the twentieth century. According to the well-researched study of Richard Mitchell the 'active membership' of the Brotherhood in 1948 was about half a million with another half million as sympathizers. Even during the lifetime of al-Bannā branches of the Brotherhood were established in Syria, Jordan, Sudan, Algeria, Palestine and Iraq. At present most of the Islamic resurgence groups which are spread all over the Muslim World are influenced, directly or indirectly, by the thought of the Muslim Brotherhood. The "National Islamic Front" in Sudan, the "Islamic Trend Movement" in Tunisia, the various Islamic groups in Egypt, to mention a few, are all offshoot organizations of the old "Muslim Brotherhood" founded by al-Bannā. The Islamic revolution in Iran, despite its astounding success in overthrowing the regime of the Shah and the wide acclaim it initially received in the Muslim world, has not surpassed the Brotherhood's influence. Except among Shi'ah groups in Iraq, Lebanon and the Gulf there is little evidence of Islamic organizations moulding themselves after Khomeini's ideology. It could be contrarily argued that the Iranians were influenced by the thought of the Brotherhood since a number of books, especially those of al-Bannā and Sayyid Qūṭb, were translated in the fifties and sixties into the Persian language.

The significant characteristic of the Muslim Brotherhood was the manner in which it presented Islam as a comprehensive way of life and the wide range of activities and training in which it was involved. Al-Bannā explained his understanding of Islam thus:

Islam is a comprehensive system that deals with all aspects of life. It is a state and country or a government and a nation. It is moral character and power of compassion and justice. It is a culture and law or science and judiciary, it is matter and wealth or earning and richness, it is jihād and call or army and ideal, as it is a truthful doctrine and worship.

This comprehensive understanding of Islam, which is not difficult to substantiate from the Qur'ān and the Traditions of the
Prophet, has widely influenced religious thinking in the Muslim world. The political aspect of establishing an Islamic state that implements the rule of the Shari'ah is the focal point of Islamic resurgence today. The Muslim Brothers successfully demonstrated their wide understanding of Islam by engaging themselves in various activities: religious preaching, political activities, business, education, social and charity work, character building, military training, sports and so on. Al-Bannā was not being propagandistic in describing his movement as an orthodox call, a Sunni way, a Sufi order, a political organisation, a sports club, a cultural and scientific association, an financial company and a social philosophy. Understandably, the 'new' interpretation of Islam as well as the variety of activities pursued by the organisation was quite attractive to many people, especially the young.

The growth and development of the Brotherhood owed much to its founder, Shaykh Hasan al-Bannā who became and remained its General Guide (al-Mursīd al-‘Amm) till his assassination on 12th February 1949. Al-Bannā, influenced by his father who was a respected scholar of the Hanbalite school, was a deeply religious person with a sense of mission. He joined and formed a number of religious organisations when he was a pupil of thirteen at the preparatory school. Al-Bannā, a brave and intelligent man, was completely dedicated to his Islamic cause. One of his close associates appropriately described him as "endowed with a prodigious memory, inexhaustible energy, oratorial skill, and personal charm he was a born leader."

Anwar al-Sadat recalled his first meeting with al-Bannā in 1940 when he came to deliver a lecture at the Ma‘ādil barracks on the occasion of the Prophet’s Birthday:

His choice of subjects was excellent, his understanding and interpretation of religion profound, and his delivery impressive. He was indeed qualified, from all points of view, to be a religious leader.

It is worth noting that he founded his movement in al-‘Ismā‘iliyyah when he was only twenty-two years old.

The fast growth of the Brotherhood, especially between 1939-1946, was greatly helped by political and social factors in Egypt at the time. The rising nationalist feelings during the Second World War were frustrated by the British government’s adamant refusal to evacuate the Suez Canal. The short-lived Egyptian governments were weak, inefficient and too preoccupied with their staying in power to be any match for the British. King Faruq, who had the powers to appoint the government, dissolve the parliament and suspend the constitution, made a mockery of constitutional rule by suspending the constitution several times, never allowing the parliament to run its full term, and rarely appointing a government.
which commanded a majority in the parliament. Sir Miles Lampson, the British High Commissioner in Cairo from 1936 to 1946, described King Faruq as "...uneducated, lazy, untruthful, capricious, irresponsible and vain."

The dire economic situation after the War, the corruption of politicians and the incessant squabbles of political parties accumulated a feeling of disillusion and frustration among many sectors of the population. There was a vacuum in the political arena to be filled by an inspiring, radical and religious movement under a charismatic leadership.

The political thought of Hasan al-Bannā was greatly influenced by his analysis of the causes which led to the deterioration of the Muslim Ummah from the time of the disintegration of the Abbasid Caliphate to the colonization of most of the Muslim countries by European powers in the 19th century. He mentioned the following causes in one of his pamphlets (nasā‘īd) published in the mid-thirties:

a. Political differences and conflict among Muslims over power and wealth.

b. Religious and sectarian clashes. The abandonment of Islam as a doctrine of action, for mere words that have no spirit or life.

c. Indulgence of Muslim rulers in a life of luxury and lust.

d. The transference of political power from the Arabs to the Persians and the Turks who were newcomers to Islam and did not understand the language of the Qurʾān.

e. The neglect of practical disciplines and cosmic knowledge while wasting time and effort on theoretical philosophies and useless studies.

f. Self-deception on the part of Muslims about their own strength, and not being aware of the growing power and social development of other nations till they were taken by surprise.

g. Emulation of the infidel way of life by Muslims in attitudes and behaviour which only harm them.

This rather simplified form of analysis was good enough for al-Bannā. He was not a social historian to dig deep into a complex period of history; he was the man of a mission who wanted to motivate his people to action and unity. Al-Bannā was annoyed that the Western material culture was exported to the Muslim world by means of education, economic system and arts, which resulted in the emasculation of the Muslim personality. He pointed out the example of Turkey which had disowned all its glorious past and declared itself a non-Muslim state. He complained that those Muslim countries which adopted the Western material culture did not
borrow its useful aspects such as science, industry and other systems which could contribute to their strength.\textsuperscript{11} Al-Bannā had in mind styles of behaviour like dancing, drinking, gambling and the spread of arts and literature which glamorise such behaviour. Being a devout Muslim, he found this morally repugnant. He believed that moral decadence, as well as economic bankruptcy and anti-religious education, was a deliberate design of European powers to weaken and dominate the Muslim world. He said:

The Europeans lured Muslim countries to borrow money from them which was later used for economic intervention, and then filled the country with their capital, banks and firms. They were able to shape the economic system as they wished and to exploit the wealth of the country to their own advantage. They also established schools and cultural institutions to spread agnosticism, atheism and scorn of religion and of homeland. They wanted the educated people to abandon their culture and religion and to revere whatever westerners do. They opened these schools only for upper class children who would become the rulers and leaders of society.\textsuperscript{12}

However, the central problem, according to al-Bannā, was the humiliating weakness of the Muslim world which made it easy for European colonialism to swallow it piece by piece. He gave an account of Muslim countries which came under colonial rule, from Indonesia to Turkestan in the Soviet Union to Morocco in the west. Unlike Arab nationalists, al-Bannā was sad that the Ottoman empire was dismembered. He felt deep concern for all Muslim countries, an attitude which was not shared by many Egyptian politicians at the time. He was happy when some of those countries revolted against colonial rule and managed to gain their independence in one way or another, even though that independence was achieved on purely nationalistic basis.\textsuperscript{13} That is why al-Bannā considered the primary objectives of the Muslim Brotherhood to be:

1. The liberation of the entire Muslim world from all sorts of foreign domination.
2. The establishment of an Islamic state in the Muslim world which should implement the laws of Islam and its social system, and propagate its message to mankind.\textsuperscript{14}

Eventually, al-Bannā believed that the Muslims should re-establish the Islamic caliphate because it is the symbol of their unity and it is, at the same time, a religious duty. Thus, the Muslim Brotherhood put the setting-up of the caliphate at the top of its programme. However, al-Bannā admitted that some preliminary steps should be taken first, such as cultural and economic cooperation among the Muslim peoples, followed by military treaties and agreements in various fields.\textsuperscript{15} That was why al-Bannā accepted the
idea of the Arab League although he knew that the British were behind it. He thought it was a good beginning for the unification of the Arab world and, later on, for the entire Muslim world.\textsuperscript{16}

Al-Bannā attempted to explain the general characteristics of the Islamic political system in a manner which is understandable and attractive for the educated class and the political leaders. He realized that the secular system of government founded by colonial powers in the Muslim world had become the real barrier to the process of Islamization. Whatever attraction al-Bannā found in the Islamic political system, his basic motivation was to comply with a religious ordinance. He started the section on government by the Qur'ānic verse which demands that rule should be according to God's revelation.

According to al-Bannā, the Islamic government rests on three pillars: the accountability of the ruler, the unity of the Ummah and the respect for the Ummah's will. The ruler is accountable before God and before his people. He is the servant of the Ummah and should look after its general interests. He is rewarded or punished according to his actions in fulfilling that role. The unity of the Ummah is based on the brotherhood of Islam that does not allow hatred or quarrel or partisanship. It does not, however, prevent rendering of advice or freedom of opinion. Respect for the Ummah's will is manifested in its rights to supervise closely the ruler's actions and to be consulted in public matters. Al-Bannā thought that the ruler should accept the 'good advice and suggestions' of his subjects. However, he did not think that the ruler was bound by those suggestions. He clearly stated that in matters where there is no text (nass) in the Qur'ān or the Traditions of the Prophet, the decision of the ruler is binding on the entire nation.\textsuperscript{17} Al-Bannā, however, was less liberal than his disciple, the able lawyer, 'Abd al-Qādir 'Awdah, who argued that the outcome of consultation (shūrā) is binding on the ruler.\textsuperscript{18}

These pillars of Islamic government, according to al-Bannā, were properly applied during the rule of the four rightly-guided caliphs and that of 'Umar b. 'Abd al-‘Azīz. Al-Bannā was sensitive to the question of any division or conflict within the Muslim community. Thus, he quoted a number of the Prophet's Traditions which warn of severe punishment for those who create discord in the nation. That is why al-Bannā was strongly against political parties in Egyptian society.

Al-Bannā accepted the representative system adopted by the Egyptian constitution as similar to the Islamic system because it was based on the afore-mentioned pillars. He rejected the notion that partisanship was an integral part of that system. He maintained that a single party could represent the entire nation. He argued that political parties had polluted the life of Egyptian society. Their intrigues and squabbles had bred social corruption.
They were not even parties in the real sense as they had no policies or programmes, they were mere factions being the product of personal differences. He thought such a situation should not be tolerated in an occupied country like Egypt. It was true that the three main opposition parties were mere factions which had broken away from the Wafd. However, al-Bannā did not feel obliged to support the Wafd as the party representing the entire nation despite its overwhelming majority, exceeding seventy per cent in every one of the six parliaments.

Al-Bannā approved, in principle, the Egyptian constitution but criticised it on the ground that some of its clauses were vague and its basic tenets were not clearly affirmed. Furthermore, it was ill-applied to the extent that the representative system became corrupt and unstable. He favoured a system in which the executive ministry is under the head of state as in the constitution of the United States. He supported his preference by quoting from al-Māwardī's works. It seems rather out of place because these works were written at the end of the Abbasid Caliphate. Al-Bannā conveniently avoided the issue of the appointment of the head of state. He could not defend a hereditary monarchy, which goes against the practice of the rightly-guided caliphs, and at the same time it was not wise for the Brotherhood to attract the displeasure of King Faruq when it was already at odds with most of the political parties in the country.

Although the Egyptian constitution stated that "Islam is the religion of the State", al-Bannā observed that the laws of the country did not reflect that claim. The laws were in contravention of Islamic tenets as they permitted gambling, fornication (ʿinā), drinking of inoxicants, interest-lending (riba), etc. He demanded that the laws of the country should be brought into conformity with the constitution by adopting the Sharīʿah laws. However, it is doubtful if those who passed the constitution of 1923 ever meant by that clause the implementation of the Sharīʿah. The Wafd party which had ninety per cent of the seats in the first parliament that ratified the constitution (1924) maintained a staunch secular stand. Al-Bannā was sensible enough not to get the point of implementing the Sharīʿah out of proportion in relation to the comprehensive Islamic system as many Muslim activists do. He argued that Islam defines objectives and sets out basic principles, and does not lay down detailed legislation. Thus people had no reason to fear the rule of Islam because it is flexible and open to evolution and social change.

The Egyptian electoral law was criticized by al-Bannā on the basis that it did not fulfil its objective of bringing "worthy persons" to represent the people. In a better argument, al-Bannā used the statistics of Dr. Sayyid Sābri, an expert on constitutional law, to prove that the decisions of the Egyptian parliament had never represented more than twelve per cent of the electorate. However, al-Bannā's five-point plan to reform the electoral law was
difficult to execute and it was impossible to obtain general approval for it. It stated the following:

1. To specify certain qualifications for a candidate such as having a definite programme and clear policies for which he wanted to work. This should be linked with a reform of the whole party system.
2. To set certain limits for election propaganda so that it should concentrate on programmes and policies rather than touch upon family life or personal matters.
3. To amend the election schedule (presumably to allow every eligible person to vote) and to generalize the application of identification cards.
4. To legislate harsh punishments for forgery and bribery in the election process.
5. To adopt the list system instead of the individual per constituency method.

Al-Bannā made these suggestions after he and five of the leading members in the Brotherhood were defeated in the election of 1945 allegedly because of governmental and British intervention. Probably al-Bannā was not aware that his suggestion to adopt the list system of election would strengthen political parties if applied in a multi-party structure and would abolish the freedom of choice altogether if followed in a one-party society. Al-Bannā longed to achieve the traditional Islamic institution of ḥāl al-ḥall wa'l-'aqd (the people who loosen and bind). Nevertheless, he did not work out how that system could be applied in the contemporary national state of Egypt. It seems that al-Bannā was envisaging a more radical political reform than his comments on the Egyptian constitution suggested. He told the Sixth General Conference of the Brotherhood (January 1941) that the reform they wanted was comprehensive and total; it would change all the features of the existing political set-up and would require the cooperation of the entire nation.

According to al-Bannā the first national problem to be solved was the liberation of Egypt and the Sudan (the Nile Valley) from British colonial rule. Officially Egypt was not a colony but it became effectively a part of the British empire after the British invasion of the country in 1882. The Egyptians held the British rule as the negation of their dignity and a "loathsome presence." Like most Egyptian politicians, al-Bannā considered the Sudan as an integral part of Egypt but not in 'a hegemonic or exploitative relationship'. He pointed out that negotiations with the British, which dragged on for many years, led nowhere and the arbitration by the Security Council achieved nothing. Therefore, the only way left for Egypt was to declare Britain an adversary, repealing all treaties with her, and to mobilize the whole nation for jihād. Al-Bannā argued that the Egyptian people were ready for the
sacrifice required but their government was weak and indecisive. He considered the liberation of Egypt only a beginning to be followed by the Sudan, Libya, Palestine, Eritrea and the rest of the Muslim countries.

Systematic consideration of the economic problem came rather late in al-Banna's political ideology. It was during the difficult years of the Second World War that al-Banna and the Brotherhood paid attention to the vital economic issue. Seven books on Islamic economic theory were written by leading members of the Society during this period. Al-Banna summarized the economic system of Islam into ten principles.

1. That 'good capital' is the basis of human livelihood, thus it has to be appropriately invested and well looked after.
2. Work should be provided for every able-bodied person.
3. Natural resources have to be exploited.
4. Means of Islamically forbidden earning such as gambling, interest-lending and deceptive transactions, etc., should be prohibited.
5. The gap between the different classes has to be narrowed till the excessive wealth and dire poverty are eliminated.
6. Social security is to be established so that the livelihood of every citizen, especially the disabled, is guaranteed.
7. Charity work, cooperation and social solidarity are to be urged and encouraged.
8. Sanctity of property and right of private ownership are to be preserved except in case of conflict with public interest.
9. Monetary dealings are to be regulated within the limits of people's rights and public interest.
10. Protection of the economic order as well as the wise and fair expenditure of public money is the responsibility of the state.

Al-Banna complained that the rich natural resources of Egypt were not utilized, that the country suffered from foreign exploitation, unequal distribution of wealth and economic disorder. He stated that foreign firms made huge profits by monopolizing the vital public services like electricity, water-supply and transport and by controlling trade, industry and monetary institutions. The 320 foreign companies in Egypt made a profit of seven and a half million pounds in the year 1938 alone. He pointed out that ironically in that year the number of Egyptian firms did not exceed eleven. Those foreign companies were favoured by the colonial power and were able to amass wealth at the expense of Egyptian citizens whom they despised. Thus, al-Banna demanded that foreign companies, especially those in control of public utilities, be put
Concerning the unjust distribution of wealth, he explained that four million peasants earned less than one pound a month per head which meant that they were living below the standard of 'animals'. Besides more than half a million workers were unemployed. He also gave figures of the widespread disease and illiteracy in the country at large. As a remedy for the situation, al-Bannā advocated limiting the size of the big landholdings, compensation for the owners and the distribution of the sized land among small peasants. He called for the introduction of zakāt as a tax for helping the poor and a progressive system of taxation so that the rich pay higher rates. He considered the primary preferences of the political leaders to be the transformation of the Egyptian economy into an industrialized one, encouragement of cottage industry, and control of irresponsible spending. Besides his conviction that struggle and hard work were necessary to change the corrupt social system, al-Bannā called for economic cooperation with the Arab and Muslim countries.

Being a practical man, al-Bannā went a step further to demonstrate the success of an Islamic economy. He established seven business companies engaged in industry, trade and printing services. The capital of the companies fluctuated between 4,000 and 60,000 Egyptian pounds, mainly collected from members of the Brotherhood as share-holders in the enterprise. The workers in those companies were encouraged to buy shares. The companies showed signs of success but were soon confiscated by the government when the Society was dissolved in 1948. Al-Bannā made it a part of the Brotherhood’s constitution that the member should give preference to free enterprise over salary-employment, should engage in some sort of work no matter how rich he was and should use goods manufactured in the Muslim world.

The hazardous problem that has wrought havoc on many fundamentalist groups in the Muslim world is the one that concerns the means of attaining political power. Al-Bannā repeatedly denied that the Muslim Brothers sought to rule the country themselves, instead, they would support any government which was ready to implement the Islamic system. Does this mean that al-Bannā saw his movement only as a pressure group for facilitating the Islamic change by exerting pressure on governments? In some ways al-Bannā acted as if that was the case, such as writing letters to prime ministers and political leaders about the necessity of adopting Islamic policies, refraining from taking any part in elections till 1945, and agreeing to withdraw his candidacy from the election of 1942 when requested by al-Nahḥās, the prime minister, on condition that the government would prohibit intoxicants and prostitution. Al-Bannā also made good-will gestures to win King Faruq over to the cause of Islam believing that this would be the shortest path for the realization of the objectives of his message. However, al-Bannā, as early as 1938, told his followers at the Fifth Conference that the partisan contemporary
governments' were not ready to adopt the Islamic system. In that case, he argued, it would be a 'criminal act' for Islamic reformers to be content with preaching and exhortation and not to claim power themselves. But, how did al-Bānān intend to claim political power in Egypt?

The obvious choice for the Brotherhood was to act like any political party by adopting political means to achieve its objectives. Instead, al-Bānān opted for registering his organization with the Ministry of Social Affairs as a religious and social society. That did not provide the Brotherhood with the better protection it originally sought. On the contrary all the restrictive measures applied against the organization, which culminated in its complete dissolution in 1948, were justified by various governments on the grounds that the organization tampered with political affairs. The Brotherhood defended its political activities on the basis that Islam is a comprehensive way of life and does not recognize separation between religion and politics. Nonetheless, Egypt of the thirties and forties was a secular state that made a clear distinction between religion and politics.

It is possible that al-Bānān did not register his organization as a political party because of three main considerations:

1. the lack of proper democratic guarantees for political activities;
2. the divisive nature of partisan politics; and
3. the risk involved for his organization.

The democratic system established in Egypt according to the constitution of 1923 could not succeed because of the vast powers given to the King and the interference by the British. The constitution was suspended several times, the parliament was never allowed to complete its term of office, and it was the rule rather than the exception for the King to appoint a government that commanded no majority in parliament. The result was political instability. Thirty-eight governments ruled Egypt between 1924 and 1952, eight of them were dismissed because of their stand against the British occupation. A state of emergency was often declared to stamp out opposition to the British or the minority governments. Furthermore, it was not uncommon for governments to use their control over the administrative apparatus for influencing the results of elections. For this reason the Wafd party had to boycott elections twice; in 1931 and 1945. Thus, the Brotherhood did not see much of a chance in becoming an ordinary political party. Secondly, the divisive role played by political parties was an anathema to al-Bānān. Islam does emphasize the unity of the Ummah and this becomes more important in a country under occupation. Thirdly, being a cautious person al-Bānān did not want to arouse the enmity of other political parties by directly challenging them at the ballot box, nor to frighten the King and the British by the growing power of a 'nationalist' fundamentalist party.
As a matter of fact al-Banna went to the extent of demanding that all political parties be dissolved and amalgamated in one popular organization 'working for the good of the nation on the basis of Islam'. He argued that political parties were not essential for a representative system of government because there were countries which followed the one party system. Despite this view al-Banna maintained contacts with political leaders and government ministers through correspondence, liaison officers and personal meetings. He appointed Ahmad al-Sukkar, his first deputy, to act as his contact with the Wafd party. Al-Banna was aware that the activities of his Society and its vocal criticism of the whole political set-up needed to be balanced. That was why the Brotherhood gave support to some prime ministers on certain policies: `Ali Mahir (1939), al-Na‘shas (1942), al-Naqrashi (1945), and Isma‘il Siqiq (1946). During the early years of the war al-Banna deliberately refrained from taking strong political stands in order to quietly build up his organization. However, after 1941, al-Banna became more reconciled to open political activities. The Sixth Conference of 1941 decided that the Brothers could contest parliamentary elections and consequently al-Banna announced his candidacy for the election of 1942 but withdrew when requested to do so by al-Na‘shas. Al-Banna and five of his senior colleagues contested the 1945 election but rigging by the government resulted in their defeat. The Sa‘dist government passed a law in April 1945 prohibiting 'social societies' from engaging in political activities, it was mainly directed against the Brotherhood. Al-Banna ingeniously divided his organization into two: the Societies for Charity and Social Service to be registered as an autonomous body with the Ministry of Social Affairs, and the General Association of the Muslim Brothers (Hu‘aybat al-‘Ikhwan al-Muslinim al-‘Ammah) to be concerned with da‘wah, economic and political matters. Although the decision, which required amendments in the constitution of the Brotherhood, allowed greater involvement in politics, it stopped short of calling the second body a 'political party'. However, late in 1945 al-Banna used the term 'political party' as one aspect of his organization. If it was not feasible for the Brotherhood to be a political party in the proper sense, what means were then left for them to achieve their goals?

Many people accused the Brotherhood of aiming to seize power by violent means and to overthrow the constitutional political system. This was the main charge levelled by al-Naqrashi's government in December 1948 and by Jamal Abd al-Nasir in November 1954 to justify the dissolution of the organization and a clamp down on its members. According to Mitchel, it was a ruling of an adversary rather than of a fair judge. The high court which looked into the case of 1948 against the Brotherhood ruled in March 1951 that the charge of attempting to overthrow the government was found 'to be without foundation'. According to a distinguished historian who supported the Free Officers' revolution, the military court, headed by Jamal Salim, which tried the
Brothers in 1954, was one of the worst in the history of military judiciary in Egypt. The Brothers believed that the dissolution of their Society in 1948 was due to British pressure and produced a document in the court to substantiate their claim. In any case the accusation is not baseless.

In his address to the Fifth Conference (1963) al-Bannā had candidly explained that 'force' is part of the Islamic doctrine because God ordered the believers to make themselves strong in order to frighten the enemies of God and their own enemies. Strength had various degrees: that of faith, of unity, and also of physical force. A group should not be described as strong unless it possessed all these forms of strength. Al-Bannā promised his audience that when he had three hundred phalanges (ḥattibah) well prepared spiritually, intellectually and physically, he would lead them through all kinds of dangers. He narrated the Ḥadith of the Prophet, "No twelve thousands shall be defeated because of a small number."\(^{55}\) However, al-Bannā advised the delegates not to endanger their efforts or risk their achievements because plenty of people are available for mere talking but when it came to action or ḥiḍād very few are left. The Brothers would use practical force when there were no other means left and they were well prepared. In that case, he went on, they would be honest and would warn the people first. Nevertheless, the Brothers neither thought of revolution nor believed in its useful results as the history of Egypt showed.\(^{56}\) Al-Bannā did not explain the difference between the use of force to which they might resort and the revolution which was unacceptable to them. In two famous addresses, during the next seven years that followed the Fifth Conference, al-Bannā was a more cautious man. His address to the Sixth Conference (1941) was mainly of a political nature in which he elaborated on the economic problems of Egypt. When speaking of the means through which the Brothers would achieve their objectives, al-Bannā mentioned persuasion, propagation of daʿwah and 'constitutional struggle'. He added that 'extra means' would only be resorted to when the Brothers were compelled to do so and they would be honest in making their position clear.\(^{57}\) In the address to the Heads of Regions (September 1945) al-Bannā told the meeting about the constitutional amendments to bring the organization into conformity with the new laws and nothing was mentioned about 'force' or 'extra means'.\(^{58}\)

Certain activities of the Brotherhood constituted stronger evidence for the charge of attempting to overthrow the government by force than al-Bannā's addresses. Al-Bannā founded a militia organization, al-Nizām al-Khāṣṣ (Special Apparatus) in 1940. It was trained to use weapons and explosives. The establishment of this body was defended on the grounds that it was meant for ḥiḍād against the British occupation in the Suez and against the Zionist movement in Palestine.\(^{59}\) The Brotherhood was by no means the only one to do so. A number of other political parties like the Wafd, the National Party, the Young Men's Muslims Association and the
Young Egypt Party also had their militia organizations which openly marched with weapons on the streets of Cairo. It was condoned by the government and encouraged by the Arab League. No wonder the high court in March 1951 which tried members of the special Apparatus found no 'crimes' in their activities and ruled that it was "in line with the avowed goals of 'liberating the Nile Valley and all Islamic countries'. The Brothers were accused of a number of violent incidents: throwing explosives at British targets and Jewish companies; killing Ḥāmid al-Khāzindār, the judge who passed a heavy sentence on a member of the Society for attacking British soldiers; assassinating Māhmūd al-Nuqrāshī, the prime minister who had decreed the dissolution of the Brotherhood; almost killing Ḥātim al-Judā, mistaking him for Ibrāhīm al-Hādi, the prime minister who succeeded al-Nuqrāshī and was behind the murder of Ḥasan al-Bannā. The members of the 'Special Apparatus', were blamed for these killings. Some of them were arrested and tried.

Al-Bannā repudiated the acts of violence, particularly al-Nuqrāshī's assassination, explaining that they were not authorized by the leadership of the Brotherhood and, thus, it should not be held responsible for them. In a letter to the Minister of the Interior, he described the perpetrators of violence as being 'neither Brothers nor Muslims'. A statement which caused pain and anger among most of his followers. After the death of al-Khāzindār in March 1948, al-Bannā complained that he no longer had control over the 'Special Apparatus'. This was partly because the top leaders of the 'Apparatus' were arrested at the time and al-Bannā lost his link with the junior chain of hierarchy and partly because the leaders of the 'Apparatus' thought al-Bannā was taking a soft line on the government. Al-Bannā took the daring step of appointing a new leader for the 'Apparatus'. However, in the years immediately after the War, political violence was neither uncommon in Cairo nor was it confined to one political party. It is sufficient to say that even army officers as well as the government took part in political violence. In August 1954 four police officers were given long prison sentences because they carried out the assassination of Ḥasan al-Bannā. There was evidence to show that the King and the prime minister were behind the murder. King Faruq tried twice to kill al-Naḥḥās through some of his agents in the army.

If the establishment of the 'Special Apparatus' could be justified on the basis that it would carry out operations against the British and the Jews it is difficult to explain the creation of 'cells' within the army and the police force in the same way. The intention of overthrowing the government becomes the only plausible explanation. Al-Bannā founded a military section (al-wahdat at-'askarīyyah) under the supervision of police officer Salāḥ Shādī to recruit and organize members within the regular forces. Later on the army members were separated under the
leadership of Major Mahmūd Labīb. Al-Sādāt recalled that when he told al-Bannā about his attempt to set up a military organization to overthrow the existing regime, al-Bannā, after some enquiries, told him that they could cooperate in their efforts. That was what actually happened several years later when the Free Officers staged their revolution in July 1952. Al-Bannā also strongly supported the coup against Imām Yaḥyā of Yemen in February 1948 hoping that the outcome would be the establishment of an Islamic state.

CONCLUSION

One may reasonably conclude that al-Bannā was working carefully to come into power in Egypt through military force with wide popular support. He once said:

The Brothers were wiser than to come forward for power when the nation was in this situation. They needed time so that their views could be known and spread, and that the people would learn to give priority to the public good over personal interests.

He did his best to achieve that goal and almost succeeded but the odds were heavily against him. However, it should be asked if al-Bannā had any other option. Being under the British occupation and the vast constitutional powers of the erratic King Faruq, Egypt hardly provided any popular political party, let alone a radical one, with an orderly democratic road to power. Al-Bannā showed that he was a flexible leader who would seek political accommodation whenever possible and would not hesitate to restrain his followers from extreme actions. One may however ask: Had the situation in Egypt been different, would he have acted differently.

NOTES AND REFERENCES


Eight governments were deposed from office or forced to resign because of their stand against the British occupation. See Tariq al-Bishri, Al-Dimiyqaratyyah wa Nižām 23 Yulūd 1952-1970 (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Abhāth al-Arabiyyah, 1987), p. 11.


Ibid., pp. 220-223.

Ibid., pp. 220-221.

Ibid., p. 216.

Ibid., p. 225.


See ‘Awdah, Al-Islām wa ‘Awda’ūna al-Sūdāsiyyah.


See al-Bishrī, op. cit., p. 16.


Ibid., pp. 378.

Ibid., pp. 379-380.


Ibid., pp. 388-389; Hasan al-Bannā, p. 87.

Ibid., p. 400.

Al-Bannā, Hasan al-Bannā, p. 86.

Al-Bannā, "Mushkilatuna…”, op. cit., p. 408.

The Egyptian pound at the time was equivalent to one sterling pound. For more details see Zakī, op. cit., pp. 208-212.

Ibid., p. 208.


Ibid., pp. 147, 358; Mitchell, op. cit., p. 41.


Mitchell, op. cit., p. 36.


Al-Bannā, "Mushkilatuna…”, op. cit., p. 376.


Ibid., p. 220.


Ibid., pp. 326-327; Zakī, op. cit., p. 28; Mitchell, op. cit., p. 33.


Hasan al-Bannā, Hasan al-Bannā, p. 16.


54. Ibid., p. 77; Ramaḍān, op. cit., p. 15; Zākī, op. cit., p. 38; 'Abd al-Ḥaǧīm, op. cit., Vol. 11, pp. 35-41, 55.


56. Ibid., p. 270.


58. Ibid., pp. 9-34.

59. Shādi, op. cit., p. 84; Mitchell, op. cit., pp. 76-77.

60. Ibid., p. 60.

61. 'Abd al-Ḥaǧīm, op. cit., Vol. 11, pp. 53-54.

62. Ibid., p. 77.

63. Ibid., pp. 66-71; 'Abd al-Ḥaǧīm, op. cit., Vol. 11, p. 46.


69. Ibid., p. 32; Sadat, op. cit., p. 23.

70. Ibid., p. 24.
