

The Muslim Brotherhood and the 'Struggle for Syria', 1947–1958 Between Accommodation and Ideology

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Although Syria gained independence in 1946, its independence was initially nominal. In fact, Syria became a local theatre of the Cold War, and a place where competing Arab blocs vied for control of the newly independent state. This post-war struggle is covered in Patrick Seale's aptly titled 1965 work, *The Struggle for Syria*.¹ Seale's study is a broad and comprehensive one, and it adequately covers most of the main actors, except one: the Muslim Brotherhood.

When Seale wrote his book, Egypt's Jamal Abd al-Nasir was the pivot of Arab politics. Socialism and pan-Arabism were the Middle Eastern discourses of the day. Abd al-Nasir had suppressed the Muslim Brotherhood in his country, and many had already eulogized the movement. But today, Islamic movements are all the rage, and it is likely that had he written the book now, Seale would most likely have paid quite a bit more attention to the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, since in the late 1970s and early 1980s the Syrian Brotherhood severely challenged the heterodox, Alawi-dominated regime of Hafiz al-Asad, until he crushed them at the battle of Hama in 1982.

For nearly a generation now, scholars have intensively studied Islamic movements. Much attention has rightly focused on the Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun*, often referred to here simply as the Brotherhood, or the *Ikhwan*), a movement viewed by many as the mother of *salafi* Islam, or the movement to return to the fundamentals of Islam as practised by the founding fathers, the *salaf*. This movement originated in Egypt, and in its heyday, from the 1930s to the 1950s, was an extra-parliamentary movement, resorting on occasion to violence and assassination to achieve its aims.²

Less scholarly attention, however, has been focused on the early history of the *Ikhwan* in Syria, and that organization presents a radically different picture. It was a small, elitist organization, never approaching the degree of support that the *Ikhwan* in Egypt enjoyed. It was also, for most of the period under discussion – 1947–58 – a *parliamentary* body, participating in the

turbulence that was Syrian parliamentary politics during those years. This forced upon the Syrian *Ikhwan* modes of behaviour very different from its Egyptian counterpart.

The following article affords a glimpse at a different Muslim Brotherhood organization; not an irredentist fanatic Muslim political force, but one that played the political game more or less according to the rules. The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria today is quite different from its former self, as it no longer constitutes a legal political organization. All the same, it has continued to exist and its activists today see themselves as following in the footsteps of the founder of the Syrian *Ikhwan*, Mustafa al-Siba'i.³

The focus of most scholarly research on the Syrian *Ikhwan* has been on the period beginning in the mid-1960s, when the growing strength of the Alawi sect in Syria led to Muslim Brotherhood activity which emphasized Alawi oppression of Sunnis, the perceived heresy of the Alawi religion, and other anti-Islamic Alawi tendencies.⁴ Only one book-length scholarly work has been written on the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, and it covers only part of the period under discussion.⁵

What follows is a discussion of the Brotherhood's involvement in the nitty-gritty of Syrian parliamentary politics during this period. For post-war Syria, two issues were at the centre of politics: the formal relationship of Islam to the Syrian state, and Syria's position between the United States and the Soviet Union in the Cold War.

It has been said that in the post-Second World War era, the Arab world has gone through three 'moods': the nationalist mood, the radical mood and the Islamic mood. The nationalist mood, defined by those elites who fought for independence from foreign rule, was based on opposition to outside intervention of all kinds and a desire for pan-Arab unity. This phase lasted until the defeat of the Arabs by Israel in 1948/49, which raised questions about the capacity and right of the older nationalist elites to rule. Combined with the renewed Soviet interest in the region and the effects of modernization, this contributed to the emergence of a new mood or political discourse – namely, various forms of socialism. This phase reached its peak in the early to mid-1960s and ended with the cataclysmic Arab defeat in the June 1967 war with Israel, which signified to many Arabs that radical socialist agendas were not the solution to Arab ills. 'Arab socialism' gradually gave way to a political discourse in which Islam and Islamic symbols have come to play a greater role.⁶

This sketch puts the tenor of the *Ikhwan*'s political activity between 1947 and 1958 in some historical perspective. During the transition from the nationalist to the socialist mood, the Syrian *Ikhwan* found itself, so to speak,

before its time. While Islam was the ultimate lodestone for all of the *Ikhwan*'s thinking, other issues of necessity formed the practical starting point for their political activities.

Beyond all other differences with its Egyptian counterpart, the fact that the Syrian *Ikhwan* was bound up in parliamentary politics helped define its character as an organization. Although the army remained the seat of real power, the *Ikhwan* had little support there, so parliament and the government, which still wielded considerable power, represented the main avenue of political involvement open to it. The fact that the *Ikhwan* operated within a parliamentary system forced upon it certain limitations. It had to more or less eschew political violence, and avoid alienating even those who were not part of its natural constituency, namely Syria's sizeable Christian minority. Very much a part of the political mainstream – and certainly not a fanatical, violent Muslim political force – the Brotherhood held several seats in parliament, including ministerial posts. The leadership was concerned with the issues that affected all politically involved Syrians; namely, relations with the developing rival Arab camps (Egypt, Iraq, and Transjordan), and relations with the great powers. Arguments over those relations in turn translated back into domestic politics; as Seale has noted, internal Syrian politics in this period can only be understood in the context of their foreign relations.⁷ These issues, combined with the growing popularity of socialist discourse, fixed the focus of the *Ikhwan*'s programme and its tactics. As a result, there was a surprising lack of emphasis on Islam *per se* in the activities of the *Ikhwan*; indeed, at times their activities could not be differentiated from common nationalist politics.⁸ The first clear example of this is to be found in the *Ikhwan*'s participation in the 1947 elections.

The July 1947 elections took place amid the fragmentation of Syria's pre-independence political blocs. The National Bloc (*al-Kutla al-Wataniyya*), which had led Syria to independence and the eventual withdrawal of French troops in 1946, began to splinter in 1939 when personal disputes in Aleppo city politics led to the rise of Rushdi al-Kikhya and Nazim al-Qudsi in the party hierarchy. By the spring of 1947, with elections scheduled for July, the *Kutla* emerged as the National Party (*al-Hizb al-Watani*), comprised mainly of Damascenes such as Shukri al-Quwatli, Jamil Mardam, Lutfi al-Haffar, Sabri al-'Asali and Faris al-Khuri. Those in the *Kutla* opposed to Quwatli, especially the Aleppo-based leaders al-Kikhya and al-Qudsi, had not yet coalesced into a party (they would do so in August 1948 as the People's Party), and ran as loosely organized parliamentary groups. This group mostly represented business interests in Aleppo and opposed Quwatli.

Those who were eventually to form the People's Party were supported in 1947 by the *Ba'ith*. Since this was before the People's Party's pro-Iraqi views came out in the open, the *Ba'ith* was quick to join with those who opposed the old guard represented by the National Party.⁹

In the 1947 elections the Muslim Brotherhood did not present their own nationwide list, but rather ran on different tickets throughout Syria. According to the US legation in Damascus, the Brotherhood presented a complete list in Damascus under the auspices of the *Rabitat al-'Ulama* (the League of Muslim Clerics), which the legation mistakenly termed 'the supreme Moslem religious authority in Syria'.¹⁰ The *Rabitat al-'Ulama* was merely a legitimizing body formed by several Islamic *jam'iyyat*, or associations, in 1946 to support the Brotherhood bid for seats in parliament by giving the *Ikhwan* wider appeal.¹¹ The *Rabita* list in Damascus included four known *Ikhwan*: Abd al-Hamid al-Tabba', 'Arif al-Taraqqi, Muhammad Mubarak and Ahmad Mazhar al-'Azma. In addition to the Jewish candidate, Wahid Mizrahi,¹² also endorsed were several known opponents of Quwatli such as Zaki al-Khatib and Ali Buzu, and two candidates assured of victory, Nuri al-Ibish and Faris al-Khuri. The reasons for *Ikhwan* support of those opposed to the National Party were similar to those of the *Ba'ith*.

In Hama, the Brotherhood ran Mahmud al-Shaqafa, and in Aleppo, Ma'ruf al-Dawalibi, who was the chairman of the Aleppo *markaz* (centre, or branch) of the *Ikhwan*. Dawalibi ran as a member of a precursor to the People's Party, which explains to a large extent the cooperation between the *Ikhwan* and the People's Party later on.

The Brotherhood elections campaign was characterized by an intensive and effective use of the mosque apparatus. The National Party countered with attacks on 'those who engaged in politics instead of teaching religion'. The election of Dawalibi (over 15,000 votes), Mubarak (27,008 votes) and Shaqafa (9512 votes) in the first round of voting on 7/8 July sent the Nationalists into a frenzy of activity against *Ikhwan* candidates. Brotherhood members were prevented from working at many polling places, political meetings were forbidden in mosques and ballot boxes were stuffed.¹³

The victory of the Muslim Brotherhood candidates, combined with the fact that the elections resulted in the elevation to office of 53 opposition deputies to the National Party's 24,¹⁴ put the National Party on notice that a new political force had arrived on the scene. Siba'i telegraphed Egyptian *Ikhwan* founder Hasan al-Banna in Cairo:

The election ended with the victory of three candidates from the Muslim Brotherhood: Dr. Ma'ruf al-Dawalibi, Muhammad al-Mubarak and Mahmud al-Shaqafa. This marks the first time official representa-

tives of the Islamic idea were elected to parliament in any Islamic or Arab State.¹⁵

Indeed, Siba'i understated the matter: of the 'radical parties' – that is, the *Ba'th*, the Communists and the Muslim Brotherhood – the Muslim Brotherhood received the most votes.¹⁶

Seale notes three issues that troubled the Syrian government on the eve of Colonel Husni al-Za'im's March 1949 coup: the failure of the Syrian army in the 1948 Palestine war; the controversy over the need to conclude a monetary convention with France; and the request by the United States for the granting of transit rights through Syria for Tapline, Aramco's project for transporting oil from the Persian Gulf to Sidon.¹⁷ The Syrian *Ikhwan*, like their counterparts in Egypt, put a high priority on the Palestine issue, although there is no evidence of any literal battlefield participation in the 1948 war to match that of the Egyptian *Ikhwan*. In September 1947, the Muslim Brotherhood had issued a National Charter (*al-Mithaq al-Watani*) declaring that an Arab state must be established in Palestine, free of Jews who entered on the basis of the Balfour Declaration. The Charter also opposed the 'imperialistic' Greater Syria plan of Transjordan's King Abdallah and his proposal for an 'Arab Liberation Army for the Salvation of Palestine' (*Jaysh al-Tahrir al-'Arabi li-Inqadh Filastin*).¹⁸ The declared *jihad* of the *Ikhwan* for Palestine was limited to demonstrations and sermons, although there are sympathetic observers who write of a '*jihad* in which the units of the Brotherhood fought courageously until the end'.¹⁹

The Arab debacle in Palestine caused massive rioting in Syria leading to the resignation of Prime Minister Jamil Mardam's government on 1 December 1948. Khalid al-'Azm took the reins on 16 December, intent on shoring up Syria's finances by concluding a monetary convention with France and granting the Tapline concession. The *Ba'th*, the People's Party and the Muslim Brotherhood joined to protest both moves, claiming that they would lead to the renewal of French involvement in Syria and strengthen the influence of the United States.²⁰ In February 1949, al-'Azm proceeded with both initiatives, yet the agreements still had to be ratified by parliament. Before this could be accomplished (and al-'Azm knew that the legislature would not ratify the documents), Colonel Za'im led a military coup against al-'Azm's government on 30 March.

Upon Za'im's assumption of power, there were several groups who constituted sources of potential support, particularly those opposed to the status quo such as the People's Party, the *Ba'th*, the army and the Muslim Brotherhood. Indeed, Za'im summoned Nazim al-Qudsi, Akram al-Hawrani and Ma'ruf al-Dawalibi to discuss the formation of a provisional government.²¹ Yet it was primarily the alienation of these political forces

that led to Za'im's downfall in August.²² Our discussion will focus on the *Ikhwan's* role in all of this.

The Muslim Brotherhood welcomed the coup as a needed remedy to the instability and ills that permeated the country and the *ancien régime*. If the army had not taken action, they claimed, the people would have risen up instead. The Brotherhood called upon Za'im to enact 'true democratic government' (*hukm dimuqrati sahih*) reforms and improve the lot of the people.²³ High hopes abounded, but they were soon disappointed; Za'im had no intention of instituting true democracy. Moreover, to their chagrin, he singled out the Communist Party and the Muslim Brotherhood as worthy targets of political warfare. 'I will first take care of the Communists,' he reportedly said, 'then I'll turn to the Muslim Brotherhood since I do not want to fight on two fronts at the same time'.²⁴ He was true to his word. The Muslim Brotherhood was outlawed along with the rest of Syria's political parties in May 1949. The Brotherhood's newspaper, *al-Manar*, appeared for the last time on 16 May. Za'im sought close relations with the Egyptian-Saudi axis in the Arab world, a move that angered the Muslim Brotherhood, the People's Party and other political forces.

Influenced by the secularizing reforms of the founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and intent on limiting the strength of the religious leadership, Za'im initiated several steps that brought the wrath of the *ulama* and the Muslim Brotherhood down upon him. He limited the power of those administering the public *waqf* (*waqf khayri*) and reorganized the administration of family *waqf* (*waqf ahli*). In order to prevent those with other than religious aims from exploiting religion, the wearing of the turban was forbidden to anyone who was not an officially recognized cleric. Steps were taken to restrict the authority of the *shari'a* and replace it with civilian secular law. Rumours emerged that Za'im intended to limit the right of a man to divorce his wife, and in late May 1949 the Minister of Justice felt it necessary to deny that the Law of Personal Status had been cancelled, a move that would have taken away the right of each religious community to handle its own affairs in the area of personal status.²⁵ All these were perceived to threaten not only the status of Islam, but also the power of the *ulama* themselves to determine the disposition of *waqf* funds and properties.

In addition to Za'im's flagrant self-aggrandizement, which angered all those who had hoped for a significant change from the old regime,²⁶ the atmosphere attested to by several witnesses seems to have particularly angered the Brotherhood and their supporters among the *ulama*. To some, Za'im's style was reminiscent of western decadence and libertinism. The Damascus correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* noted:

Responding to the urge of the President-elect to be modern minded, Moslem women, who three months ago would not have dared to appear unveiled in public in Damascus, are doffing their veils. Scores of people were killed and injured here in 1944, and the Army was called out because it became publicly known that two leading citizens had each bought a ticket for himself and his wife for a charity dance. Tonight Moslems of Damascus are dancing in public with their wives. The transformation in Damascus is being repeated in Aleppo and other Syrian towns. . . . With their world apparently tumbling about their ears, the hitherto all important Ulema are remaining silent and impotent in the face of it all.²⁷

Za'im succeeded in alienating nearly all of those who had brought him to power or were sympathetic to him. This included, in addition to the Brotherhood (and the *ulama* who supported them), Akram Hawrani, the People's Party, the *Ba'ath* and the army. Even his Kurdish ancestry became an issue, with the Muslim Brotherhood joining those who accused him of attempting to set up some sort of Kurdish republic and of favouring Circassian and Kurdish units of the army over Arab ones. He was overthrown by another officer, Colonel Sami Hinnawi, on 14 August 1949.²⁸

The *Ikhwan* resumed their activity shortly after the Hinnawi coup, issuing a statement noting that the Muslim Brotherhood would continue its struggle to serve society, 'the Arabs and Islam, and to raise the level of the *umma* in the areas of faith, culture, health and social justice'.²⁹ That turned out to be a continuing challenge.

With the announcement of elections to a Constituent Assembly (*Jam'iyya Ta'sisiyya*) that would draft and approve a constitution, and later be reconstituted as the legislature, the Muslim Brotherhood announced that while it would cooperate with parties who worked for the same goals, it rejected offers by the People's Party to establish a coalition list in Damascus. It also refused to cooperate with the *Ba'ath*, apparently believing that the Islamic movement could make a go of it on its own.³⁰

On 7 November 1949, the *Ikhwan* began to publish its newspaper once again, this time under the name of *al-Manar al-Jadid*. On 11 November, the Muslim Brotherhood announced the formation of the Islamic Socialist Front and published its platform – which was conspicuous in its lack of reference to Islam. The platform instead emphasized the problem of corruption and the need for social equality, supporting progressive taxation, land reform, limitation of ownership (*tahdid al-milkiyya*) and workers' rights. Its only reference to religion was the need to inculcate a belief in God – which many

Christians would agree with – and the only reference to Islam as such was to alms-giving, the *zakat*.³¹

The Islamic Socialist Front presented a full list only in Damascus, and it included Siba'i, Mubarak, and Arif al-Taraqqi of the Muslim Brotherhood and Abd al-Hamid al-Tabba' of the *Jam'iyat al-Gharra*. In Aleppo, Dawalibi and Baha al-Din al-Amiri were supported by the *Ikhwan*.³²

Hinnawi's coup of August 1949 had been a pro-Iraqi one, and it once again raised the issue of union with Iraq. The Syrian party generally assumed to be the party of union was the People's Party. Being Aleppo-based, its wealthy families had long maintained a commercial orientation toward Mosul and Baghdad rather than Damascus.³³ The *Ikhwan* were opposed to such a union, however, particularly because of Iraq's pro-British orientation and its opposition to Baghdad's monarchical form of government. In early October, Siba'i had noted that 'we support all the Arab countries; we want the cancellation of the artificial borders, and it is natural that we should begin with a union with Iraq. But we don't want such a union to constrain the free and independent state of Syria. In addition, we are firm in our support of the republican form of government.'³⁴ On another occasion he noted further that monarchy had no basis in Islam.³⁵

Despite their opposition to the People's Party, the Brotherhood maintained a connection to the party through Ma'ruf al-Dawalibi. Dawalibi seems to have been drawn to the party because it was the major party in his home town, Aleppo, thus constituting the primary channel of political advancement. The party itself might have been willing to have him, as his fame as the one who had helped Palestinian nationalist leader, Amin al-Husayni – wanted by the Allies for collaboration with Nazi Germany – made him an attractive drawing card. Dawalibi himself opposed union with Iraq, perhaps because he was not from a major family with commercial connections there.³⁶ Indeed, Dawalibi became oriented toward the Egyptian–Saudi side in the 'struggle for Syria' during his terms in various ministerial posts.

The elections of 15 November 1949 resulted in the Islamic Socialist Front's winning three seats in Damascus (Taraqqi, Siba'i, and Mubarak) and the election of the Muslim Brotherhood–People's Party member, Dawalibi, in Aleppo. Two 'independents' supported by the Front in Damascus, Subhi al-'Umari and Georges Shalhub (a Catholic), were also elected.³⁷ The People's Party won a plurality of seats, (51 out of 143) and the *Ba'th* won three seats.³⁸ The victory of the People's Party, as well as Hinnawi's coup, brought hopes of union with Iraq to the forefront; the atmosphere was one of impending decision.

While unity was soon to become a dead letter due to the lack of a real will for it on the part of the People's Party,³⁹ the issue nevertheless became a focal point of debate in the Constituent Assembly, which convened on 12

December 1949. Rushdi al-Kikhya of the People's Party was elected president of the Assembly by 98 votes; Muslim Brotherhood leader Siba'i ran against Kikhya, but received only two votes.⁴⁰ Despite Siba'i's poor showing, the Brotherhood was one of the main protagonists in the first controversy in the Constituent Assembly between those who opposed and those who supported union with Iraq. Three deputies with known Hashemite sympathies drafted the oath to be taken by members of the Constituent Assembly and the Head of State: 'I swear by God the Almighty that I shall respect the laws of the state, defend the country's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, protect its wealth, and work for the achievement of Arab unity.'⁴¹ While the text reflected the obvious effort by its drafters to walk the fine line between Syrian independence and union with Iraq, the anti-union forces, led by Akram Hawrani acting as spokesman for the army and Siba'i's Islamic Socialist Front, vehemently attacked the draft oath. The oath made no reference to the republican form of government in Syria, he said, and noted that the main candidates for union, Iraq and Jordan, were monarchies. Hawrani proposed that the Assembly add a clause calling for the preservation of the republican regime, while Siba'i added that monarchy was contrary to Islam. This opposition, however, failed to defeat the People's Party and its 'Independent' supporters, and the draft oath was passed.⁴²

The approval of the oath was for all intents and purposes a vote for union with Iraq, and it was the last straw for the opponents of that union. Colonel Adib al-Shishakli, supported by Hawrani, moved on Damascus in a bloodless coup on 19 December 1949. Following the coup, Siba'i and the Islamic Socialist Front joined the other parties and the Independents, each trying to form a cabinet. On 24 December, Nazim al-Qudsi of the People's Party succeeded in forming a cabinet composed of People's Party members and Islamic Socialist Front member Muhammad al-Mubarak (Public Works), as well as the Damascene Independent supported by the *Ikhwan*, the Catholic Georges Shalhub (Health). The army, however, objected to Qudsi's inclusion of so many People's Party members (seven out of nine), and Qudsi was forced to resign the next day. Khalid al-'Azm, an Independent, formed a cabinet on 27 December 1949 that was more acceptable to the army since the People's Party held only four of ten cabinet posts. The *Ikhwan* was represented in the cabinet by Dawalibi (National Economy) and Mubarak (Public Works).⁴³

The committee formed to draft the constitution (*al-Lajna al-Mukallafa bi-Dirasat al-Mawadi' al-Dusturiyya*), chaired by People's Party leader Nazim al-Qudsi, included 33 members, among them Mustafa al-Siba'i. The effort, spearheaded by the Islamic Socialist Front and the *ulama*, to have Islam

declared the state religion was by far the most controversial matter raised during discussions on the new constitution. The Brotherhood understood that it operated in a pluralistic environment that would not tolerate a full-blown effort to institute Islamic government, so why did it advance such an unlikely platform?

Some have taken the Brotherhood's effort at face value, believing that the group was simply eager to exercise its first real parliamentary power base.⁴⁴ The evidence, however, points to the conclusion that the *Ikhwan* was merely trying to attach an Islamic symbol to what was clearly a secular-leaning, temporal government. The main points of the *Ikhwan*'s position were set out by Siba'i in February 1950, and his tone was above all else pragmatic. Islam, wrote Siba'i, should be the state religion, since this was a prerequisite to restoring the confidence of the country. Israel, which was also based on religion (or so he thought), had successfully defeated the Arabs, who should therefore be aware of the power of having a state religion. Faith was needed to conquer Syria's difficulties, and the enshrining of Islam in the constitution would stimulate the people toward greater attachment to the state. Siba'i argued further that declaring Islam as the state religion would increase Syria's commercial markets in the Islamic countries and further economic assistance. He also reassured Syria's Christians that Islam had the highest respect for Christianity and did not interfere in matters of personal status. To those who feared the rule of the *ulama*, Siba'i noted that Syria's representative institutions would continue: 'Our parliament, deputies, laws, and way of life will all remain, but they will be reinforced by loftiness of spirit, purity of hand, moral probity and human nobility.' He concluded: 'The only reason for establishing a state religion is to colour the state with a spiritual, moral hue so that regulations and laws will be carried out under the impetus of a deep, spiritual driving force.' Besides, Syria had a Muslim majority, Siba'i stated, and therefore the spiritual counterbalance to materialism should be Islam.⁴⁵

The naiveté of Siba'i's statements – the notion that merely declaring Islam as the state religion would infuse Syrian politics with 'loftiness of spirit, moral probity and human nobility' – was obvious to even the most casual observer of Syrian political life, a life, let us not forget (for contemporaries could not), that was replete with rapid-fire military coups and chronic instability. Such statements nevertheless indicate something about the *Ikhwan*'s ultimate mindset, if not its proximate objectives. Were Islam declared the state religion, then the materialist systems of capitalism and communism would be delegitimized. But the question remains: What, then, was the Brotherhood really up to?

The struggle over this issue involved many parts of Syrian society. The *Ba'th* organized student opposition to the proposed article in the form of a petition to the Constituent Assembly. Other students sympathetic to the

Ikhwan tried to prevent the delivering of the petition and clashes broke out between *Ba'th* and *Ikhwan* supporters.⁴⁶ The Christian communities objected strongly, fearing that they would be relegated to the Islamic *dhimmi* status of a second class, 'tolerated' minority. In protest – though evidently a rather self-defeating one – Syrian Catholics cancelled the 1950 Easter celebrations.⁴⁷

The draft constitution was published on 15 April 1950; with respect to the Islamic issue, the draft went far beyond the 1930 constitution, which had specified only that the 'religion of its [Syria's] head is Islam'.⁴⁸ Article 3 stated that 'Islam is the state religion; other divine religions and religious minorities will be respected. There will be no discrimination between the citizens of the state on the basis of religion.'⁴⁹ The article was approved by the constitutional committee 14–7, 2 abstaining and 2 absent. According to at least one report, the Muslim Brotherhood lorded their victory over the Christians by organizing demonstrations in which cars drove through the Christian quarters of Aleppo and Damascus. This act was inconsistent with Muslim Brotherhood rhetoric, yet reveals perhaps some of the latent animosity towards Syria's Christian population. On 22 April the government banned public discussion of the religion and state issue, fearing total chaos.⁵⁰

The draft version was brought before the Assembly on that day and official debate began on article 3. Ultimately, following a tense debate on 5 September, the Assembly accepted a version that included only the 1930 constitution's formula that the religion of the Head of State is Islam. The Brotherhood, however, succeeded in adding two other provisos that seemed to strengthen the role of Islam in the constitution. The preamble stated: 'As the majority of the people professes Islam, the state declares its attachment to Islam and its noble ideals.' In addition, the article included the statement that 'Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) is the main source (*al-masdar al-ra'isi*) of legislation.'⁵¹

Following the approval of the constitution by the Constituent Assembly on 5 September, the Assembly declared itself a House of Representatives and elected Hashim al-Atasi as President. Siba'i, who ran against Atasi, received only one vote.⁵² Nonetheless, the *Ikhwan* seemed quite pleased with how things had turned out, a sign that they were content with the final draft. This suggests that, like any rational political actor, the Brotherhood knew from the start that to get more of one's desires fulfilled, one often starts out asking for everything. Even religious fanatics can learn to be tactically patient and skilful. Siba'i's candidacy advanced an aim; he knew he would not win. And he did not care.

In his analysis of the US–British attempt to establish an alliance network in the Middle East in the 1950s to counter the USSR, Patrick Seale emphasizes

that in Syria the global aspect of the issue was often ignored. Instead, he avers, the issue was adapted to inter-Arab and internal Syrian politics, 'serving to underline local conflicts and providing local rivals with an additional stick with which to beat each other'.⁵³ Syria did indeed become a battlefield in the Cold War, yet most Syrians understood the conflict in quite parochial, even provincial terms. The real enemy, for Syrians, was Israel and the continuing presence of foreign troops (that is, British) on Arab soil.

The Muslim Brotherhood distinguished between communism and the local Communist Party on the one hand, and its view of the USSR on the other. The Brotherhood abhorred communism, an atheistic materialist doctrine that negated all things spiritual. Yet the battle against communism was far from being simply an ideological one. The Brotherhood and the Syrian Communist Party sought support, to a great extent, from the same constituency – recently socially mobilized urban middle and lower-middle class Sunnis – which surely increased the level of conflict.⁵⁴ Even Siba'i's own family was affected by these conflicting currents. A relative of his, Badr al-Din al-Siba'i, was a Communist Party leader in their home town of Homs.⁵⁵

Aside from the reality of political competition, the Brotherhood's view of the Soviet Union was determined by pragmatic considerations, based primarily on the position taken by the latter on issues of concern to the *Ikhwan*. When the Communists and the USSR supported a binational state in Palestine, the Brotherhood attacked them.⁵⁶ The Brotherhood's opposition grew stronger when the Soviets voted in November 1947 in favour of the partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states. The *Ikhwan* leadership accused local communists of causing *fitna* (civil strife) at a time when Zionism threatened Syria, and of representing a foreign power. So bitter was their conflict that severe clashes erupted between them, particularly in Homs in 1947.⁵⁷

Yet the perceived British attempts to force an Iraqi–Syrian union, combined with the west's role in the creation of Israel, soon evoked a change. Rumours circulated that the United States and Britain were pressuring the Arabs to reach a settlement with Israel in order to assure stability in the region.⁵⁸ So the Islamic Socialist Front, with the aid of the then Minister of the Economy, Ma'ruf al-Dawalibi, embarked on an anti-western campaign. At the 1 May 1950 meeting of the Constituent Assembly, Siba'i attacked the Arab League for 'bowing under Anglo-American pressure'. If such pressure continues, stressed Siba'i, the Arab countries should ally with the USSR – without, however, accepting communism.⁵⁹ Indeed, in the 9 April, 1950 issue of the Egyptian newspaper *al-Misri*, Dawalibi stressed, 'The Arab states would more readily become a Soviet republic than become a Jewish state as a result of US pressure.' The United States, he added, sought to create American colonies in the Middle East, which would cause war. The only way to prevent such a war,

he concluded, was the signing of a non-aggression pact between the Arab states and the Soviet Union. *Al-Manar al-Jadid* praised Dawalibi's remarks and anti-American demonstrations led by the *Ikhwan* ensued. The Syrian government, on the other hand, was quick to stress that Dawalibi's remarks did not represent official policy.⁶⁰ On 19 April, a bomb exploded in the courtyard of the American legation in Damascus; most believed the *Ikhwan* was responsible.⁶¹

Ikhwan anti-western activity continued and intensified in May. In a mass demonstration led by Mubarak and Siba'i, called to protest the convention of a new party supporting Shukri al-Quwatli, the western countries were attacked along with Quwatli and other Arab governments. The Muslim Brotherhood, like other Syrian parties, viewed the inter-Arab, internal Syrian and global political dimensions as integrally linked – far more so than they really were. In his speech to the demonstrators, Siba'i argued that Russia has certainly not wronged the Arabs as much as had the west. France was the enemy of the Arabs in North Africa and the Levant; in India, Egypt and Palestine, Muslims have accounts to settle with the British. 'This being so', he continued in an eerie Arabic echo of Churchill, 'we will make an agreement even with the devil [Russia]'. In a telegram sent to the political committee of the Arab League, the demonstrators demanded that the League resist Anglo-American pressure; if such pressure did not cease, then the League should announce a pro-Soviet policy. The demonstration concluded with seemingly paradoxical cries: the religion of the state must be Islam, long live Stalin, and long live Arab–Soviet cooperation.⁶²

Siba'i expounded further on his view of the Soviet Union at a Muslim–Christian conference held in Bhamdun, Lebanon in April 1954. He noted that while Islam had its own 'socialist system' independent of communism (and capitalism), this system did not conflict with communist trends. Muslims should relate to the USSR as to any powerful state; if the state respects the Muslims and their sovereignty, then there can be peace even if ideologies are at variance. 'Islam does not impose war on all who differ with it. Should [a country] attack the Muslims' creed, their honour and their country, then war is declared and all believers are ordered to take measures to repulse the aggression.'⁶³

Western efforts to build a Middle East alliance network intensified in the beginning of 1951. The commander of the British Middle East forces, General Sir Brian Robertson, was to visit Damascus on 7 February. Prior to the visit, the Islamic Socialist Front joined the *Ba'th* and Hawrani in calling for a policy of neutrality. *Al-Manar al-Jadid* noted that both the east and the west were the enemies of Islam and the Arabs. Russia has also oppressed the Muslims, it noted.⁶⁴

The issue of Arab 'neutrality' has been the subject of much confusion and debate. Those in the west who viewed the Cold War as a zero-sum game found genuine neutrality hard to imagine. US Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern, South Asian and African Affairs, G.V. McGhee, stated to Syrian leaders upon his visit to Damascus in March 1951 that there could be no neutrality between aggressors and defenders of freedom, and there is no reason to believe that he did not mean what he said.⁶⁵ Walter Laqueur argued at the time, as well, that Arab neutrality amounted to fellow travelling. That neutrality found its expression in the worldwide 'Partisans of Peace' movement, which was active in Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Sudan and Turkey, as well as Syria. This was, clearly, a communist 'front organization'. In 1950 and 1951, many prominent Syrian personalities, including a majority of the Syrian parliament, signed the Soviet-instigated 'Stockholm World Peace Appeal' sponsored by the Partisans. The entire Islamic Socialist Front leadership and Ma'arif Dawalibi signed. Laqueur argued that these fellow travellers were riding a wave of pro-Soviet sentiment for personal gain, without being members of the Communist Party, but nevertheless carrying out Soviet policy.

But with the possible exception of Dawalibi, who probably had much to gain personally from courting the Soviets, the Islamic Socialist Front's policy of neutrality seemed to have been an honest attempt to steer a course between the two blocs.⁶⁶ Patrick Seale charges, with some justification, that many in the west simply did not comprehend the local roots of neutrality, tending to believe that all such activity was directed from the USSR. The leaders of the Islamic Socialist Front, Hawrani and the *Ba'ath*, he contended, were not fellow travellers. They had always fought the west, but 'their instinct was to keep out of Great Power conflicts'. Pressure from the west would only produce balancing behaviour, that is, more Syrian interest in a Soviet connection. From the bright light of hindsight, the evidence suggests that Seale made the more compelling argument.

March 1951 was dominated by Syrian-Israeli clashes along the armistice lines in the Hula Valley. The Cold War had its impact here, too, as the west's perceived support of Israel evoked strong opposition to the USA. Syria, which was on the verge of accepting Point IV aid from the Americans, rejected the aid (even though most of the other Arab countries had already accepted) in protest. At a press conference, Siba'i pronounced on the Cold War in true neutralist form, stating that 'although we need military aid, we refuse to throw our sons into the furnace of a war that has nothing to do with us'. Dawalibi also maintained that no matter what Syria received in aid, Israel would always get ten times as much.⁶⁷

The west continued to press for some kind of a defence agreement. On 13 October, 1951, following the NATO Council's recommendation that Greece

and Turkey join the alliance, Britain, the USA, France and Turkey invited Egypt to join an allied Middle East Command. The proposal was rejected out of hand (the British had made the evacuation of the Suez Canal contingent on Egypt's accepting the plan).⁶⁸ Egypt, which one week earlier had unilaterally abrogated the 1936 treaty with Britain, was widely praised in Syria for its actions. The Muslim Brotherhood and the *Rabitat al-'Ulama* expressed full support for Egypt. Following Friday prayers held in the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, led by Islamic Socialist Front leader and Minister of Agriculture, Muhammad Mubarak, thousands marched in demonstration. Dawalibi, who was then chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Relations, stated that the Arabs would accept western cooperation only in 'throwing the Jews into the sea'.⁶⁹

Hasan al-Hakim's government, which had been in power from 9 August 1951, resigned on 7 November 1951, following intense controversy over the western defence proposals. The fall of Hakim's government was orchestrated by the People's Party, using the issue of the defence plans as a tool of internal politics.⁷⁰ After much casting about for candidates and running into army opposition, on 8 November President Hashim al-Atasi asked Muslim Brotherhood and People's Party member Ma'ruf al-Dawalibi to form a government. He succeeded in doing so on 28 November. The government was composed mostly of People's Party members in addition to Islamic Socialist Front member Muhammad Mubarak (as Minister of Agriculture).

Dawalibi seemed the right candidate for the moment. He was a main exponent of neutralism, a hero for his role in helping Amin al-Husayni escape from France, and he was a member of the majority People's Party, yet was anti-Hashemite.⁷¹ More important, Dawalibi's ascent shows both how fluid and unstable Syrian politics were, and how much a part of the establishment the *Ikhwan* was. Still, it is true that Dawalibi was a People's Party member, thus his official political affiliation was not with the *Ikhwan*. Yet everyone knew that he was a leader of the Aleppo branch of the *Ikhwan* and one of its leading members in Syria. Furthermore, Dawalibi's rise to the post marked the first time such a position was held by an up and coming 'radical' and not an old-guard nationalist. His election signified the rising power of new forces in Syrian politics, of a type which was eventually to run the show: the communists, Hawrani, the *Ba'th* and the *Ikhwan*.

Dawalibi's government was short-lived. By taking the defence portfolio for himself and not giving it to Shishakli's man, Colonel Fawzi Salu, who had held it in all cabinets since June 1950, he was pushing Shishakli to the wall. In addition, Dawalibi's cabinet was dominated by People's Party members whom Shishakli thought would try to limit the role of the army. On the night of 28/29 November 1951, Shishakli orchestrated his second coup, arresting

Dawalibi and other members of the government. Searching for a 'constitutional' way to legitimize his rule, Shishakli tried to convince Dawalibi to resign. He refused at first, but eventually did so on 1 December 1950, noting that he was under 'physical and mental pressure'.⁷² On 3 December, Salu, at Shishakli's behest, assumed the functions of Head of State, Minister of Defence and Prime Minister, with full executive and legislative powers.⁷³

The Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) and Hawrani supported Shishakli wholeheartedly, while the *Ba'ith* and the Islamic Socialist Front-Muslim Brotherhood had their reservations. All were pleased to see the downfall of the old-guard People's Party, yet had their doubts about an overt military regime and its possible directions. The Brotherhood did not remain ambivalent about Shishakli for long. As early as May 1951, the Ministry of Interior had requested from the provinces a detailed report on the activities of the *Ikhwan*, their centres and membership rolls.⁷⁴ Under the influence of the avowedly secular SSNP and particularly Hawrani – both of which stood to gain from the suppression of the *Ikhwan* – Shishakli moved against the Brotherhood.⁷⁵ He began in a general way, following al-Za'im's lead, by attempting to limit the influence of the *ulama* in politics. The wearing of religious dress was restricted to those directly and officially involved in religious affairs. The government also erected a statue of former Syrian Chief of Staff and Minister of Defence, Yusuf al-'Azma. While al-'Azma was a war hero, having died defending Syria against the French in 1920, the *Ikhwan* had vehemently opposed the statue for years on the basis that it constituted a form of polytheism (*shirk*). In addition, religious instruction was made mandatory only in the religion of the student; the *Ikhwan* believed that all Syrians should study Islam.⁷⁶ While the principle of such instruction was certainly important, the *Ikhwan* properly saw Shishakli's directive as being aimed at limiting the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood and the *ulama*.

In January 1952, the *Ikhwan* organized a demonstration of 1300 representatives from across Syria in opposition to military dictatorship and western defence plans, and in support of Egypt's stand against the west. That same month, the government issued an order closing all *Ikhwan* branches in Syria and forbidding the publication of *al-Manar al-Jadid*. The Brotherhood's youth organization, the *Futuwwa*, was dissolved, and *Ikhwan* leaders Siba'i, Mubarak and Salah al-Din al-Shash were arrested. Dawalibi remained in prison. The banning of the *Ikhwan* was followed in April 1952 by the total outlawing of all political parties.⁷⁷ Shishakli gradually consolidated his hold on the country, and once tensions died down in April and May 1952, the release of political prisoners began. Among those released were Mubarak of the Islamic Socialist Front, an Islamic Socialist Front supporter in the parliament, the 'independent' Subhi al-'Umari, and finally Ma'ruf al-Dawalibi.

But the effort to remove religion from politics did not abate. On 11 March 1952 the government issued a decree outlining 'standard clothing' for the *ulama*: it was now forbidden to wear the *tarbush*, or fez, and to wear a tie; the permitted 'uniform' for men of religion consisted of a white skullcap (*taqiyya*) covered by a turban (*imama*), a long outer cloak (*jubba*) with matching trousers and black shoes and socks. In addition, Shishakli forbade the *ulama* to sit in coffee houses (and presumably to take part in political discussion) while wearing religious garments.⁷⁸

In December 1952, Shishakli made his final move against his real and potential opponents, claiming a 'plot'. Leaders of the Brotherhood, *Ba'th*, Hawrani's Arab Socialist Party and the Communist Party were arrested. Included among the detained was Ma'ruf al-Dawalibi. In a demonstration of solidarity with the Syrian *Ikhwan*, the *Murshid al-'Amm* (General Guide) of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Hasan al-Hudaybi, telegraphed Shishakli demanding Dawalibi's release.⁷⁹ Several political leaders managed to escape to Lebanon, including Akram al-Hawrani, Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Din al-Bitar of the *Ba'th* and, apparently, Siba'i.⁸⁰

Following a period of relative calm, Shishakli decided to 'constitutionalize' his regime. A draft constitution was published on 21 June 1953, the major change being the transformation of the existing standard parliamentary system of government to a presidential system. On 10 July the constitution was ratified and Shishakli, the only candidate, was elected president.⁸¹ Shishakli then promulgated a decree defining legitimate parties on 13 September. Among parties outlawed were those of a regional, racial or sectarian nature.

Following this limited legalization of parties, Siba'i returned to Syria in late September. The *Ikhwan* held meetings to discuss the future of the organization in light of the new political situation. The leadership decided to refrain from all overt political activity and to concentrate solely on social and religious activities.⁸²

On the eve of the parliamentary elections, set for 9 October, political detainees were released, including Dawalibi. Only independents, the SSNP and Shishakli's Arab Liberation Movement participated in the elections, with the Arab Liberation Movement coming out way ahead. The other parties, including the *Ikhwan*, boycotted the elections.

Growing resentment against Shishakli culminated in his overthrow by a military coup on 24 December, 1953. Power remained in the hands of the Chief of Staff, General Shawkat Shuqayr, who dissolved parliament on 27 February 1954. On 1 March, a new government was formed by Sabri al-Asali, with Dawalibi as Minister of Defence; but Asali resigned on 1 June due to army pressure. The new Prime Minister, Sa'id al-Ghazi, declared his intention to lead a caretaker government until free and fair elections could be held. Elections were eventually set for 24 September.⁸³

The *Ikhwan* decided to sit out the 1954 elections, in line with its previous decision to keep out of politics. Siba'i explained in *al-Manar al-Jadid* that the Muslim Brotherhood had decided to do so on the grounds that the 'political arena had enough activists, while the area of social reform lacks activists'. In addition, stated Siba'i, party politics took up too much of young people's time.⁸⁴ Instead, the Brotherhood resolved to throw its support behind good Muslims and anti-western candidates. According to one source, the Muslim Brotherhood decided that members wishing to run for parliament must resign from the *Ikhwan*.⁸⁵ Dawalibi participated in the elections, as did Muhammad Mubarak who ran as an independent. Both were elected, with Dawalibi polling the most votes of any single candidate. His anti-western views, his past support for the Mufti Amin al-Husayni, and the fact that he was a symbol of Shishakli's oppression helped him in that regard. While not participating in the elections, the Brotherhood remained active in street politics. There were intense clashes between Muslim Brotherhood and *Ba'th* supporters in Aleppo. These clashes may be viewed as a kind of Muslim Brotherhood last stand, a last ditch attempt to stem the growing tide of support for its main competitor, the *Ba'th*.⁸⁶

The significance of the 1954 elections lies in the increase in strength of those who opposed the old order, especially the *Ba'th*, who went from one seat in 1949 to 22 in 1954. This was due to the joining of forces between the *Ba'th* and Hawrani. Hawrani had the ability to mobilize peasants and workers to vote. The *Ba'th's* strong organization, clear party line and its popular anti-west stand served it well in the election. But, of course, it did not have to contend with the Muslim Brotherhood, which helped it enormously. So the key question remains: Why did the Brotherhood leave parliamentary politics? Certainly part of the reason was due to the lack of popularity of its ethnic, Sunni Muslim approach in an era of rising secular Arab nationalism, despite the *Ikhwan's* attempts at a universal Arab appeal. Yet the main reason is to be found in the intense regional dilemma into which the organization was thrust in 1954/55.

The growing popularity of President 'Abd al-Nasir and the Egyptian regime in the Arab world and especially Syria coincided with 'Abd al-Nasir's oppression of the Egyptian *Ikhwan*, thus putting the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood in a terrible bind. In an attempt to consolidate the rule of the Revolutionary Command Council, 'Abd al-Nasir began a campaign against the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in January 1954. The organization was dissolved by the cabinet and the *Murshid al-'Amm* of the organization, in Egypt, Hasan al-Hudaybi, was imprisoned. (He was later released on 25 March.)

Following his criticism of the Egyptian acceptance of the 'heads of agreement' signed with Britain in July to evacuate the Suez Canal, Hudaibi went into hiding. This was followed by the stripping of Egyptian citizenship of six *Ikhwan* who were in Syria attending a conference. A pamphlet issued from the conference condemned the Revolutionary Command Council for its treatment of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Syrian Brotherhood activity on behalf of the Egyptian *Ikhwan* led to tension between their respective governments.

The final agreement with Britain was signed on 19 October. Siba'i organized massive demonstrations against the accord. An assassination attempt on Abd al-Nasir on 4 October – whether staged or real – led to massive arrests of *Ikhwan* members, including Hudaibi. Six Muslim Brotherhood members were executed on 9 December, leading to further demonstrations in Syria. Following prayers for the dead, Siba'i called upon his followers to take revenge for the deaths of the martyrs.⁸⁷

The Egyptian press was enlisted in the campaign against the Syrian *Ikhwan*. Attacks by the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood on Egypt were viewed as interference in Egyptian internal affairs. The newspaper *Akhir Sa'a* carried a picture of Siba'i speaking before a crowd. The picture was captioned: 'Mustafa Siba'i, the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria leads a demonstration in Damascus against Egypt!'⁸⁸

Some sources note that following the crushing of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood the *Ikhwan's* headquarters was moved to Damascus and that Siba'i had been nominated *Murshid al-Amm* in place of Hudaibi. The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood denied this, however, and the near lack of organizational and administrative cooperation between the two *Ikhwan* bodies makes this supposed transfer of power seem unlikely.⁸⁹

Syrian politics following the September 1954 elections took place in the shadow of the Egyptian–Iraqi battle over an Arab defence pact with the west, culminating with the Baghdad Pact signed on 25 February 1955. The struggle over the alliance brought the *Ba'th* closer to Egypt, both opposing the alliance with the west and Iraq, and closer to those Syrian politicians who supported the agreement. The *Ba'th* also moved toward the Syrian Communist Party to make common cause against the pact.⁹⁰

During this period the Muslim Brotherhood was active only in street politics, yet its supporters in the parliament, notably Muhammad Mubarak, tried to walk the fine line between pro-Egyptian and pro-Iraqi forces. This grew out of the dilemma discussed earlier; while identifying with Abd al-Nasir's opposition to the Baghdad Pact, the *Ikhwan* could not bring themselves to freely support the Egyptians because of Abd al-Nasir's ruthless crushing of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Seale cites the fall of Faris al-Khuri's government on 7 February 1955 as a turning point, signifying

the rise to power of the 'neutralist left' in Syria, led by Khalid al-'Azam, Sabri al-'Asali and Akram Hawrani.⁹¹ This was followed in June 1956, when the first government was set up which included *Ba'th* ministers, Salah al-Din al-Bitar as Minister of Foreign Affairs and Khalil Kallas as Minister of the Economy. During these developments the Muslim Brotherhood was officially granted status by the Ministry of Interior as a social and religious organization that was not to involve itself in politics. At a June 1955 meeting, Siba'i was reelected as the leader of the *Ikhwan* in Syria. At the same meeting, the *Ikhwan* voted to continue its social and religious activities while remaining outside the government and politics.⁹² The Brotherhood's activities during this period were thus characterized by a search for a way to plug into Syrian politics while at the same time remaining outside parliamentary machinations.

Such a balancing act could be sustained only in the area of internal Syrian politics, since in the area of foreign policy the Brotherhood was more or less in agreement with its main opponents, the *Ba'th* and the Communists. The rising popularity of 'Abd al-Nasir and his regime's increasingly close relations with the *Ba'th* pushed the Brotherhood into a corner. The nature of Abd al-Nasir's popularity was such that one could not give 'support' with reservations; one was either for the *ra'is* or against him. Nevertheless, in December 1955, on the occasion of the anniversary of the hanging of the six Egyptian *Ikhwan* by 'Abd al-Nasir, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood published an announcement in support of 'Abd al-Nasir's foreign policy, but expressing its determination not to cease its struggle against his internal policies.⁹³

Such pronouncements could hardly be expected to gain the Syrian Brotherhood any supporters; they were far from being in tune with the political *zeitgeist*. Following the decline of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Syria became the source of statements on behalf of all Arab Muslim Brotherhood organizations. In February 1956, the Executive Committee of the Congress of the Muslim Brotherhood in Arab Countries published a statement opposing all settlements with Israel, and supporting a boycott of France because of its policy in Algeria. The statement also expressed 'sorrow' at the lack of political freedom in Egypt.⁹⁴ The same body met again in August 1956, following the nationalization of the Suez Canal, and issued the following statement, which reflected the *Ikhwan*'s dilemma: 'The oppression by the Egyptian military regime of the *Ikhwan* will not prevent the *Ikhwan* from entering the battle against the English aggressors. The *Ikhwan* battalions who fought the English in 1951 are prepared to do so again'.⁹⁵

At a time when the Egyptian *Ikhwan* was suppressed, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood – while in no way replacing or achieving the importance of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood – remained the only significant voice of the

Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab world. The Egyptians were aware of this, and made an effort to placate the Syrian *Ikhwan* who were concerned about their Egyptian compatriots. In February 1956, Egyptian leaders contacted Syrian Brotherhood leaders and achieved a temporary lull in Syrian *Ikhwan* activities against the Egyptian regime.⁹⁶

The Muslim Brotherhood's involvement in Syrian internal politics in these days focused on the *Ba'th* and the Communists, though it did so mostly outside of any parliamentary framework. Both 1955 and 1956 saw recurrent street battles with *Ba'th* supporters in Aleppo, Homs, Damascus and Dar'a. In the parliament, Muhammad Mubarak moved to unseat the Communist Party leader, Khalid Bakdash.⁹⁷

By 1957, 'Abd al-Nasir's popularity was at its height, and the *Ba'th* were enjoying his favor. The by-elections of 4 May, 1957 provided an opportunity for a reading of popular sentiment, at least as far as it would be reflected at the polls.

The elections were held due to the seats vacated by four deputies convicted in 1956 for participating in an Iraqi-inspired conspiracy. They took place in four constituencies: Damascus, Suwayda, Jabal al-Duruz and Homs. In the latter three districts left-wing candidates supported by the government were elected. The election in Damascus, however, provided an opportunity to evaluate the strength of the *Ba'th* vis-à-vis the *Ikhwan*. The *Ba'thi* candidate, Riyadh al-Malki, enjoyed full government support, including voter transportation and the distribution of pro-Malki leaflets by army officers. Malki also benefited from being the brother of Adnan al-Malki, the popular Deputy Chief of Staff who was murdered by in April 1955 by a member of the SSNP. Malki was opposed by Siba'i himself. Siba'i's decision to run for the seat might seem to contradict the Brotherhood's 1954 decision to abjure parliamentary politics. But that decision applied only to the Muslim Brotherhood as a party; the decision affirmed the right of 'good Muslims' to run as independents. Siba'i might have exploited this in order to reenter parliamentary politics without official *Ikhwan* backing. There are indications that Siba'i was never convinced of the need to withdraw from parliamentary activity. It was Hudaybi who pressured Siba'i to remove the Muslim Brotherhood from party politics; but, with Hudaybi in prison, Siba'i may have felt at leave to ignore his wishes. In addition, there was evidence in 1954 of disagreements within the Syrian Brotherhood itself over whether or not to participate in elections.⁹⁸ In any event, Siba'i lost, but he did carry 47 per cent of the vote. This was evidence, at least, of Siba'i's personal appeal, if not also of the Brotherhood's continuing popularity in Damascus.⁹⁹

Political trends in Syria, notably *Ba'thi* political considerations with respect to the rising popularity of the Communist Party, as well as Abd al-Nasir's desire to control Syrian foreign policy, led by 1 February 1958 to the

union of Egypt and Syria in the United Arab Republic (UAR).¹⁰⁰ Abd al-Nasir promulgated a decree on 12 March dissolving all political parties in the Syrian 'region' of the UAR. The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood was mentioned explicitly.¹⁰¹ While welcoming the union of Syria and Egypt, the *Ikhwan* refused to disband their organization, claiming that the founding of the UAR was not its final goal, which remained the unification of the entire Muslim world.¹⁰²

In the face of the growing popularity of the radical secular parties, which increasingly hegemonized the discourse of Syrian politics, the Muslim Brotherhood fought a rearguard battle in the late 1940s and 1950s to keep Islam on the agenda of Syrian politics. In doing so, they were forced into apologetics, lapsing into the discourse of the time, which was one of universalism and 'socialism'. A sectarian appeal to Sunni Muslim solidarity was simply out of step with contemporary thought. It was this 'forcing' of its ideology that took the punch out of the *Ikhwan*'s message. They never really had a chance in the Syria of those times, despite its Sunni Muslim majority. The simple truth was that the message of the *Ikhwan* was an anachronism to many of the new counter elite who set the tone of postwar Syrian politics.

Despite having a vast mosque-based network, the Muslim Brotherhood never succeeded in developing a mass organizational structure, such as the one the *Ba'th* developed so successfully. The *ulama* who led the *Ikhwan* in Syria – unlike the non-*ulama* *Ikhwan* leadership in Egypt – were not adept at the methods needed to establish a mass movement. Furthermore, the persecution of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt by Abd al-Nasir, who was tremendously popular in Syria, led to a drop in the *Ikhwan*'s popularity there. For as long as the UAR lasted, Syria's Muslim Brotherhood had little to do on the national political scene.

NOTES

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1. Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of Post-War Arab Politics, 1945–1958* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).
2. See particularly Richard P. Mitchell's classic, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969). For a more recent study, see Brynjar Lia, *The Society of Muslim Brothers in Egypt* (London: Ithaca Press, 1998).
3. See the modern *Ikhwan*'s website at www.ikhwan-muslimoon-syria.org.
4. For example, Thomas Mayer, 'The Islamic Opposition in Syria, 1961–1982', *Orient*, 24 (1983), pp.589–609; Itamar Rabinovich, *Syria under the Ba'th 1963–66: The Army-Party Symbiosis* (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1972); Yosef Olmert, 'Islam or Ba'th:

- Asad's Struggle against the Muslim Opposition', *Ma'arakhot*, 43, July (1982), pp.9–20, 69, (in Hebrew); Moshe Maoz, *Modern Syria: Political and Social Change in the Process of Creating a National Community* (Tel Aviv: Reshafim, 1974) (in Hebrew); Umar F. Abd Allah, *The Islamic Struggle in Syria* (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1983); Raymond Hinnebusch, 'The Islamic Movement in Syria: Sectarian Conflict and Urban Rebellion in an Authoritarian–Populist Regime', in Ali E. Hillal Dessouki (ed.), *Islamic Resurgence in the Arab World* (New York: Praeger, 1982), pp.138–69. For a more recent update on the movement in Syria, see Eyal Zisser, 'The Islamic Movement in Syria and the Ba'th Regime: Stepping onto a New Path?', *HaMizrah HeHadash*, 42 (2001), pp.67–85.
5. Johannes Reissner, *Ideologie und Politik der Muslimbrüder Syrien. Von der Wahlen 1947 bis zum Verbot unter Adib ash-Shishakli 1952* (Freiburg: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1980).
 6. See for example John O. Voll, 'Islamic Dimensions in Arab Politics since World War II', *American–Arab Affairs*, 4, Spring (1983), pp.108–9.
 7. Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, p.1.
 8. Reissner, *Ideologie und Politik* p.198; see for example the Islamic Socialist Front's platform for the 1949 elections in the Brotherhood's newspaper, *al-Manar al-Jadid*, 11 Nov. 1949, quoted in Reissner, *Ideologie*, pp.416–9; the platform does not mention Islam. Nor was the Brotherhood's newspaper particularly conservative in its search for advertising revenue. Even a cursory glance at issues of the paper from 1951 will reveal advertisements for movies with photographs of men and women embracing, and a running advertisement for Palmolive soap showing a blond beauty, her back exposed, clutching a towel to her breasts (see, for example, *al-Manar al-Jadid*, 1 Jan. 1951).
 9. Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, pp.124–37.
 10. US National Archives, Report prepared by the United States Legation in Damascus for the Secretary of State, 'The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria', despatch 3883, 19 Dec. 1947, enclosure #3, RG59, 890D.00.
 11. Reissner, *Ideologie*, p.183.
 12. Dr Wahid Mizrahi, a physician, was head of the Jewish Club in Damascus. He apparently entered politics at the urging of the prominent Totah family, of which his wife was a member. The major Jewish families had candidates in several different parties, suggesting typical minority behaviour of 'hedging one's bets'. This was learned from a contemporary of Mizrahi's now living in Israel. Mizrahi died in the early 1980s.
 13. Reissner, *Ideologie*, pp.79–88; US Damascus Legation Report, 19 Dec. 1947 and enclosure #3 in same.
 14. Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, p.31.
 15. *Jaridat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin*, 24 July 1947, quoted in Reissner, *Ideologie*, p.188.
 16. Abd Allah, *Islamic Struggle*, p.93.
 17. *Ibid.*, p.35.
 18. For a German translation of the Charter see Reissner, p.221; for an English translation see Abd Allah, *Islamic Struggle*, p.174.
 19. Abd Allah, *Islamic Struggle*, p.74.
 20. Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, pp.34–6; Reissner, *Ideologie*, p.227; Gordon H. Torrey, *Syrian Politics and the Military, 1945–58* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1964), p.113.
 21. Torrey, *Syrian Politics*, p.123. Hawrani was a populist political activist who played an important role in Syrian politics until the early 1960s.
 22. See Ya 'akov Shim'oni, 'Syria between Coups', *Ha-Mizrah He-Hadash*, 1 (Oct. 49), pp.7–21 (Hebrew).
 23. *Al-Manar*, 2 April 1949, quoted in Reissner, *Ideologie*, p.293.
 24. *La Bourse Egyptienne*, 18 April 1949, quoted in Reissner, *Ideologie*, p.293.
 25. For details on Za'im's moves in these areas see Shim'oni; Alfred Carleton, 'The Syrian Coups d'Etat of 1949', *Middle East Journal*, 4 (Jan. 1950), pp.1–11; Reissner, *Ideologie*, pp.288–9; Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, p.58.
 26. See Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, p.61.
 27. *The Daily Telegraph*, 24 July 1949, quoted in Reissner, *Ideologie*, p.294.
 28. Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, pp.62–3; Reissner, *Ideologie*, pp.295–6.
 29. Reissner, *Ideologie*, p.296.

30. *Al-Manar al-Jadid*, 11 Nov. 1949, cited in 'Korot Ha-Yamim', a chronology which appeared in the Hebrew scholarly journal, *Ha-Mizrah He-Hadash*, 1949–61; hereafter cited as 'Korot', followed by the issue of *Ha-Mizrah He-Hadash* in which it appeared.
31. *Al-Manar al-Jadid*, quoted in Reissner, *Ideologie*, pp.416–9.
32. Reissner, *Ideologie*, p.316.
33. Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, Torrey, *Syrian Politics*, p.54.
34. *Al-'Ilm*, 10 Oct. 1949, quoted in 'Korot', 1 (1950), p.161.
35. Torrey, *Syrian Politics*, p.157.
36. See Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, p.8.
37. See Reissner, *Ideologie*, p.320; 'Korot', 1 (1950), p.227.
38. Torrey, *Syrian Politics*, p.53.
39. For an explanation of the People's Party's lukewarm position on union with Iraq, see Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, pp.79–90.
40. *Al-Barada*, 14 Dec. 1949, cited in 'Korot', 1 (1950), p.228.
41. Text is in Torrey, *Syrian Politics*, p.56.
42. *Ibid.*, pp.156–7; Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, pp.84–5.
43. Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, p.92.
44. See Torrey, *Syrian Politics*, pp.172–5; Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, p.93.
45. The article, which appeared in several newspapers (for instance, *al-Ayyam*, 9 March 1950), is translated in R. Bayley Winder, 'Islam as the State Religion: A Muslim Brotherhood view in Syria', *Muslim World*, 44 (1954), pp.215–6.
46. *Al-Ba'th*, 23 Jan. 1950, cited in 'Korot', 1 (1950), p.231.
47. See Mario Nallino, 'Islam e minoranze religiose nella nuova Costituzione Siriana del 1950', *Oriente Moderno*, 30 (1950), pp.10–17; *Ha-aretz*, 24 Jan. 1950. In traditional Islamic fashion, which viewed the correct, God-ordained order to establish Muslims as rightful rulers, with Jews and Christians as 'tolerated minorities' (*ahl al-dhimma*), the Brotherhood characterized Islam as a kind of a universal supra-religion, above all others but not arrayed against them. The Syrian *Ikhwan* emphasized that their movement's message (*da'wa*) was religious, but not sectarian (See Mustafa al-Siba'i, 'al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun', in *al-Ahزاب al-Siyasiyya fi Suriya* (Damascus: Dar al-Ruwad, 1954), p.40.
48. Majid Khadduri, 'Constitutional Development in Syria', *Middle East Journal*, 5 (1951), pp.137–60.
49. Radio Damascus, 15 April 1950, cited in 'Korot,' 1 (1950), p.312.
50. Torrey, *Syrian Politics*, p.174. While preaching a universal, non-sectarian message, the Syrian *Ikhwan* was actually quite concerned about protecting the Sunni majority from Christians. Thus the internal handbook of the Brotherhood's youth organization, the *Futuwwa*, instructs members to become familiar with the major industries in each area, how many Muslims were employed there, and whether the ownership of each factory was in Muslim, Christian or Jewish hands (Mustafa al-Siba'i, *al-Fata al-Hadith* [Damascus: Matba'at al-Ittihad al-Sharqi bi-Dimashq, n.d.], pp.79–86).
51. The text of the 1950 Constitution may be found in *al-Jarida al-Rasmiyya*, 7 Sept. 1950, pp.3159–79.
52. 'Korot', 2 (1951), p.157.
53. Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, p.91.
54. The same was true in Egypt, see Mitchell, *Society Muslim Brothers*, p.39.
55. Reissner, *Ideologie*, p.199.
56. *Al-Manar al-Jadid*, 25 Aug. 1947, cited in *ibid.*, p.204.
57. *Ibid.*, pp.203, 208.
58. See Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, pp.101–2.
59. 'Korot', 1 (1950), p.314.
60. Quoted in 'Korot', 1 (1950), p.318.
61. Arab News Agency, cited in 'Korot', 1 (1950), p.318.
62. 'Korot', 1 (1950), p.314.
63. *Al-Muslimun*, May 1954, quoted in Ishaq Musa Husayni, *The Moslem Brethren: The Greatest of Islamic Movements* (Beirut: Khayat's, 1956), p.146.
64. *Al-Manar al-Jadid*, 4 Jan. 1951, cited in 'Korot', 2 (1951), p.261.

65. Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, p.104.
66. *Ibid.*, p.104; Walter Z. Laqueur, *Communism and Nationalism in the Middle East* (New York: Praeger, 1956), pp.156–7; Reissner, *Ideologie*, pp.355–69.
67. *New York Times*, 24 May 1951, quoted in 'Korot', 2 (1951), p.363.
68. Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, pp.111–12.
69. *Ibid.*, p.112; *Alif Ba*, 17 Oct. 1951, quoted in 'Korot', 3 (1952), p.167.
70. Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, pp.113–14.
71. *Ibid.*, p.114.
72. *Al-Hayat*, 2 Dec. 1951, cited in 'Korot', 3 (1952), p.278.
73. Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, pp.115–16.
74. *Al-Sabah*, 29 May 1951, cited in 'Korot', 2 (1951), p.357.
75. On the influence of the SSNP and Hawrani on Shishakli, see Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, pp.120, 123–4.
76. Government order of 9 Jan. 1952, cited in 'Korot', 3 (1952), p.279.
77. *Al-Sarkhah*, 20 Jan. 1952, cited in 'Korot', 3 (1952), p.279; Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, p.121; *New York Times*, 31 Jan. 1952; Britain, Public Record Office, FO 371/98916/EY 1016/2, Montagu Pollack to Eden, 22 Jan. 1952.
78. *Al-Hayat*, 12 March 1952, cited in 'Korot', 3 (1952), p.383.
79. *Al-Ahram, Islamic Struggle*. . .10 Jan. 1953, cited in 'Korot', 4 (1953), p.196.
80. While in Lebanon, Siba'i became involved in Lebanese politics (he was, theoretically, also the head of the Muslim Brotherhood in Lebanon), and was assumed to be behind the publication of a booklet in March 1953 on behalf of all Muslim organizations in the country. The manifesto called for – among other things – limiting of the [Christian] president's powers and the appointment of the Muslim vice-president; *al-Jarida*, 17 March 1953, cited in 'Korot', 4 (1953), p.203.
81. For an English translation of the constitution, see *Bulletin of Syrian Information*, August 1953.
82. *Al-Hayat*, 23 Sept. 1953, 1 Oct. 1953, cited in 'Korot', 5 (1953), p.51.
83. Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, p.145.
84. *Al-Manar al-Jadid*, 8 March 1954.
85. Torrey, p.255; according to Hamid Algar's 'Source 9' the withdrawal from parliamentary activity was done at Egyptian *Ikhwan* leader Hasan al-Hudaybi's insistence; see Abd Allah, *islamic Struggle*. . .p.277.
86. On the clashes see Torrey, p.254; 'Korot', 6 (1955), p.55.
87. Mitchell, *Society*. . .pp.125–162.
88. *Akhir Sa'a*, 15 Dec. 1954.
89. See Agence France Presse, 20 Oct. 1954, cited in 'Korot', 6 (1955), p.135; Torrey, p. 271; Radio Beirut, 14 Dec. 1954, cited in 'Korot', 6 (1955), p.153.
90. See Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, pp.217–8.
91. Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, pp.219–20.
92. *Al-Ayyam*, 5 June 1955, cited in 'Korot', 6 (1955), p.311.
93. *Filastin*, 10 Dec. 1955, cited in 'Korot', 7 (1956), p.138.
94. *Filastin*, 11 April 1956, cited in 'Korot', 6/7 (1956), p.300.
95. *Al-Manar al-Jadid*, 17 Aug. 1956, cited in 'Korot', 8 (1957), p.62.
96. *Al-Sayyad*, 28 Feb. 1956, cited in 'Korot', 7 (1956), p.210.
97. *Mideast Mirror*, 23 Feb. 1956, cited in 'Korot', 7 (1956), p.211.
98. *Sawt al-'Arab* 12 Oct. 1954, cited in 'Korot', 6 (1955), p.153.
99. On the by-elections of 1957, see Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, pp.290–91; Torrey, *Syrian Politics*, pp.351–3.
100. The details of the process leading to union are outside the scope of this paper; they can be found in Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, pp.317–26.
101. *Al-Ahr'm*, 19 March 1958, cited in 'Korot', 9 (1959), p.312.
102. *Ha-aretz*, 2 Feb. 1958, 3 March 1958, cited in 'Korot', 9 (1959), p.311.

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