

Matthias Küntzel

# Nazi Propaganda in the Middle East and its Repercussions in the Postwar Period

*Antisemitism based on the notion of a Jewish world conspiracy is not rooted in Islamic tradition but, rather, in European ideological models. The decisive transfer of this ideology to the Muslim world took place between 1937 and 1945 under the impact of Nazi propaganda. Important to this process was the development of Islamic antisemitism—a particular form of Jew-hatred, based on the fusion of Islamic anti-Judaism from the old scriptures with modern European antisemitism. This paper shows how Islamic antisemitism became popularized within the Arab world by the booklet “Islam and Jewry” from 1937 and via the Arabic-language program broadcast by a German shortwave transmitter between April 1939 and April 1945. It also deals with the aftereffects of Nazi propaganda for the Arab world that paved the way for the Arab’s full-scale war against the Jews of Mandatory Palestine in 1948.*

Until 1937, the Nazi government rejected Arab offers of cooperation: It was anxious not to jeopardize British appeasement of Berlin by activities in the Middle East, especially since the Mediterranean fell within the sphere of responsibility of Germany’s Italian ally. In June 1937, however, Berlin revised this approach. The trigger was the proposal from the British Peel Commission for the division of the Palestine Mandate territory into a smaller Jewish and a larger Muslim-Arab state. The formation of a Jewish state “is not in Germany’s interest,” was the instant response of Foreign Minister Konstantin von Neurath. “Germany therefore has an interest in strengthening the Arab world as a counterweight against such a possible increase in power for world Jewry.”<sup>1</sup> Strengthening the Arabs against the Jews—it is true that Berlin initially pursued this new course surreptitiously, lest it alienate London. Nevertheless, the scale of the operations now set in motion was impressive.

The Nazi government began to supply money and weapons to antisemites such as the Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin el-Husseini, who led the “Arab Revolt” between 1936 to 1939. During those years, moderate Palestinian Arab forces that were seeking coexistence with the Zionists had not yet been marginalized. This changed when the Nazis put all their weight on the Mufti’s scale. “The Mufti himself said that it was at that time only because of German money that it had been possible to carry through the uprising in Palestine. From the outset he made major financial demands that the Nazis in very large measure met.”<sup>2</sup>

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1 Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik 1918–1945, Serie D, Band V, Dok. 569.

2 K. Gensicke, *Der Mufti von Jerusalem, Amin el-Husseini, und die Nationalsozialisten* (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 1988), 233–35.

In Egypt, Berlin invested more money in the Muslim Brotherhood than in any other anti-British organization. This organization, founded in 1928, used the riots in Palestine for antisemitic campaigns in Egypt, which enabled them to increase their membership from 800 in 1936 to 200,000 in 1938.<sup>3</sup> In addition to providing funds, Nazi agents organized for the Muslim Brothers so-called “Palestine meetings” and other anti-Jewish lectures and even helped the Muslim Brotherhood to produce explosives for their war against the Yishuv in Palestine.<sup>4</sup> This cooperation, which is evidenced by documents from the British National Archives, took place in complete secrecy because the Nazis did not want to alert British authorities in Egypt or London.

However, Nazi propagandists, in the course of their efforts to mobilize the Arabs against the Jews, had discovered that their racist antisemitism was met with incomprehension. “The level of education of the broad masses is not advanced enough for the understanding of the race theory,” wrote a leading Nazi in Egypt.<sup>5</sup> The instructor for propaganda at the German embassy in Tehran came to the same conclusion: “The broad masses lack a feeling for the race idea,” he explained in a letter to the Foreign Office and therefore recommended to lay “all the emphasis on the religious motif in our propaganda in the Islamic world. This is the only way to win over the Orientals.”<sup>6</sup>

As a consequence, Nazi Germany of all places started to use the Islamic creed as a door opener to gain access to the Muslim masses. “Berlin made explicit use of religious rhetoric, terminology, and imagery and sought to engage with and reinterpret religious doctrine and concepts,” reports David Motadel in his seminal work about *Islam and Nazi Germany’s War*. “Sacred texts such as the Qur’an ... were politicized to incite religious violence against alleged common enemies.”<sup>7</sup> A thirty-one-page brochure in the Arabic language with the title *Islam and Jewry*, published on August 18, 1937, in Cairo, served as a main propaganda tool.

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3 Cf. A. A. M. El-Awaisi, *The Muslim Brothers and the Palestine Question 1928–1947* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1998), 98.

4 Cf. National Archive Kew Garden, London: FA 371/23343 Defense Security Office, Egypt, 10.09.1939—Note on German Suspects—Egypt, 13, 24, 26.

5 G. Krämer, *Minderheit, Millet, Nation? Die Juden in Ägypten 1914–1952* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1982), 278.

6 Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts (PAAA), R 60690, Winkler, “Erfahrungen aus der deutschen Propagandaarbeit in Iran vom November 1939 bis September 1941: Aufzeichnung vom 10. January 1942,” 2–3.

7 D. Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany’s War* (London: Belknap of Harvard University Press, 2014), 76.

## “Islam and Jewry”

*Islam and Jewry* was, as far as we know, the very first text that propagated sheer Jew-hatred in an Islamic context by mixing selected anti-Jewish episodes of Mohammed’s life with the so-called wickedness of Jews in the twentieth century. It was the starting point of what I call “Islamic antisemitism”—the fusion of Islamic anti-Judaism from the old scriptures with European antisemitism.

European antisemitism, as manifested in the phantasm of the Jewish world conspiracy, was alien to the original image of the Jews in Islam. Only in the Christian tradition do Jews appear as a deadly and powerful force capable of killing even God’s only son. They were able to bring death and ruin on humanity—being held responsible for outbreaks of the plague. The Nazis believed in the phantasm of the Jews as the rulers of the world, who were thus also responsible for all its misfortunes. There was, according to their phantasm, only one way to the redemption of the world: the systematic annihilation of the Jews.

This was not the case in Islam. Here, it was not the Jews who murdered the Prophet, but the Prophet who murdered Jews: In the years from 623 to 627, Mohammed had all the Jewish tribes in Medina enslaved, expelled, or killed. Therefore, some typical features of Christian antisemitism did not appear in the Muslim world: “There were no fears of Jewish conspiracy and domination, no charges of diabolic evil. Jews were not accused of poisoning wells or spreading the plague.”<sup>8</sup> Instead, Muslims used to treat the Jews with contempt or condescending toleration. The hatred of Jews fostered in the Qur’an and in the Sunnah pursued the goal of keeping them down as dhimmis: hostility was accompanied by devaluation.

This, however, changed with the emergence of Islamic antisemitism which combines the worst images of Jews from the Muslim and from the Christian tradition. It seems appropriate to take a closer look at *Islam and Jewry*, a manifesto that researchers have largely overlooked so far.

On the one hand, the text builds on the traditions of early Islam: “The battle between the Jews and Islam began when Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina,” we read here:

At that time the Jewish methods were already the same as today. Their weapon as ever was defamation. ... They said Muhammad was a swindler..., they tried to undermine Muhammad’s honor..., they began to ask Muhammad senseless and unsolvable questions.

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<sup>8</sup> B. Lewis, *Semites and Anti-Semites: An Inquiry into Conflict And Prejudice* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1986), 122.

... But with this method too, as before, they had no success. So they ... tried to eradicate the Muslims.

At the same time, the text attacks the Jews in the diction of European antisemitism as “great businessmen,” “exploiters,” “microbes,” and as the perpetrators of the plague. Since Muhammad’s days, we read here, the Jews have been constantly trying to “destroy Muslims.” The brochure concludes that

The verses from the Qur’an and hadith prove to you that the Jews have been the bitterest enemies of Islam and continue to try to destroy it. Do not believe them, they only know hypocrisy and cunning. Hold together, fight for the Islamic thought, fight for your religion and your existence! Do not rest until your land is free of the Jews.<sup>9</sup>

This manifesto was an innovation in several ways. First, while the classical Islamic literature treats Mohammad’s struggle with the Jews as a minor episode in the life of the Prophet, now “Muhammad’s conflict with the Jews has been portrayed as a central theme in his career and their enmity to him given a cosmic significance.”<sup>10</sup> Second, the anti-Jewish components of Islam, which had been dormant or of less significance during the former hundred years, were suddenly invested with new life and vigour. Third, the anti-Jewish verses of the Qur’an were generalized and considered valid for the twentieth century: Converging with European racism, the Jews were attributed a certain unchanging nature with negative characteristics. Fourth, the religious patterns have been combined with elements of a paranoid conspiracy theory: The Muslims were considered to be eternal victims (“They try to eradicate the Muslims”) in order to legitimize new forms of aggression (“Do not rest until your land is free of the Jews”), which were more reminiscent of the policies of the Nazis than the attitudes of Mohammad.

During the war, Nazi Germany printed and disseminated *Islam and Jewry* nearly unchanged in several languages and editions. For example, there is proof that in 1942, the Spanish authorities confiscated about 1,500 copies of “a German propaganda pamphlet in the Arabic language called ‘The Islam and the Jews’” that had been sent to the German consulate in Tangiers. According to the German Foreign Ministry, these brochures were to have been distributed “unobtrusively” in Spanish Morocco.

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<sup>9</sup> Translated from the German version of “Islam-Judentum. Aufruf des Großmufti an die islamische Welt im Jahre 1937,” in *Islam, Judentum, Bolschewismus*, ed. M. Sabry (Berlin: Junker & Dünhaupt, 1938), 22–32.

<sup>10</sup> Lewis, *Semites*, 128.

The Spanish authorities, however, who were responsible for Tangiers, prevented this. They were of the opinion that “the distribution of such a propaganda directed against the Jewish elements in Spanish Morocco could not be permitted” and had all copies confiscated and destroyed.<sup>11</sup>

In 1943, another 10,000 copies of the same pamphlet were printed in Zagreb, this time in Serbo-Croatian (*Islam i Zidovstvo*), and distributed in Bosnia and Croatia.<sup>12</sup>

Though there is currently no overview of the spread of this pamphlet, *Islam and Jewry* might well be regarded as the forerunner of Sayyid Qutb’s notorious text *Our Struggle with the Jews* of the 1950s.<sup>13</sup> David Motadel regards *Islam and Jewry* as “one of the most significant examples of this kind of religiously charged anti-Jewish propaganda dispersed among Muslims,”<sup>14</sup> while historian Jeffrey Herf deemed this text as “one of the founding texts of the Islamist tradition, one that defined the religion of Islam as a source of hatred of the Jews.”<sup>15</sup>

The publisher of the first Arabic edition of *Islam and Jewry* was Mohamad Ali al-Taher, director of the “Palestinian-Arab Bureau of Information” in Egypt. Al-Taher was a well-known journalist from Palestine who had lived in Cairo for many years. He was, according to the Norwegian professor of Middle East Studies, Brynjar Lia, one of Amin el-Husseini’s “Palestinian contacts in Cairo” and is said to have contributed to the transfer of German Nazi money to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>16</sup> There are other archival sources that indicate a collaboration between al-Taher and German agents.<sup>17</sup>

Nonetheless, he was not the author of the pamphlet. “A distinguished Arab wrote this book about the Jews and their behavior,” wrote al-Taher in his short

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11 Zentrum Moderner Orient Berlin, Höpp-Archiv, “Beschlagnahme einer deutschen Propagandaschrift, ‘Der Islam und die Juden’ (in arabischer Sprache),” No. 01.10.015.

12 Cf. J. Lebl, *The Mufti of Jerusalem Haj-Amin el-Husseini and National-Socialism* (Belgrade: Cigoja Stampa, 2007), 311–19; Motadel, *Islam*, 196.

13 Cf. R. L. Nettler, *Past Trials and Present Tribulations: A Muslim Fundamentalist’s View of the Jews* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1987).

14 Motadel, *Islam*, 196.

15 J. Herf, “Haj Amin al-Husseini, the Nazis and the Holocaust: The Origins, Nature and After-effects of Collaboration,” *Jewish Political Studies Review* 26, nos. 3 & 4 (2014): 15.

16 Cf. B. Lia, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt: The Rise of an Islamic Mass Movement 1928–1942* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1998), 179.

17 Cf. M. Küntzel, *Nazis und der Nahe Osten: Wie der islamische Antisemitismus entstand* (Leipzig-Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2019), 70–71.

preface to *Islam and Jewry* “and we greatly appreciate it.”<sup>18</sup> But who was that “distinguished Arab”?

This secret was not revealed in Egypt in August 1937 or later. It was in Germany that Amin el-Husseini was first named as the alleged author of *Islam and Jewry*. In 1938, the Berlin-based “Junker und Dünnhaupt Verlag” published the entire pamphlet under the title: “Islam-Judaism. Call of the Grand Mufti to the Islamic world in 1937.”<sup>19</sup> In subsequent editions initiated by the Nazis during the Second World War, the Mufti continued to be named as the author.

Whether el-Husseini was in fact the sole initiator and author of this booklet, however, is an open question. There is no doubt that the Nazis used this pamphlet for their own propaganda purposes. Were they also involved in its creation? On the one hand, the Arabic text is characterized by a poetic style of writing, such as can be found in other texts of the Mufti.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, the Mufti never claimed authorship.

In 1937, the Nazis were el-Husseini’s closest allies. The “only great power interested in Arab victory over the Jews of Palestine and fully trusted by the Arabs is Germany,” Fritz Grobba, the German Ambassador in Baghdad stated in a report about a visit by the Mufti’s emissaries at the beginning of January 1937.<sup>21</sup> In the summer of 1937, when the Mufti was hiding on Jerusalem’s Temple Mount, he was in contact with representatives of Nazi Germany through a middleman. At that time, Nazi propagandists had already discovered the antisemitic potential of Islam. Thus, in April 1935, the Nazi magazine *Weltkampf* published an article about the “antisemitic movement in Islam.”<sup>22</sup>

It is nevertheless still unclear how the writing and publication of *Islam and Jewry* came about and what role the Nazis played in this. In addition, we do not know what contacts al-Taher, the publisher of *Islam and Jewry*, might have had with German agents in Egypt in 1937. It is also unclear how the 1938 German translation of *Islam and Jewry* was organized and who did it. While historians have still to answer important questions about *Islam and Jewry*, the political context which facilitated the emergence of Islamic antisemitism is quite clear.

In his short preface, Al-Taher connected *Islam and Jewry* to the fight against the partition of Palestine as proposed in the 1937 Peel Plan: The Palestinian-Arab Bureau of Information is publishing this work because Muslims and Arabs

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**18** I am grateful to the Israeli Arabist and historian Dr. Edy Cohen, who discovered the original Arabic booklet and translated its cover page for me.

**19** Translated from the German version of “Islam-Judentum,” in Sabry, *Islam, Judentum*, 22–32.

**20** Verbal message from Dr. Edy Cohen.

**21** PAAA, Akten betreffend Judenfragen, Pol. VII, R 104791, Grobba, Bagdad, den 5. Januar 1937.

**22** Kureshi, “Antisemitische Bewegung im Islam,” *Der Weltkampf* 12, no. 136 (1935): 113–15.

“should know about Jews just now while the Jews seek to create a state by eliminating Muslims and Arabs.”<sup>23</sup>

The brochure itself culminates in the following call: “Do not tolerate the partition plan, for Palestine has been an Arab country for centuries and shall remain Arabic forever.”<sup>24</sup> *Islam and Jewry* was thus intended to theologize the territorial conflict between Jews and Arabs in order to prevent the realization of a partition proposal for Palestine—the first important attempt at a compromise—which had initially been met with a degree of approval from some moderate Arabs.

*Islam and Jewry* was published eleven years before the State of Israel came to existence. This fact alone contradicts the widespread assumption that Islamic antisemitism was a response to Israel’s actions. The Nazi’s engagement in this respect and at such an early stage also shows that their Islamic turn was not just a tactic due to the needs of the Second World War. Instead, the Nazis tried to mobilize and exploit the antisemitic potential, which Islamic texts can provide if you read them in a selective way. This certain way of reading the Islamic scriptures, however, started to become common in the Middle East in 1937.

“The classical Islamic literature treats [Mohammed’s] struggle with the Jews as a relatively minor episode in the career of the Prophet,” observes Bernard Lewis. In modern times, however, Lewis continues,

under external influences which are easily recognizable, Muhammad’s conflict with the Jews has been portrayed as a central theme in his career, and their enmity to him given a cosmic significance. This is new, and related directly to new situations and influences.<sup>25</sup>

New situations—the uproar against the Peel plan and new “external influences”—by the Nazis for example, changed the picture of the Jews in the Middle East, indeed. And it was *Islam and Jewry* that gave the alleged Jewish enmity toward Mohammed a cosmic significance for the first time.

## Radio Zeesen

The most effective vehicle of Nazi propaganda, however, was the Arabic-language broadcasting out of Zeesen, a town with some four thousand inhabitants to the south of Berlin that once housed one of the world’s most powerful shortwave transmitters. Its influence has long been neglected by historians of the

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<sup>23</sup> According to the translation by Dr. Edy Cohen.

<sup>24</sup> Translated from the German version of “Islam-Judentum,” in Sabry, *Islam, Judentum*, 22–32.

<sup>25</sup> Lewis, *Semites*, 128.

Middle East. This author has written about it since 2005,<sup>26</sup> but in the meantime, Jeffrey Herf in his *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World* and David Motadel in his *Islam and Nazi Germany's War* analysed extensively this “long-range gun in the ether” as Joseph Goebbels dubbed it. Based on new sources, both authors show how the Nazis used this propaganda tool to popularize the Jew-hatred found in early Islamic sources and radicalized it by combining it with the patterns of European antisemitism.<sup>27</sup>

Between April 1939 and April 1945, Radio Zeesen broadcast in standard Arabic every day, soon adding programs in Maghribi Arabic, and broadcasts intended for Turks, Iranians, and Indians. The Oriental Service of the radio station had absolute priority over all other foreign broadcast offices and employed around eighty staff members.<sup>28</sup> They presented the Allies in the Second World War as lackeys of the Jews and drummed the notion of the “United Jewish Nations” into the audience. At the same time, the Jews were attacked as the worst enemies of Islam.

At that time, listening to radio took place primarily in public squares or bazaars and coffee houses. Various testimonies from that period indicate that the German broadcast in the Arabic language was more popular than the BBC's broadcasts in Arab languages, for several reasons.

Firstly, its programs were professionally produced, with regular recitations from the Koran and well performed Arabic music. Secondly, there were quite popular broadcasters, such as Hajj Amin el Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem, the prominent Iranian announcer Bahram Shahrokh, Taqi al-Din al-Hilali from Morocco, and the prominent Iraqi journalist Yunus al-Bahri. “Berlin could never have been able to find a better-suited man to be its propaganda instrument through the Radio,” a British intelligence report remarked about al-Bahri. “With his sharp voice, aggressive speeches, and marked ability to raise his voice, his broadcasts quickly became the earmark of Germany's Arabic service.”<sup>29</sup> Thirdly, the German transmitter—overhauled for the Olympics in 1936 in Germany—was more powerful than those of its competitors, thus ensuring a better listening experience. Fourthly, Muslims were addressed as Muslims, not as Arabs: With its

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26 Cf. M. Küntzel, “National Socialism and Antisemitism in the Arab World,” *Jewish Political Studies Review* 17 (2005): 99–118.

27 Cf. J. Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Motadel, *Islam*.

28 Cf. W. Schwipps, “Wortschlacht im Äther,” in *Wortschlacht im Äther: Der deutsche Auslandsrundfunk im Zweiten Weltkrieg: Geschichte des Kurzwellenrundfunks in Deutschland 1939–1945*, ed. Deutsche Welle (Berlin: Haude & Spenerische Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1971), 58.

29 As cited by Motadel, *Islam*, 93.

pro-Arab shift, Berlin had discovered the antimodernist potential of Islam. German propaganda, however, propagated a politicized version of Islam. According to Motadel, “German propaganda combined Islam with anti-Jewish agitation to an extent that had not hitherto been known in the modern Muslim world.”<sup>30</sup>

Jeffrey Herf highlights the centrality of the teachings of the Koran for Germany’s Arabic propaganda as well:

It was its reading of this work and this tradition—not citations from *Mein Kampf*, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, or speeches by Hitler or Goebbels—that served as the most important entry point to Arab and Muslim listeners.<sup>31</sup>

The reception and the effectiveness of Germany’s broadcast propaganda is difficult to assess. There are indications, though, that it had a certain influence. Reader Bullard, the British Ambassador in Tehran, in 1940 wrote that

Even if we do broadcast in Persian, we cannot hope to rival the Germans in interest, as their more violent, abusive style, with exaggerated claims ... appeals to the Persian public.<sup>32</sup>

These appeals were not only to the Persians. In 1939, a British informant reported that he had passed a café in Jaffa. It was possible to listen to the German radio even outside, he wrote. Moreover, in his words, “all around the café stood Arabs—even on the nearby balconies—listening to the broadcast.”<sup>33</sup> Also instructive is another British report about the effect of Radio Zeesen on the Arabs in Palestine, written in October 1939:

In general it may be said that the middle, lower middle and lower classes listen to the Arabic broadcasts from Berlin with a good deal of enjoyment. They like the racy, “juicy” stuff which is put over; they are amused at the slanderous and libelous attacks on British personalities. ... What the average Palestine Arab does imbibe, however, is the anti-Jew material. This he wants to hear and to believe; and he does both. To that extent German propaganda is definitely effective.<sup>34</sup>

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**30** Motadel, *Islam*, 97.

**31** Herf, *Nazi Propaganda*, 197.

**32** R. Bullard, *Letters from Tehran: A British Ambassador in World War II Persia* (London: Tauris, 1991), 28.

**33** Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem, Report by Kapeliuk, 18. October 1939 as cited by R. Wildangel, *Zwischen Achse und Mandatsmacht: Palästina und der Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 2007), 359.

**34** British National Archive, London, WO 208/1701, Palestine Historical. Monthly appreciations German Nazi activities in Palestine. Oct '38–Oct '39.

In spring 1944, a “Weekly Review of Foreign Broadcasts,” done for the US Military Intelligence Division concluded:

the anti-Jewish theme has in the past constituted a good half of the German propaganda directed towards the Near East. ... In recent weeks the Arabic voice in Berlin has surpassed all its previous records in inciting violence in Palestine.<sup>35</sup>

The bulk of the radio’s verbal material was indeed devoted to whipping up antisemitic hatred. “The defense of your life is a duty which can only be fulfilled by annihilating the Jews” was the message on July 7, 1942. “Kill the Jews, burn their property, destroy their stores ... Your sole hope of salvation lies in annihilating the Jews before thy annihilate you.”<sup>36</sup> At the same time, the anger of Radio Zeesen turned on fellow Arabs who entertained the possibility of coexistence with Jews in Palestine:

Noble Arabs! You should maintain your policy of boycotting the Jews. You should punish those who ignore the boycott. All Arabs who collaborate with the Jews should be destroyed before they help the Jews destroy us.<sup>37</sup>

However, according to Herf,

the fusion of antisemitism with anti-Zionism was the key ideological weapon of the Nazi regime in its efforts to win support from Arabs and Muslims in North Africa and the Middle East.<sup>38</sup>

From April 1939 to April 1945, Radio Zeesen constantly urged their listeners to prevent the birth of a Jewish state and exterminate the Jews living in Palestine. It broadcast, for example, that the Jews would not be satisfied until they had made “every territory between the Tigris and the Nile Jewish.” If they succeeded,

there will remain not a single Arab Moslem or Christian in the Arab world. Arabs! Imagine Egypt, Iraq and all the Arab countries becoming Jewish with no Christianity or Islam there.<sup>39</sup>

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**35** Weekly Review of Foreign Broadcasts, F.C.C., No. 118, 3/4/44 “Near and Middle East,” as cited by Herf, *Nazi Propaganda*, 219.

**36** Voice of Free Arabism, July 7, 1942, 8:15 pm, “Kill the Jews before They Kill You,” Kirk to Secretary of State, No. 502 (July 21, 1942), as cited by Herf, *Nazi Propaganda*, 126.

**37** Arab Nation, April 30, 1943, 9:00 pm, “Has the Jewish Danger Passed?,” Kirk to Secretary of State, No. 1047, Cairo (May 15, 1943), as cited by Herf, *Nazi Propaganda*, 171.

**38** Herf, *Nazi Propaganda*, 178.

**39** Berlin in Arabic, September 8, 1943, “Talk: The Ambitions of the Jews,” Kirk to Secretary of State, No. 1313, Cairo, September 23, 1943, as cited by Herf, *Nazi Propaganda*, 57.

The more impending the defeat of Germany, the shriller the warnings of Radio Zeesen about the consequences for Palestine should “World Jewry” take advantage of its opportunity.

Radio Zeesen stopped broadcasting in April 1945. However, the echoes of this propaganda, which fell on receptive ears due to anti-Jewish elements of the Qur’an and other Islamic sources, continued to reverberate. While the view of the British Foreign Office, which in 1946 “spoke of Arab hatred of the Jews being greater than that of the Nazis,” may be exaggerated,<sup>40</sup> it is obvious that wartime Nazi propaganda contributed to increased hostility after the war.

## Antisemitic Mobilization against the New-Founded Israel

The significance of Nazi propaganda became clear on November 2, 1945, the anniversary of the Balfour declaration. On that day, the worst anti-Jewish pogroms in Egypt’s history were perpetrated in Cairo: Demonstrators “broke into the Jewish quarter, plundered houses and shops, attacked non-Muslims, and devastated the adjacent Ashkenazi synagogue before finally setting it on fire.”<sup>41</sup>

This Arab mob was organized by the Muslim Brotherhood, which, after 1945, turned out to be the most important political force in Egypt with 1,500 branches and at least 500,000 members. By 1948, these figures had doubled or even tripled.<sup>42</sup>

They tirelessly defended the war crimes perpetrated by Amin el-Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem. “Should one hair of the Mufti’s be touched, every Jew in the world would be killed without mercy”—threatened their newspaper in 1946—some months after the Holocaust.<sup>43</sup>

Utilizing the arguments of the Nazis, the Muslim Brotherhood started to radicalize the Arab street in their struggle against the Jewish state. They adopted the antisemitic course of Amin el-Husseini in every respect: “This hero fought Zion-

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<sup>40</sup> B. Morris, *1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 34.

<sup>41</sup> Krämer, *Minderheit*, 320.

<sup>42</sup> El-Awaisi, *The Muslim Brothers*, 135.

<sup>43</sup> “One hair of the Mufti’s is worth the Jews of the Whole World,” *Al Ikhwan Al Muslimun*, June 20, 1946, Tuck to Secretary of State, No. 1648 (June 24, 1945), as cited by Herf, *Nazi Propaganda*, 242–43.

ism with the help of Hitler and Germany,” they proclaimed in 1946. “Germany and Hitler are gone, but Amin Al-Husseini will continue the struggle.”<sup>44</sup>

Historians of the Middle East agree that it was to a large extent the pressure from the “Arab street” that had previously driven a reluctant Arab League into a full-scale war against Israel in 1948.<sup>45</sup> Egypt’s Premier Nuqrashi, for example, was against the military assault that took place in 1948. However, he said he was swayed by public opinion that “was all in favor of the war, and considered anyone who refused to fight as a traitor.”<sup>46</sup>

When the Arab League met in Cairo in December 1947, the Brotherhood brought, for example, 100,000 demonstrators into the streets. According to a contemporary account, on the terrace of the Savoy Hotel where the meeting of the League took place, “the Prime Ministers of the Arab states stood with worthy and grave expressions acknowledging, fez in hand, the salutes of the passing parade of believers.”<sup>47</sup> The Arab League responded to this demonstration by, for the first time, agreeing to the training of volunteers for jihad in Palestine. Thus, it was under the impact of the Brotherhood’s mass mobilization that a reluctant Egypt government began its active participation in the fighting in Palestine.

In addition, while the Yishuv had to defend itself against guerrilla attacks, using all necessary means to do so, the Muslim Brotherhood spread rumors of horrific Zionist atrocities against Arabs in Palestine. Thus, they “created an atmosphere in which war seemed the only logical and natural process,” writes Thomas Mayer. “The [Brotherhood] Society succeeded in drawing Egypt into a full-scale military initiative in Palestine.”<sup>48</sup> The American embassy in Damascus confirmed this assessment. Without referring to the Brotherhood by name, they identified “the combined momentum of their own rhetoric and pressure from below” as the cause of the Egyptian invasion of Israel. The “Government appears to have led public opinion to the brink of war and [is] now unable to retreat.”<sup>49</sup>

Only in December 1948, after this war was lost, did the Egypt government dissolve the branches of the Muslim Brotherhood and ban the organization.

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<sup>44</sup> As cited by Herf, *Nazi Propaganda*, 244.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. M. Küntzel, “The Aftershock of the Nazi War against the Jews, 1947–1948: Could War in the Middle East Have Been Prevented?” *Jewish Political Studies Review* 26 (2014): 38–53.

<sup>46</sup> F. A. Gerges, “Egypt and the 1948 War,” in *The War for Palestine. Rewriting the History of 1948*, ed. E. L. Rogan and A. Shlaim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 154.

<sup>47</sup> “Mit deutschem Gruß für Palästina,” *Spiegel* 51 (1947): 11.

<sup>48</sup> T. Mayer, “The Military Force of Islam: The Society of the Muslim Brethren and the Palestine Question: 1945–48,” in *Zionism and Arabism in Palestine and Israel*, ed. E. Kedourie and S. G. Haim (London: Frank Cass, 1982), 110–11.

<sup>49</sup> R. Memminger, Damascus to Secretary of State, May 9, 1948, USNA, 800 Syria/9–548, as cited by Morris, *1948*, 181.

Why were the Arab rulers not able to dissolve the militant and antisemitic demonstrations of the “Arab street” in the years before?

Probably, those rulers were obsessed by an antisemitic kind of anti-Zionism, as well. Thus, two years after the liberation of Auschwitz, Ibn Saud described the Jews as an “aggressive people” whose ambitions “extend to all the Arab states where holy places are to be found.”<sup>50</sup> Lebanese Foreign Minister, Hamid Frangieh, regarded “the expansionist efforts of Zionism a serious threat to peace.”<sup>51</sup> Iraqi Crown Prince Abd al-llah considered Zionism “the greatest tragedy of the twentieth century,”<sup>52</sup> while an Egyptian member of parliament viewed it as “a cancer in the Arab body.”<sup>53</sup> It is no wonder, therefore, that an assembly of Arab kings and princes convened by Egypt’s King Farouk in May 1946 struck the same note. Their resolution states as follows:

We have decided that Zionism poses a danger not only to Palestine but also to all other Arab countries and to all nations of Islam. Therefore it is the duty of all Arab countries and Islamic countries to resist the danger of Zionism.<sup>54</sup>

The paranoid delusion that a few thousand Zionists in Britain and the US together with the Yishuv in Palestine constituted a dangerous global power that threatened the whole Islamic world had nothing to do with reality but much to do with the cumulative impact of the years of relentless Nazi propaganda since broadcasts from Berlin had permanently claimed that Zionism was inherently expansionist.

## Conclusion

In 1948, there were, of course, also other motives to prevent the creation of the state of Israel—for example, the Egypt’s rulers desire to counter the territorial

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**50** *Archiv der Gegenwart*, United Press, “Telegramm von König Ibn Saud und Präsident Truman,” entry of October 18, 1946, 901.

**51** *Archiv der Gegenwart*, “UN-Bulletin, Declaration by Hamid Frangieh on behalf of the Arab League,” entry of July 22, 1947, 1151.

**52** FO 371/45237/E 2090, Oriental Department to Dickson, 26 March 1945, as cited by M. Litvak and E. Webman, *From Empathy to Denial: Arab Responses to the Holocaust* (London: Hurst, 2009), 39.

**53** *Al-Ahram*, 6 and 7 March 1946, as cited by Meir and Webman, *Empathy*, 41.

**54** Third Section of the Resolutions of the Anshas Summit of May 28 and 29, 1946, as cited by Z. Elpeleg, *Through the Eyes of the Mufti: The Essays of Haj Amin*, trans. R. Kessel (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2009), 194.

ambitions of Emir Abdullah from Trans-Jordan, or the feeling that Palestine had become a test of the Arabs independence vis-à-vis the imperial powers. However, the aftereffect of Nazi propaganda played a crucial role, as well. Nazi Germany's efforts to incite Arabs against the Jews changed the perception of the Jews within Islamic societies. While individual editions of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* were already circulating in Palestine during the 1920s, European conspiracy theories became popular only since the late 1930s. In addition, Radio Zeesen strengthened an exclusively anti-Jewish reading of the Islamic scriptures and agitated in an antisemitic manner against the Zionist project.

Nazi propaganda thus contributed to the fact that the end of World War II was followed by a twofold division of the world. The one division between politico-economic systems is known as the Cold War. The second cleavage, merely covered over by the Cold War, has to do with the persistence of National Socialist modes of thought particularly in the Arab world. In her report on the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961, Hannah Arendt cast her gaze into this abyss:

the newspapers in Damascus and Beirut, in Cairo and Jordan did not conceal either their sympathy for Eichmann nor their regret that he "did not finish the job"; a radio broadcast from Cairo on the opening day of the trial even included a little sideswipe at the Germans, reproaching them for the fact that "in the last war, no German plane had ever flown over and bombed a Jewish settlement."<sup>55</sup>

Obviously, there was not only a temporal proximity between the Arab war against Israel and the Nazi war against the Jews three years before but also an ideological proximity. In this respect, the war of 1947/48 might appear as an aftershock of the Nazi war before.

In today's Middle East, a rhetoric that was influenced by Nazi sources still prevails. To this day, Palestinian leaders continue to refuse to recognize the Jewish state by using those eighty-year-old pretensions. The more that connection is understood, the easier might it become to free the lives of Palestinians and Arabs from the idiocy of antisemitism.

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<sup>55</sup> H. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: Ein Bericht von der Banalität des Bösen* (Munich: Piper, 1986), 81.

*Political scientist and historian Matthias Küntzel, born in 1955, holds a tenured part-time position as a teacher of political science at a technical college in Hamburg, Germany. Between 2004 and 2015, Küntzel was an external research associate at the Vidal Sassoon International Centre for the Study of Antisemitism (SICSA) at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He is the author of Jihad and Jew-Hatred. Islamism, Nazism and the Roots of 9/11 (Telos 2009) and, most recently, of Nazis and the Middle East: How Islamic Antisemitism came into Being (Hentrich & Hentrich 2019; in German).*

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