

Al-Azhar's Political Role during World War II (1939-1945)

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Abstract

Al-Azhar role was not only religious or cultural, but it was a major participant in the national movement and political life. This role has become evident throughout the history of the Egyptian National Movement and during World War II, when Egypt suffered economically and politically during the war years. All sects of society were seeking independence from Britain, and Al Azhar was not excluded from the scene. This article discusses the role of Al-Azhar during that difficult phase of Egypt's Modern history, especially with regard the famous incident of Abdeen palace 1942, that was about to topple the throne of King Farouk , and how that the scholars of Al-Azhar and its students came out chanting and condemning the incident and the British occupation not only for supporting the king as a guardian but also for rejecting the British occupation and the terms of the 1936 treaty that made Egypt suffer the scourge of war, even though it was not a participating party. Thus, Al-Azhar institution has become a haven for Egyptians under this cloudy climate.

Key words: Al Azhar, Abdeen Palace, Farouk, World War II.

Introduction

When the Fatimid state laid the pillars of its rule in Egypt and founded Cairo; the fourth Islamic capital, Jawhar Al Siqelly constructed a mosque to spread the Fatimid call in Egypt; it was Al-Azhar Mosque. It was built in 361 AH (972 AD) to be an official mosque for Cairo. Al Azhar had an enlightening role besides the religious one through a combination of study

rings inside it. Despite the deterioration that afflicted Al-Azhar during The Al-Ayubid period¹, it has regained its strength during the Mamluk era. Thus, the fifteenth century is considered the golden age of Al-Azhar, as it occupied a prominent place among the schools of Cairo; it has become a mother school and the major Islamic University. Every scholar hoped to teach inside the corners of Al Azhar Mosque². It was extended during the Mamluk era as a mosque and as a University with the establishment of two schools in the first half of the eighth century AH. A third school was set up late in the first half of the ninth century AH³. During that period Al-Azhar was a source of light of knowledge, and the most famous scientists were studying in it. It has a great credit in achieving the science assets that were popular in that era. The role of Al-Azhar continued after the Ottoman conquest of Egypt. Its scholars have had a great role in facing the oppression of the rulers⁴.

Al-Azhar had a great role during the French campaign in 1798 when it resisted the injustice of the French and led the revolutions against the despots. Bonaparte realized that he came to govern a people having their religion and traditions. So, he turned his attention to Al Azhar and the scientists from the beginning and showed his respect for Islam. We find that he pursued a policy of courtship with the Al-Azhar scholars , gave them more respect and appreciation⁵, and retained their privileges and their supervision on the Endowments. In his first week in Cairo, he issued a decree to allocate a horse for each scholar of Al-Azhar from among the

¹Doris Behrens- Abouseif, *Islamic Architecture in Cairo. An Introduction*, (EJ Brill, Leiden, 1992), p.58.

² Y.G.M. Lulat, *A History of African Higher Education from Antiquity to the Present*, (Greenwood Publishing Group, Westport, 2005), p.77.

³ المقریزی ، المختار من الخطط المقریزية ، " المواعظ والاعتبار بذكر الخطط والآثار " ، (الهيئة المصرية العامة للكتاب ، القاهرة ، 1998) ، ص 23 .

⁴ رأفت عبد الحمید ، الأزهر الشريف قبل الحملة الفرنسية (الأزهر الشريف فی عبده الألفی) ، (الهيئة المصرية العامة للكتاب ، القاهرة ، 1983) ، ص 195 .

⁵ عبد العزیز الشناوی ، صور من دور الأزهر فی مقاومة الاحتلال الفرنسي لمصر فی أواخر القرن الثامن عشر ، من أبحاث الندوة الدولية لتاریخ القاهرة ، مارس - أبريل ، 1969 ، (مطبعة دار الكتب ، القاهرة ، 1971) ، ص 19-20 .

members of the Board of Cairo. This decision holds the honor and appreciation for the scholars of Al-Azhar⁶.

Al Azhar was the centre of the Revolution against the French through the Commission that prepared for the revolution and its leadership. Subsequently, the campaign was forced to pour its flames on the Al-Azhar⁷, and opened its guns against it to destroy it or destroy the resistance emitting from it. On 21 October 1798, a massive revolution was led in Cairo by Al-Azhar. The response was immediate; as the streets were filled with protesters and Azhar was the centre of the revolution⁸. In the meantime, Suleiman al-Halabi, a student from Al-Azhar assassinated Kleber, thus increasing hostility between the French and scholars of Al-Azhar which led to the arrest of a number of students and scholars of Al-Azhar. The military court issued a death sentence judgment to the killer and four of Al-Azhar students.⁹ when Muhammad Ali took power, he began to work on the elimination of these leaders and scientists who brought him to power. So, he exiled scientists, and took plans to undermine the Al-Azhar and took some measures such as: the seizure of the endowments of Al Azhar that resulted in a lack of Al Azharite students and teachers who left their work due to low salaries¹⁰.

Al Azhar suffered widely under the British rule. The British occupation of Egypt 1882 was not only aiming at the military or political control, but it had a much deeper aim as it sought to control the minds of the Egyptian people. So, Britain was serious in attacking and discrediting the Islamic religion with the help of the Orientalists. It also fought against Al-Azhar and worked on weakening its role of the political arena through several

⁶Metin Heper, Raphael Israeli(ed.), *Islam and Politics in the Modern Middle East (RLE Politics of Islam)*, second edition, (Rutledge, New York, 2014), p. 25.

⁷ Geneive Abdo, *No God but God: Egypt and the Triumph of Islam*, (Oxford University Press, 2000), p.47

⁸Geneive Abdo, *No God but God: Egypt and the Triumph of Islam*, p.48.

⁹ رأفت عبد الحميد، مرجع سبق ذكره، ص 215 - مجلة الأزهر، المجلد الخامس والعشرين، 1373 هـ / 10 سبتمبر 1952، الجزء الأول، ص 52.

¹⁰ عبد الرحمن الراجعي، تاريخ الحركة القومية وتطور نظام الحكم في مصر، الجزء الثاني، (الهيئة المصرية العامة للكتاب، القاهرة، 2000)، ص 296.

ways, including¹¹, Creating a competitor to Al Azhar in the field of education such as the civil education and the foreign schools. Also, some educational institutions were set up to compete against Al Azhar such as the Legitimate Judiciary School and Dar Al Uloom School ; the first to graduate judges in the Sharia courts and the second to graduate teachers of the Arabic language in schools and the Ministry of Education. The aim was to keep Al Azhar away from this and away from its control over the law and education. The occupation aimed at isolating Al Azhar from the community to give an impression that the weakness lies in the religion called to by Al Azhar scholars and in the subjects studied by its graduates and not in the Western culture . Thus, the British occupation directed their attention to attacking Al Azhar and imposing restricts on them by not providing job opportunities for them.

The history of Al Azhar was recorded in the 1919 revolution. It was also a symbol of steadfastness , patriotism and a struggle to defend the country throughout the ages. Al Azhar was the centre of the revolution. Its scholars and students wrote speeches and poems that gave rise to feelings. Al Azhar welcomed young as well as old people. It also welcomed Muslims as well as Christians within its yards. All sects of Egyptians gave many speeches. People cannot forget Father Sergius when he ascended the prayer platform of Al Azhar Mosque and began to transmit enthusiasm in the hearts of people to demand freedom and independence.¹² All this shows how important the role played by Al Azhar was in demanding for independence and freedom. Thus, Al Azhar remained a fort and platform for Jihad against injustice, corruption and occupation. Thus, the role of Al Azhar was not only religious but it was also political and contributed strongly in the political and military life.

Al Azhar's Political role Prior to World War II

Al Azhar became greatly involved in politics and elections run in 1938, due to the relationship between Sheikh of Al Azhar and prime minister

¹¹Metin Heper, Raphael Israeli(ed.), *Islam and Politics in the Modern Middle East(RLE Politics of Islam)*,p.26.

¹² عبد العزيز غنيم ، فى أثناء الثورة المصرية (الأزهر والنضال الوطني) ، (الهيئة المصرية العامة للكتاب ، القاهرة ، 1983)، ص 222 .

Mohamed Mahmud and the desire of the latter that students of Al Azhar should help the minority parties in their planning for the elections. When the electoral battle began, Al Azhar was used as a mean to attack the opponents of the cabinet especially Al wafd party. We also find that Al wafd itself used some Azharites in their fight against their opponents especially the Liberal Constitutionalists and Al Saadeen. At that period, Al Maraghy became involved in political activity in a way that made him part of the partisan political rivalries. He practiced this activity as he was supporting the king and was in close contact with the Liberal Constitutionalists in their fight against Al wafd. It was said that he was instigating Al Azhar students to support the constitutionalist candidates in the 1938 elections.¹³

March 1938 witnessed the highest evolution in the electoral movement. Al Balagh newspaper began to attack Al wafd, its chairman and its newspaper. It published an article by Abbas Mahmud Al Aqqad in which he reminded people of the religious lessons. Makram Ebeid had a role in stopping it. Al Aqqad accused Makram Ebeid of the incitement to cheer against sheikh Al Azhar and calling for his downfall. He also accused Al Masry newspaper of plotting against the Azharites and Al Azhar. However, he denied these charges and confirmed the existence of links of affection between him and Sheikh Maraghy. He also sent a report to the chief prosecutor of Egypt requesting the prosecution to protect him from this tendentious propaganda¹⁴.

Makram Ebeid, during his speech in his constituency (Shoubra) confirmed good relationship with Al-Azhar saying, " *I admit to you that what hurts me and my heart is to be told that I am an enemy of Islam and an enemy of Al-Azhar. Those who know me well, including my opponents, are well aware that they are telling lies. If Christians were closer to Muslims, Makram Ebeid would be the closest*". The attendants cheered (long live Makram, the Egyptian- Long live Makram , friend of Muslims- long live the union), and then continued his speech , saying , " *As for my hostility to Al Azhar, I say that I am not an enemy of Al-Azhar nor of my*

¹³. سعيد إسماعيل على ، دور الأزهر في السياسة المصرية ، (دار الهلال ، القاهرة ، بدون .تاريخ) ، ص 336 .

¹⁴. المصرى ، 2 مارس 1938 .

brothers and my president; May Allah forgive them. On the contrary, I feel indebted to Al Azhar I as long as I live. I will never forget that I owe Al Azhar much of. I also awe much to my teachers from Al-Azhar who corrected my tongue and my logic. They also corrected my behaviors. I still have strong ties with those from among them who are still alive as well as those who died"¹⁵.

Here, we note that Makram Ebeid was well aware of the opposing propaganda and its bad effect on the elections especially when it had any relation with religion and Al Azhar. During the electoral battle , he used Al Azhar as a square for his speeches in his fight against Al wafd party with a focus on Makram Ebeid as a secretary general for the party¹⁶. This activity was extended to include all nearby neighbourhoods of Al Azhar. In Darb al-Ahmar district, the party's candidate of Saady party, Ahmed Maher, depended greatly on the support of the Azharites. Al Wafd Party candidate (Zuhair Sabri) felt this. So, he wrote a warning to Ahmed Maher saying: (to my rival Ahmed Maher Effendi in Darb al-Ahmar constituency: If you rely on Azharites, you should know that they are men of religion, not carriers of sticks, but carriers of the Book of Allah.(Glory be to him)¹⁷.

The cabinet of Mohamed Mahmud used Al-Azhar students in the propaganda against Al wafd party in the regions and what happened in one of the suburbs of Ayyat district where a delegation of 58 Azharites, accompanied by the son of Sheikh Hassan Al deeb; one of the relatives of the candidate of the Liberal Constitutionalists party in this area, began to launch opposing propaganda against Al Wafd party. Some Azharites used to say in the regions that Al Nahhas, chairman of Al wafd party, hates Islam and prohibits prayer in mosques and that he does not fear Allah.¹⁸

The election battle resulted in the winning of the Liberal Constitutionalists and Saadeen and 55 of the independents, loyal to the government , 12 of the Wafdist , 45 of the National Party and the total

¹⁵. المصرى ، 6 مارس ، 1938

¹⁶. المصرى ، 7 مارس 1938

¹⁷. المصرى ، 3 مارس 1938

¹⁸. المصرى ، 14 مارس 1938

was 264 MPs¹⁹. At these times, the Egyptian delegation issued a statement to the nation stating that" the use of Al-Azhar students was not an element of the many pressing elements used by minority parties to fight against Al wafd party, but that was not the only element the led to the victory of minority parties, but that the use of forgery, as was well known, helped in the first place bring down the candidates of Al wafd ".²⁰

In answer to a question raised by Mahmud Suleiman Ghannam to the Prime Minister about the number of students who did not attend their lessons during the elections, he confirmed the use of the cabinet of Al Azhar students in the electoral battle .

Table 1: The number of students who did not attend a college, Al Azhar institute or religious institutes with or without an excuse, from 28 February to 8 April, 1938.

College or institute	Duration / from February 28 to April 18, 1938			
	number of students	With excuse	Without excuse	total
Faculty of Arabic Language	465	167	155	322
Faculty of Sharia	889	285	197	482
Basics of religion	721	215	245	460
Cairo Institute	2152	756	656	1412
Tanta Institute	1449	176	-	176
Alexandria Institute	788	169	535	704
Zagazig Institute	1459	385	437	832
Shebin Institute	625	137	141	378

¹⁹ عبد الرحمن الراجحي ، مرجع سبق ذكره ، ص 60 .

²⁰ . المصري ، 12 أبريل 1938 .

Desouk Institute	272	69	63	132
Damietta Institute	378	22	34	56
Assiut Institute	957	224	103	327

Source: The House of Representatives, the minutes of the eighth session ,
December 20, 1938

Sheikh Al Maraghy Mediation between Political Parties in 1939

On August 12, 1939, Mohamed Mahmud submitted his resignation following a meeting with Saied Zulfaggar Pasha, chief secretary of the king in which he told him of the king's desire in the resignation. Newspapers talked about the formation of a new cabinet headed by Ali Maher, head of the royal courting the period from 12 to 18 August. Ali Maher was not asked officially to form the cabinet. During that short period, Al Maraghy, sheikh of Al Azhar was active and acted as a political mediator between the two parties of the former cabinet and the constitutionalists and Al Sadeen and between Ali Maher and the palace. This role was not known before. The aim of this political activity on the part of sheikh Al Azhar was to support the parties of the former cabinet to join the new cabinet in case it was formed by Ali Maher Pasha.²¹ As a result, the ministers held their meetings in Alexandria and Sheikh Mustafa Maraghy was the mediator²².

The ministers of the two parties believed that they have an absolute majority in the House of Representatives and constitutionally they should have the same majority in the new cabinet. Besides, the Board of directors of the two parties have the right to choose its candidates in the new cabinet on condition that its candidates assume the highest level ministries that were in the hands of the parties in the resigned cabinet such as the ministry of finance , ministry of the interior and ministry of justice.²³ But in the meantime the Liberal Constitutionalists decided not to take part in the cabinet after knowing that Maher was ready to engage two ministers only from the Liberal Constitutionalists in his cabinet; they were Helbawi Bek and Abdel Majeed Ibrahim Bek. None of them was once a minister. the Liberal Constitutionalists decided not to take part in the cabinet. So, the cabinet of Ali Maher was composed of his supporters.

²¹ . المصري ، 14 أغسطس سنة 1939 م .

²² . الإتحاد ، 16 أغسطس سنة 1939 م .

²³ . الإتحاد ، 17 أغسطس سنة 1939 م .

AlSaadian also took part in this cabinet by four ministers²⁴. Some Azharites condemned sheikh of Al Azhar for his mediation and considered this to be an abuse to Al-Azhar. They also reminded him of what the cabinet of Ali Maher pasha did towards Al Azhar and the hard line position of the minister of Education towards Al Azhar²⁵.

Azhar during World War II

After Great Britain prepared itself militarily for the possibility of World War II, they made a great effort to ensure the support of Egypt to Britain during the war. The British High Commissioner did great efforts through his relations with the Egyptian politicians before the war. He also made contacts with the educational institutions including Al Azhar for fear of Italian propaganda of anti-Englishmen that may come out from Al-Azhar. So, Lampson, the British High Commissioner asked Sheikh Mohammed Mustafa Al Maraghy to consult with him in the general conditions and internal politics. The High Commissioner told sheikh of Al-Azhar that there was an Italian propaganda that said that the English persecuted Muslims and that Italy was a friend to Muslims. The High Commissioner asked sheikh of Al Azhar about the possibility of seeking the support of Sufism to invalidate this Italian propaganda and strengthen the morale of the people and also by preachers in mosques and through Al-Azhar.²⁶

Al Maraghy told him that he gave his instructions to the preachers to preach people and to be patient and perseverant. Lampson expressed his concern about the Italian propaganda, which was on the Aljbert gallery and the Moroccan one. Al Maraghy said "I know that" as the Italian built a house for Libyan students who were studying in Al Azhar. They gave them salaries to encourage them to study hard. Also, Italy used to pay salaries to students in Aljibert gallery. They were Eritreans and Ethiopians. Sheikh (Nour) was in close contact with the Italians. Sheikh of Moroccan gallery was also in contact with them. Al Maraghy found that it was inappropriate to take an action against them as they were poor students and it was difficult to prevent them from entering Al Azhar. In case he did this, he would be accused of preventing Muslims from religious education in Al Azhar. Besides, if these students didn't get

²⁴Parker R.A.C., *The Second World War. A Short History* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1989), p.21.

²⁵ Jackson Ashley, *The British Empire and the Second World War* (Carnegie Press, London, 2006), p.103.

²⁶F.O 407-223, no.26, From sir M Lampson to viscount Halifax (May,19,1939).

salaries from the Italians, it would be difficult for them to continue their education in Al Azhar.²⁷

Al Maraghy, recommended the British High Commissioner that France should organize the students who were living in the Moroccan gallery to take action against the Italian calls in Al Azhar and the High Commissioner should do the same in Sudan for students who were staying in Al Sennariah and barbarian galleries. However, the British High Commissioner commented on helping Al Azhar in confronting Italian propaganda that depicted the superiority of German and Italian troops.²⁸ Also at the same meeting, sheikh of Al Azhar warned the British High Commissioner from Britain 's position towards Palestine. So, how come Britain seeks Egyptian and Arab collaboration with them while seeing their fellow Muslims in Palestine treated badly by the British. Also Sheikh Al Maraghy revealed the failure of British troops to protect the Egyptian lands. The Egyptians feared on their land from the superiority of the Italian military forces .²⁹

It is clear that this interview ended with an outcome that the High Commissioner did not expect. It also ended with the disapproval of sheikh of Al Azhar to work against the Italian propaganda in Egypt. Sheikh of Al Azhar was only convinced of preaching and giving advice to people to keep calm and tranquil. Following the declaration of war in September 1939, just when the economic conditions worsened in the country, Sheik of Al Azhar took part in alleviating this economic crisis.³⁰ Preachers were active at that time and worked on lecturing among people. Al Maraghy worked to protect Egypt from the scourge of war. It was he who said in September 19th, 1941 at Beybars Mosque, at the time when Cairo was attacked by a severe air strike that war did not concern us, thus making the British anger. They expressed their protest to the cabinet of Hussein Serry against that phrase and considered Sheikh Al Maraghy one of the opponents of the allies.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁹ الإتحاد، 2 سبتمبر سنة 1939.

³⁰ Jackson Ashley, *The British Empire and the Second World War*, (Carnegie Press, London, 2006), p.103.

The 4th February incident 1942

Since the Second World War, danger was away from Egypt. Egyptians did not feel it till the tenth of June 1940 when Italy declared war against France and Britain. Here the Egyptians felt that the danger was approaching them and the war seemed at hand.³¹ The Abdeen Palace Incident was a military confrontation that took place on 4 February 1942 at Abdeen Palace in Cairo, and almost resulted in the forced abdication of King Farouk. During that critical period, Britain wanted a person to whom it may give confidence to be head of the cabinet. So, they had to notify the palace of the cabinet reshuffle as they said that Ali Maher's cabinet was not cooperating with it as it should be with Britain, according to the Treaty of Alliance and Friendship.

Farouk had many links with the Italians in general and his friend Polly in particular, so the British sought to counteract this by inviting him to London to convince him to maintain Anglo-Egyptian relations during the war³². The international situation worsened at the end of 1941 with the Axis powers gaining many victories over the Allies. At the beginning of 1942, Egyptian demonstrations appeared throughout the country in support of Rommel, with Italian flags flown from Egyptian houses. As a result, the British insisted on changing the government³³. Owing to the Allies' alarm at the situation in the western desert, Lampson sent an ultimatum to Farouk: comply with the Allied request, or abdicate. When Farouk failed to yield, Lampson surrounded the palace with troops. Having no choice, the king capitulated to British pressure³⁴. Farouk viewed the ultimatum as an abrogation of the Anglo-Egyptian treaty and an insult to the independence of the country. From the Allied perspective,

³¹F.O.371-23306, J2796-1-16, No.872(289-41-39). Copy sent by Air Bag, British Embassy, Alexandria, 14 July 1939.

³² F.O.371-23306, NO. 506, Lampson to F.O., 2 September 1939.
- F.O.371-23306, NO. 416 Decypher, J.2944-1-16, 3 August 1939.

³³ F.O. 371-23306, NO. 443, Lampson to F.O., Cairo, 1 February 1942.

³⁴ . 1942-2-5 المصري This newspaper just referred to the accident and did not comment on it. The British supported Al-Nahass because of his acknowledged antipathy towards fascists and because they thought he would be able to resist palace interference. As for Al-Nahass, he probably accepted the leadership in the hope of extracting material assistance from Britain for Egypt; he may also have wanted to undermine the minority parties' alliance with the king. It was also hoped that a Wafd government led by Al-Nahass would weaken the influence of the pro-Axis elements around King Farouk. Lampson eventually decided to force this choice on Farouk by insisting that he abdicate unless he agreed to ask Al-Nahass to form a government.

however, Lampson's ultimatum was a wartime measure justified by military emergency³⁵. It would appear that the British had struck a deal with Al-Nahass. For the remainder of the hostilities, they were scarcely troubled by Egyptian politics. The Egyptian military response to these actions seems to have been confined to the presenting of arms by the Royal Guards as the British drove through the palace gates. The failure of the Egyptian Army to intervene was perhaps a result of the British strength, and may have been agreed upon by its leaders and the Egyptian politicians³⁶.

Here Al Azhar appeared in the scene. There were two incidents that toppled this cabinet alongside these difficulties. Al Azhar played a role in one of those two incidents: The first incident was the severance of relations with Feshy cabinet which paved the way for the ministerial crisis. A few days later the second incident took place which overthrew the cabinet of Hussein Sirri Pasha. It was the demonstrations that happened in February 1942. At the same time, the second German attack took place in the Western Desert.³⁷

The Egyptians disagreed about these demonstrations; some said that they were plotted; others said that they were not. Those who said that they were not plotted argued that all sects of society were disappointed. Senior peasants felt disappointed of the then recent governmental procedures to keep up with the supply crisis through limiting the area that may be grown cotton as well as the lack of Consumer commodities, high prices and poor economic conditions. Besides, the axis troops that were advancing towards Egypt in 1942 were mainly while the invading country in the past was the former colonial Italy.³⁸ But there are some sources that attributed the demonstrations to Aarome land to Azharites³⁹. Lord Killearen confirmed in his diaries on the Feb. 4th incident saying : "I think that Sheikh Al Maraghy, Sheikh of Al-Azhar,⁴⁰ is the primary instigator to these hostile demonstrations to us from among Ali Maher's friends and

³⁵ لطيفة محمد سالم، فاروق و سقوط الملكية في مصر 1936-1952، (مكتبة مدبولي، القاهرة، 1989)، ص. 109.

³⁶ الدستور 1943-1-5 This newspaper reflects the relations between Britain and Al-Nahass. It is said that Al-Nahass sent a letter to congratulate the British Ambassador when he was given the title of Lord Killeren.

³⁷ محمد أنيس، 4 فبراير في تاريخ مصر السياسي، (القاهرة، مكتبة مدبولي، 1982)، ص 9.

³⁸ F.O. 371-23306, J 2662-11-6, No. 182 (33-19-39), 6 July 1939, General Situation in Egypt.

³⁹ F.O. 371-41326, No.1190, Killearen to Mr. Eden, 22 December 1943.

⁴⁰ أنور السادات، أسرار الثورة المصرية بواعثها الخفية وأسبابها السيكلوجية، الهلال العدد 76، 1957، ص 64-62.

evil hostile figures."⁴¹ But what lessens the significance of this argument is that Hussein Sirri Pasha gained the confidence of the English government. So, Dr. Heikal, a minister in the cabinet of Hussein Sirri Pasha, testified that Hussein Heikal was not in close contact with the English as was the case with Hassan Sabry . Again, the English intervened to save the cabinet of Hussein Sirri just before the severance of diplomatic relations with Al Feshy cabinet. Therefore, the severance of relations was requested by the English.⁴²

It is known that Al-Azhar and sheikh of Al-Azhar were working for the sake of the National Movement and the hostility to Britain. So, there was no reason to prevent sheikh of Al Azhar from supporting the National Movement, So he told Al Maraghy that " *as long as Al Azhar's role was restricted to religious affairs , thus the government would not intervene; but in case Al Azhar intervenes in the political affairs, he would not hesitate to send the police to undertake the required procedures*". Thus, Sirri Pasha asked sheikh of Al Azhar to stop these demonstrations that were hostile to the English at once. But, these warnings were in vain and the demonstrations and chants were repeated once and again. In the streets of Cairo the next day. The demonstrators were holding signs against Britain and occupation.

The Prime minister was sure that the palace was supporting those demonstrations and movements in Al Azhar. It was also supporting the position of sheikh of Al Azhar. (so, he told Hussein Sirri Pasha, head of the royal court, that he was completely ready to suppress the movement of Al-Azhar mosque, provided he gets assurances from King Farouk that he supports this action). Hussein Pasha asked for a deadline to respond and then returned that same afternoon to tell him that the palace had no relation with this and that the Prime Minister can do what he wants.⁴³ This means that the palace is no longer in favor of the cabinet of Hussein Sirri Pasha, and that the palace knows that Sirri Pasha cannot do anything against the conspiracies plotted by the palace and Sheikh of Al Azhar. Accordingly, Hussein could not remain in the cabinet after it lost the satisfaction of the king. Moreover, the support of the parliament was no longer enough for the survival of the cabinet.⁴⁴

⁴¹ نفس المرجع ، ص 64 .

⁴² عبد العظيم رمضان ، تطور الحركة الوطنية في مصر من سنة 1937- 1948 ، ج2 ، الدار البيضاء ، ص 180

⁴³ F.O. 371-23306, No.77 Saving, J 2668, 10 July 1939, from Cairo to F.O.

⁴⁴ . المصري ، 5 فبراير ، 1955 .

Here emerged the role of Al-Azhar, which came out condemning the incident and vows the Wafdist cabinet to avenge what happened following the British blatant interference in the Egyptian affairs. The demonstrations of the scholars and students of Al Azhar were a good reflection of their refusal of what had happened. The feud increased between Al Azhar institution and the Wafdist party which was seen as an ally to the occupiers. So, it had to be fought with all means. When Al Wafd party took power in 4 February 1942, and it was natural that Al Maraghy would stand against this cabinet ,Al Wafd did not forget what was done by Al Maraghy in 1937 and 1938. Thus, Al Wafd instigated the students of Al Azhar against sheikh of Al Azhar and achieved a great success in this regard.

As a result of the instigation of Al Wafd cabinet for Azharites against sheikh Al Azhar , they demonstrated against him and called for his resignation. So, he stayed at his home and submitted his resignation but it was refused by king Farouk.⁴⁵ When sheikh Al Maraghy submitted his resignation and it was refused by the king, relations were resumed between the palace and the cabinet with regard law no. 15, 1927 and the question whether Sheikh Maraghy really restored it or not. For this reason, Al Maraghy was suspended at home for about ten months during which he couldn't go to Al Azhar. At that time, Al Nahhas asked the British ambassador to help him get out of the headquarters of Al Azhar. But the British ambassador did not want to get involved in these problematic affairs. He also said that the embassy had no relation with religious affairs.⁴⁶

It becomes clear that Al Nahhas and his cabinet were trying to get rid of sheikh Mohamed Mustafa Al Maraghy and keep him away from Al Azhar as he was supporting the constitutionalist party and had a hostile attitude against Al Wafd party. Al Wafd never forgot what sheikh Al Maraghy did in the elections run in 1938 AD. They also never forgot the instigations of sheikh Al Azhar to the Azharites against Al Wafd and its candidates and supporting the Liberal Constitutional Party. The result was that Al Wafd lost the elections.

King Farouk refused the resignation. In his discussion, Al Nahhas said that he had the right to accept the resignation of sheikh of Al Azhar as Al Maraghy had restored law no. 15 for the year 1927 with the nullification of law no. 49 for the year 1930 as the nullification of the nullified is

⁴⁵ حلمى النمنم ،الأزهر الشيخ والمشيخة ،(الهيئة المصرية العامة للكتاب ، القاهرة ، 2012)، ص 214 .

⁴⁶ سعيد إسماعيل على ، مرجع سبق ذكره ، ص 339 .

considered a restoration to the previous law. He gave evidence that when Al Maraghy submitted his resignation, he submitted it to the prime minister not to the king. By this , he admitted that the prime minister is entitled to accept the resignation. This argument lasted for about ten months during which sheikh of Al Azhar remained suspended till the resignation of Al Wafd in the late 1944. Thus Al Maraghy came back to Al Azhar in January 1945. He considered himself not resigned till his death in 1945.⁴⁷

After the death of Sheikh Al Maraghy, King Farouk worked to appoint a sheikh of Al-Azhar. At that time, Al Wafd cabinet was not in power to oppose the king's decision as the then cabinets were minority cabinets that were as a ring in the hand of the king. If we compare the acts carried out by Al Maraghy and the words that he said before his appointment as sheikh of Al Azhar about the message of Al Azhar, it is found that it was represented in "carrying the message of Islam," and whenever the message of Islam is known, the message of Al-Azhar is known. Here the question is; how does the message of Al-Azhar become the message of Islam? Azharites took part in the demonstrations to fight against the occupation. This was the concept adopted by Al Azhar in the field of politics through the refusal of foreign intervention in all its forms and fighting against corruption within the motherland.

Conclusion

From what was mentioned above, it becomes clear that, Lampson feared from the power of Al-Azhar and the extent of its control over the minds of the Egyptians. So, he referred to it to support Britain during war years, and asked sheikh of Al-Azhar to do publicity for the Allied armies. Here the national role of Al Azhar became clear when it refused Lampson's request and contented himself with a promise to ask Egyptians to be patient. It also became clear to us that students of Al-Azhar were showing sympathy to the Italian side that was hostile to Britain. Britain realized this clearly. Sheikh of Al Azhar refused to punish the students or dismiss them from Al Azhar asked by the British ambassador. Al Azhar refused Egypt's entry into war alongside the Allies. Al Maraghy was the main driver of the demonstrations that were supporting the troops of the Axis during years of war. There was a feud between the Wafdist cabinet and Al

⁴⁷ محمد حسين النجار، *الاتجاهات الوطنية في الأدب المعاصر ، من قيام الحرب العالمية الأولى إلى قيام الجامعة العربية ، الجزء الثاني*، (القاهرة ، مكتبة الآداب ، سنة 1956) ، ص 24 .

Azhar institution because of its refusal of the February 4, 1942 that brought the Wafdist Party to power. So, there were attempts to instigate Al Azhar students against the chiefdom. It already succeeded in those attempts. Thus, Britain realized the seriousness of Al-Azhar as a religious institution that has an impact on the Egyptians. So, it refused Al Nahass's demand to oust sheikh of Al-Azhar .

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