

# Relations between Nazi Germany and the Arab world



Muslim soldiers of the *Handschar Waffen SS* reading a pamphlet written by *Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini* titled '*Islam and Judaism*.' They wear distinctive *Handschar tarboosh* headgear, and insignias (scimitars and swastikas) on their lapels.

Relations between Nazi Germany and the Arab World refers to political and military links between Germany and Arab nationalists during the era of *Nazi Germany* (1933–1945). The relationship between the Nazi movement and the leadership of the *Arab world* encompassed contempt, propaganda, collaboration and in some instances emulation. Cooperative relationships were founded on shared hostilities toward common enemies, such as British and French imperialism, colonialism, communism, and Zionism.

## 1 Nazi perceptions of the Arab World

### 1.1 Hitler's views on Islam and the Arab world

Among eastern religions, Hitler described religious leaders such as *Confucius*, *Buddha*, and *Muhammad* as providers of spiritual "sustenance". In speeches, Hitler made apparently warm references towards Muslim culture such as: "The peoples of Islam will always be closer to us than, for example, France".<sup>[1]</sup>

A famous anecdote about *Adolf Hitler's* perspectives towards *Islam* and the *Arabs* is recounted by *Albert Speer* in his best-selling memoir, *Inside the Third Reich*. Speer reports that "Hitler had been much impressed by a scrap of history he had learned from a delegation of distinguished

Arabs."<sup>[2]</sup> The delegation had speculated that the world would have become "Mohammedan" if the *Berbers* and *Arabs* had won the *Battle of Tours* in the 8th Century AD, and that the Germans would have become heirs to "a religion that believed in spreading the faith by the sword and in subjugating all nations to that faith. Such a creed was perfectly suited to the German temperament."<sup>[3]</sup> Speer then presents Hitler's claims on this subject:

Hitler said that the conquering Arabs, because of their racial inferiority, would in the long run have been unable to contend with the harsher climate of the country. They could not have kept down the more vigorous natives, so that ultimately not Arabs but Islamized Germans could have stood at the head of this Mohammedan Empire.<sup>[4]</sup>

This "exchange" occurred when Hitler received *Saudi Arabian* ruler *Ibn Saud's* special envoy, *Khalid al-Hud al-Gargani*.<sup>[5]</sup> Earlier in this meeting Hitler noted that one of the three reasons why Germany had warm sympathies for the Arabs was:

... because we were jointly fighting the *Jews*. This led him to discuss Palestine and conditions there, and he then stated that he himself would not rest until the last Jew had left Germany. *Kalid al Hud* observed that the *Prophet Mohammed* ... had acted the same way. He had driven the Jews out of *Arabia* ....<sup>[6]</sup>

Gilbert Achcar wryly observes that the Führer did not point out to his Arab visitors at that meeting that until then he had incited German Jews to emigrate to Palestine, and the Reich actively helped Zionist organizations get around alleged British-imposed restrictions on Jewish immigration.<sup>[7]</sup>

Hitler had told his military commanders in 1939, shortly before the start of the war:

We shall continue to make disturbances in the *Far East* and in *Arabia*. Let us think as men and let us see in these peoples at best lacquered half-apes who are anxious to experience the lash.<sup>[8][9]</sup>

Prior to the **Second World War**, all of **North Africa** and the Middle-East were under the control of European powers. Despite the Nazi racial theories which denigrated Arabs as members of an “inferior Semitic race”, many Germans made exceptions for some Arabs who assisted the Reich in fighting the British for possession of the **Middle East**. Mufti Haj Amin al-Husseini, for example, “was granted honorary Aryan” status by the Nazis for his close collaboration with Hitler and the Third Reich.<sup>[10][11]</sup>

The German government developed a cordial association and cooperated with some Arab nationalist leaders based on their common anti-colonial and anti-Zionist interests. The most notable examples of these common-cause fights were the 1936–1939 **Arab revolt in Palestine** and other actions led by Grand Mufti Haj Amin al-Husseini, and the **Anglo-Iraqi War**, when the **Golden Square** (four generals led by Rashid Ali al-Gaylani) overthrew the pro-British 'Abd al-Ilah regency in Iraq and installed a pro-Axis government.<sup>[12][13][14]</sup>

In response to the Rashid Ali coup, Hitler issued **Führer Directive No. 30** on 23 May 1941 to support their cause. This order began: “The Arab Freedom Movement in the **Middle East** is our natural ally against England.”<sup>[14]</sup>

General der Flieger Hellmuth Felmy was appointed central authority for all “Arab affairs concerning the Wehrmacht” under the so-called terms of this “Directive No. 30”.<sup>[15]</sup> General Felmy summarized the military perspective on strategic common interests of German and Arab nationalists in the following passage:

The already tense situation in the Middle East was further complicated by the emergence of Jewish nationalistic aspirations. Arab hatred of the Jews and disappointment at the failed Arab hopes for independence led to bloody riots. At first purely anti-Jewish in nature and directed against the rapidly increasing Jewish immigration into Palestine, the uprisings were later aimed at Great Britain as the mandatory power. The situation continued to be unsatisfactory until the outbreak of World War II, when it was overshadowed by the crisis in Europe. When England declared war on Germany the Zionist organizations, which had actively supported the influx of Jewish immigrants in Palestine, at once proclaimed solidarity with Britain against Germany.<sup>[16]</sup>

On 11 June 1941 Hitler and the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces issued Directive No. 32, titled “Preparations for the period after 'Barbarossa'” which read (in part):

Exploitation of the Arab Freedom Movement. The situation of the English in the Middle East will be rendered more precarious, in the event of major German operations, if more

British forces are tied down at the right moment by civil commotion or revolt. All military, political, and propaganda measures to this end must be closely coordinated during the preparatory period. As central agency abroad I nominate Special Staff F, which is to take part in all plans and actions in the Arab area, whose headquarters are to be in the area of the Commander Armed Forces South-east. The most competent available experts and agents will be made available to it. The Chief of the High Command of the Armed Forces will specify the duties of Special Staff F, in agreement with the Foreign Minister where political questions are involved.<sup>[17]</sup>

General der Artillerie Walter Warlimont, who was involved in military alliances with some Arabs, reports that many German officers believed:

...the only real political rallying point among the Arabs was their common hatred of the Jews, while “Arab nationalist movements” as such, because of the diversity of interests in the various Arab countries, existed only on paper.<sup>[18]</sup>

## 2 Arab perceptions of Hitler and Nazism

According to Gilbert Achcar, there was no unified Arab perception of Nazism:

'In the first place, there is no such thing as Arabs. To speak in the singular of an Arab discourse is an aberration. The Arab world is driven by a multiplicity of points of view. At the time, one could single out four major ideological currents, which extend from western liberalism, through **Marxism** and nationalism, to **Islamic fundamentalism**. In regard to these four, two, namely western liberalism and Marxism, clearly rejected Nazism, in part on shared grounds (such as the heritage of **enlightenment** thinkers, and the denunciation of Nazism as a form of **racism**), and partially because of their geopolitical affiliations. On this issue, Arab nationalism is contradictory. If one looks into it closely, however, the number of nationalistic groups which identified themselves with Nazi propaganda turns out to be quite scaled-down. There is only one clone of Nazism in the Arab world, namely the **Syrian social national party**, which was founded by a Lebanese Christian, Antoun Saadeh. The **Young Egypt Party** flirted for a time with

Nazism, but it was a fickle, weathercock party. As to accusations that the **Ba'ath party** was, from the very outset in the 1940s, inspired by Nazism, they are completely false.<sup>[19]</sup>

Hitler and fascist ideology were controversial in the Arab world, just as they were in Europe, with both supporters and opponents.

Massive programs of propaganda were launched in the Arab world, first by **Fascist Italy** and later on by **Nazi Germany**. The Nazis in particular focused on impacting the new generation of political thinkers and activists.<sup>[20]</sup>

In 1932, Hitler was given the name *Abu Ali* in Syria, and he was named *Muhammad Haidar* in Egypt.<sup>[21]</sup>

After Hitler was elected in March 1933, the Mufti of Jerusalem immediately made contact with the Nazis, according to Heinrich Wolff, the German consul-general in Jerusalem.<sup>[22]</sup>

**Erwin Rommel** was almost as popular as Hitler. Some Arabs used “Heil Rommel” as a common greeting in Arab countries. Arabs thought the Germans would free them from the rule of the old colonial powers France and Britain. After France’s defeat by Nazi Germany in 1940, some Arabs were chanting against the French and British around the streets of **Damascus**: “No more Monsieur, no more Mister, Allah’s in Heaven and Hitler’s on earth.”<sup>[23]</sup> Posters in Arabic stating “In heaven God is your ruler, on earth Hitler” were frequently displayed in shops in the towns of **Syria**.<sup>[24]</sup>

Some wealthy Arabs who traveled to Germany in the 1930s brought back fascist ideals and incorporated them into **Arab Nationalism**.<sup>[25]</sup> One of the principal founders of Ba'athist thought and the **Ba'ath Party**, **Zaki al-Arsuzi**, stated that **Fascism** and **Nazism** had greatly influenced Ba'athist ideology. An associate of al-Arsuzi, **Sami al-Jundi**, wrote:

“We were racists. We admired the Nazis. We were immersed in reading Nazi literature and books that were the source of the Nazi spirit. We were the first who thought of a translation of *Mein Kampf*. Anyone who lived in Damascus at that time was witness to the Arab inclination toward Nazism. **Michel Aflaq** a founder of the Ba'athist philosophy admired Hitler and the Nazis for standing up to Britain and America. This admiration would combine aspects of Nazism into Ba'athism.”<sup>[26][27]</sup>

The two most noted Arab politicians who actively collaborated with the Nazis were Grand Mufti of Jerusalem (al Quds) Haj Amin al-Husseini,<sup>[28][29]</sup> and the Iraqi prime minister Rashid Ali al-Gaylani.<sup>[30][31]</sup>

The British forced Mufti al-Husseini into exile for his role in the 1936–1939 Arab revolt in Palestine. The ex-Mufti



*Haj Amin al-Husseini and Adolf Hitler on 28 November 1941.*

had agents in the **Kingdom of Iraq**, the **French Mandate of Syria** and in **Mandatory Palestine**. In 1941, the Mufti actively supported the Iraqi Golden Square *coup d'état*, led by Rashid Ali al-Gaylani.<sup>[21]</sup>

After the Golden Square Iraqi regime was defeated by pro-British forces, Rashid Ali, the Mufti, and other Iraqi veterans took refuge in Europe, where they supported Axis interests. They were particularly successful in recruiting several tens-of-thousands of Muslims for membership in German *Schutzstaffel* (SS) units, and as propagandists for the Arabic-speaking world. The range of collaborative activities was wide. For instance, **Anwar Sadat**, who later became president of **Egypt**, was a willing co-operator in Nazi Germany’s espionage according to his own memoirs.<sup>[20]</sup>

**Adolf Hitler** met with Haj Amin al-Husseini on 28 November 1941. The official German notes of that meeting contain numerous references to combatting **Jews** both inside and outside Europe. The following excerpts from that meeting are statements from Hitler to the Mufti:

Germany stood for uncompromising war against the Jews. That naturally included active opposition to the Jewish national home in Palestine, which was nothing other than a center, in the form of a state, for the exercise of destructive influence by Jewish interests. ... This was the decisive struggle; on the political plane, it presented itself in the main as a conflict between Germany and England, but ideologically it was a battle between National Socialism and the Jews. It went without saying that Germany would furnish positive and practical aid to the Arabs involved in the same struggle, because platonic promises were useless in a war for survival or destruction in which the Jews were able to mobilize all of England’s power for their ends....the Fuhrer would on his own give the Arab world the assurance that its hour of liberation had arrived. Germany’s objective would then be solely the destruction of the Jewish ele-

ment residing in the Arab sphere under the protection of British power. In that hour the Mufti would be the most authoritative spokesman for the Arab world. It would then be his task to set off the Arab operations, which he had secretly prepared. When that time had come, Germany could also be indifferent to French reaction to such a declaration.<sup>[32][33][34]</sup>

Haj Amin al-Husseini became the most prominent Arab collaborator with the Axis powers. He developed friendships with high-ranking Nazis, including Heinrich Himmler, Joachim von Ribbentrop and (possibly) Adolf Eichmann. He contributed to Axis propaganda services and to the recruitment of Muslim and Arab soldiers for the Nazi armed forces, including three SS divisions consisting of Yugoslavian Muslims.<sup>[25]</sup> He was involved in planning “wartime operations directed against Palestine and Iraq, including parachuting Germans and Arab agents to foment attacks against the Jews in Palestine.”<sup>[35]</sup> He assisted the German entry into North Africa, particularly the German entry into Tunisia and Libya. His espionage network provided the Wehrmacht with a forty-eight hour warning of the Allied invasion of North Africa. The Wehrmacht, however, ignored this information, which turned out to be completely accurate. He intervened and protested to government authorities in order to prevent Jews from emigrating to Mandatory Palestine.<sup>[36]</sup> There is persuasive evidence that he was aware of the Nazi Final Solution.<sup>[37]</sup> After the war ended he claimed that he never knew about the extermination camps or the plans for genocide, that the so-called ‘evidence’ against him was forged by his Jewish enemies, and even denied having met Eichmann. He is still a controversial figure, both vilified and honored by different political factions in the contemporary Arab world.<sup>[38]</sup>

### 3 Opposition

Gilbert Achcar, a professor of Development Studies at the University of London’s School of Oriental and African Studies, argues that historical narratives often over-emphasize collaboration and under-appreciate progressive Arab political history, overshadowing the many dimensions of conflict between Nazism and the Arab World. He accuses Zionists of promulgating a ‘collaborationist’ narrative for partisan purposes. He proposes that the dominant Arab political attitudes were ‘anti-colonialism’ and ‘anti-Zionism,’ though only a comparatively small faction adopted anti-Semitism, and most Arabs were actually pro-Ally and anti-Axis (as evidenced by the high number of Arabs who fought for Allied forces). Achcar states:

The Zionist narrative of the Arab world is based centrally around one figure who is ubiquitous in this whole issue—the Jerusalem

Grand Mufti Hajj Amin al-Husseini, who collaborated with the Nazis. But the historical record is actually quite diverse. The initial reaction to Nazism and Hitler in the Arab world and especially from the intellectual elite was very critical towards Nazism, which was perceived as a totalitarian, racist and imperialist phenomenon. It was criticized by the liberals or what I call the liberal Westernizers, i.e. those who were attracted by Western liberalism, as well as by the Marxists and left-wing nationalists who denounced Nazism as another form of imperialism. In fact, only one of the major ideological currents in the Arab world developed a strong affinity with Western anti-Semitism, and that was Islamic fundamentalism—not all Islam or Islamic movements but those with the most reactionary interpretations of Islam. They reacted to what was happening in Palestine by espousing Western anti-Semitic attitudes.<sup>[39]</sup>

## 4 Cooperation

### 4.1 Mandatory Palestine

The Palestinian Arab and Nazi political leaders said that they had a common cause against International Jewry. The most significant practical effect of Nazi policy on Palestine between 1933 and 1938, however, was to radically increase the immigration rate of German and other European Jews and to double the population of Palestinian Jews. The Mufti had sent messages to Berlin through Heinrich Wolf, the German Consul in Jerusalem endorsing the advent of the new regime as early as March, 1933, and was enthusiastic over the Nazi anti-Jewish policy, and particularly the anti-Jewish boycott in Germany. “[The Mufti and other sheikhs asked] only that German Jews not be sent to Palestine.”<sup>[40]</sup>

Nazi policy for solving their Jewish problem until the end of 1937 emphasized motivating German Jews to emigrate from German territory. During this period the League of Nations Mandate for the establishment of a Jewish Homeland in Mandatory Palestine to be used as a refuge for Jews was “still internationally recognized”. The Gestapo and the SS inconsistently cooperated with a variety of Jewish organizations and efforts (e.g., Hanotaiah Ltd., the Anglo-Palestine Bank, the Temple Society Bank, HIAS, Joint Distribution Committee, Revisionist Zionists, and others), most notably in the Haavurah Agreements, to facilitate emigration to Mandatory Palestine.<sup>[41]</sup>

Nora Levin wrote in 1968: “Up to the middle of 1938, Palestine had received one third of all the Jews who had emigrated from Germany since 1933 -- 50,000 out of a total of 150,000.”<sup>[42]</sup> Edwin Black, benefitting from more modern scholarship, has written that 60,000 German



Jews immigrated into Palestine between 1933 through 1936, bringing with them \$100,000,000 dollars (\$1.6 billion in 2009 dollars). This precipitous increase in the Jewish Palestinian population stimulated Palestinian Arab political resistance to continued Jewish immigration, and was a principal cause for the 1936–1939 Arab revolt in Palestine, which in turn led to the British White Paper decision to abandon the League of Nations Mandate to establish a Jewish National Home in Palestine. The resultant change in British policy effectively closed Palestine to most European Jews who suffered persecution throughout World War II. After 1938 the majority of Zionist organizations adhered to a strategy of ‘Fighting the White Paper as if there was not War, and fighting the War as if there was no White Paper.’ Zionists would smuggle Jews in Palestine whenever possible, regardless if this brought them into conflict with the British authorities. At the same time the Zionists and other Jews would ally themselves to the British battle against Germany and the Axis, even while the British blocked the escape of European Jews into Palestine.<sup>[43]</sup>

In 1938 the German policy toward the Jewish Homeland in Palestine appears to have substantially changed, as indicated in this German Ministry of Foreign Affairs note from 10 March 1938:

The influx into Palestine of German capital in Jewish hands will facilitate the building up of a Jewish state, which runs counter to German interests; for this state, instead of absorbing world Jewry, will someday bring about a considerable increase in world Jewry’s political power.<sup>[44]</sup>

One consequence of the Mufti’s opposition to England’s role as the Mandatory power in Palestine and his rejection of the British attempts to work out a compromise between Zionists and Palestinian Arabs was that the Mufti was forced to flee Palestine. Many of his followers, who had fought Jews and the English in Palestine, followed him and continued to work for his political goals. Among the most notable Palestinian soldiers in this category was Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni, a kinsman and officer of the Mufti who had been wounded twice in the early stages of the 1936–1939 Arab revolt in Palestine. The Mufti sent Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni to Germany in 1938 for explosives training. Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni then worked with the Mufti to support the Golden Square regime, and consequently was sentenced to prison by the British after they retook Iraq. He subsequently became the popular leader of approximately 50,000 Palestinian Arabs who joined the Mufti’s Army of the Holy War during the 1948 Arab–Israeli War. His fellow Iraq-veteran and German collaborator Fawzi al-Qawuqji became a rival general in that same struggle against Zionism.<sup>[45]</sup>

As noted in the above paragraph by Gen. Felmy, after the Kristalnacht pogroms in November 1938, most Jewish and Zionist organizations aligned with Britain and its

allies to oppose Nazi Germany. After this time the organized assistance by the Gestapo to the Jewish organizations who transported European Jews to Palestine became much more sporadic, although bribery of individual Germans often help accomplish such operations even after official policy discouraged them.<sup>[46]</sup>

The Mufti opposed all immigration of Jews into Palestine. The Mufti’s numerous letters appealing to various governmental authorities to prevent Jewish emigration to Palestine have been widely republished and cited as documentary evidence of his collaboration with Nazis and his participative support for their actions. For instance, in June 1943 the Mufti recommended to the Hungarian minister that it would be better to send Jews in Hungary to Concentration Camps in Poland rather than let them find asylum in Palestine (it is not entirely clear that the Mufti was aware of the Extermination Camps in Poland, e.g. Auschwitz, at this time):

I ask your Excellency to permit me to draw your attention to the necessity of preventing the Jews from leaving your country for Palestine, and if there are reasons which make their removal necessary, it would be indispensable and infinitely preferable to send them to other countries where they would find themselves under active control, for example, in Poland ....<sup>[47]</sup>



*Haj Amin al-Husseini meeting with Heinrich Himmler (1943).*

Achcar quotes the Mufti’s memoirs about these efforts to influence the Axis powers to prevent emigration of Eastern European Jews to Palestine:

We combatted this enterprise by writing to Ribbentrop, Himmler, and Hitler, and, thereafter, the governments of Italy, Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria, Turkey, and other countries. We succeeded in foiling this initiative, a circumstance that led the Jews to make terrible accusations against me, in which they held me accountable for the liquidation of four hundred thousand Jews who were unable to emigrate to Palestine in this period. They added

that I should be tried as a war criminal in Nuremberg.<sup>[48]</sup>

Achcar then notes that although the Mufti's motivation to block Jewish emigration into Palestine:

...was certainly legitimate when it was addressed as an appeal to the British mandatory authorities .... It had no legitimacy whatsoever when addressed to Nazi authorities who had cooperated with the Zionists to send tens of thousands of German Jews to Palestine and then set out to exterminate the Jews of Europe. The Mufti was well aware that the European Jews were being wiped out; he never claimed the contrary. Nor, unlike some of his present-day admirers, did he play the ignoble, perverse, and stupid game of Holocaust denial.... His armour-propre would not allow him to justify himself to the Jews....gloating that the Jews had paid a much higher price than the Germans... he cites... : "Their losses in the Second World War represent more than thirty percent of the total number of their people .... Statements like this, from a man who was well placed to know what the Nazis had done ... constitute a powerful argument against Holocaust deniers. Husseini reports that Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler ... told him in summer 1943 that the Germans had 'already exterminated more than three million' Jews: "I was astonished by this figure, as I had known nothing about the matter until then." .... Thus, in 1943, Husseini knew about the genocide....Himmler ... again in the summer of 1941 ... let him in on a secret that ... Germany would have an atomic bomb in three years' time....<sup>[49]</sup>

In November 1943, when he became aware of the nature of the Nazi *Final Solution*, the Mufti said:

It is the duty of Muhammadans in general and Arabs in particular to ... drive all Jews from Arab and Muhammadan countries....Germany is also struggling against the common foe who oppressed Arabs and Muhammadans in their different countries. It has very clearly recognized the Jews for what they are and resolved to find a definitive solution [endgültige Lösung] for the Jewish danger that will eliminate the scourge that Jews represent in the world. ....<sup>[50]</sup>

## 4.2 Iraq

On 1 April 1941, a day after General *Erwin Rommel* began his Tunisian offensive, the *Golden Square* rebellion

overthrew the pro-British Iraq regime. General Felmy's recollections of the subsequent *Anglo-Iraqi War* include:

Rashid Ali sent an urgent appeal for assistance to Berlin, where the Wehrmacht High Command held a conference on 6 May 1941 to discuss measures to be taken to support the rebellion. It was decided to give Iraq all assistance possible and to intensify the war against Great Britain in the Middle East. Diplomatic relations between the Third Reich and Iraq were resumed. The former German Ambassador to Iraq, Dr. Grobba, returned to Baghdad.<sup>[51]</sup>

Dr. *Fritz Grobba* served intermittently as the German ambassador in Iraq from 1932 to 1941, supporting anti-Jewish and fascist movements in the Arab world. Intellectuals and army officers were invited to Germany as guests of the Nazi party, and antisemitic material was published in the newspapers. The German embassy purchased the newspaper *al-Alam al-Arabi* ("The Arab World") which published anti-Jewish, anti-English, and pro-Nazi propaganda, including a serialized translation of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* in Arabic.<sup>[52]</sup>

On June 1–2, 1941, immediately after the collapse of the pro-Nazi Rashid Ali government in Iraq, the Mufti and others inspired a pogrom against the Jews of *Baghdad* known as the *Farhud*. The estimates of Jewish victims vary from less than 110 to over 600 killed, and from 240 to 2000 wounded. Gilbert Achcar's research indicates that historian Bernard Lewis misquoted the total number of victims as the number of Jewish victims, whereas the overwhelming majority appear to have been killed by the British-led repression of the Arabs.<sup>[53]</sup> Edwin Black concludes that the exact numbers will never be known, pointing out the improbability of the initial estimate in the official reports of 110 fatalities that included both Arabs and Jews (including 28 women), as opposed to the claims of Jewish sources that as many as 600 Jews were killed.<sup>[54]</sup> Similarly, the estimates of Jewish homes destroyed range from 99 to over 900 houses. Though these figures are debated in the secondary literature, it is generally agreed that over 580 Jewish businesses were looted. The Iraqi-Arab *Futuwwa* youth group—modeled after the *Hitler Youth*—were widely credited with the *Farhud*. The *Futuwwa* were commanded by Iraqi minister of education *Saib Shawkat*, who also praised Hitler for eradicating Jews.<sup>[55][56][57]</sup>

In June 1941, Wehrmacht High Command Directive No. 32 and the "Instructions for Special Staff F" designated Special Staff F as the Wehrmacht's central agency for all issues that affected the Arab world.<sup>[58]</sup> General Felmy's testimony about this period:

At the time of the Iraqi rebellion a number of Arab students residing in Germany had

volunteered for duty in the ... The Wehrmacht High Command, Foreign Group ... to receive a four-weeks training course in Dueren, in West Germany. About 30 Arab volunteers were transferred from Dueren to Special Staff F as the cadre for the promoted German-Arab training battalion ... Sunium, ... Greece ... in July 1941. Training of the Moslems began immediately. The Arabs had a fair knowledge of German and showed themselves willing to learn....One mistake that was made was to use as instructors Germans who had lived in Palestine and the other Middle East countries. These men had long been accustomed to regard Arabs as a race of menials, and something of this attitude crept into the instruction. When efforts were made to establish a better working relationship ... the Arabs came to the conclusion that they were already regarded as full-fledged partners in the Axis. One of the major issues ... was the conflict engendered by the difference in the political loyalties of the volunteers. Some of the latter professed their faith in one Arab chieftain, while the others argued the merits of his opponent. Thus a number of the volunteers had already secretly contacted Fauzi Kaiki, the Syrian army leader. After his escape by plane from the British, Fauzi had established himself in Berlin and begun to take an active interest in the Arabs at Sunium.<sup>[59]</sup>

The 'Fauzi Kaiki' mentioned by General Felmy was the Palestinian soldier **Fawzi al-Qawuqji**. He had been awarded an Iron Cross, second class, for his service as Ottoman Army lieutenant fighting alongside General Otto von Kreiss' Prussians, who had opposed the British in Palestine during World War I. He was later to become famous when he was appointed commander by the **Arab League of the Arab Liberation Army**, one of the five Arab armies involved in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.<sup>[60]</sup>

The political divisiveness between these factions, and primarily between the 'Big Two' leaders, Haj Amin al-Husseini and Rashid Ali, were a persistent problem for Arabs who had fled Iraq and found asylum with their Axis allies in Europe.<sup>[59]</sup> The problems for their supporters who remained in Allied-held Arab lands could be worse, however. Palestinian fighter **Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni** spent over four years in prison for his participation in the Iraqi rebellion.<sup>[45]</sup>

### 4.3 Central and Eastern Europe

The Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, helped the Nazis recruit soldiers for Muslim Waffen-SS units in the **Balkans**.<sup>[61]</sup> Originally the Croatian **Ustasha** commanders assumed they could recruit both Muslims and Catholics into a blended force that they wanted to call

'SS Ustasha Division.' The Croatian Catholic-Bosniak movement had alienated large portions of the Bosnian Muslim population, however. The local **ulama** were opposed to the idea of ethnic **Bosniaks** joining Muslim divisions due to the supervision under The **Independent State of Croatia** whom the local Muslim community saw as persecuting **Muslims in Croatia**.<sup>[62]</sup> In 1943, Croatia's Muslim vice president Kulenvovic asserted "If this were 1941, not only 20,000, but 100,000 volunteers could have been procured."<sup>[63]</sup> Himmler opposed the Ustasha suggestion of using a religiously mixed force, and Nazi and Muslim leaders agreed on raising a purely Muslim division. Himmler wrote: "I still intend to form the division from Muslims"<sup>[63]</sup>

The attempts by Germans and Croatians to raise Muslim volunteers for these divisions did not garner sufficient numbers of recruits. Himmler turned for help in this recruiting task to Mufti Husseini, who was residing in Berlin at that time. On 21 March 1943, Husseini began using his Islamic authority to appeal to Croatian and Bosnian Muslims, "who are forced to endure a tragic fate ... persecuted by the Serbian and communist bandits [partisans] ... England and its allies bear a great accountability before history for mishandling and murdering Europe's Muslims, just as they have done to the Arabic lands and in India." The Mufti traveled to Croatia where he raised a division of 10,000 Muslim volunteers known as the 13th Waffen SS Mountain Division **Handschar**. The emblematic insignia of this unit was the Turkish **Handschar** curved sword or "knife".<sup>[64]</sup>

During a visit in July 1943 the Mufti said:

The active cooperation of the world's 400 million Muslims with their loyal friends, the German, can be of decisive influence upon the outcome of the war. You, my Bosnian Muslims, are the first Islamic division [and] serve as an example of the active collaboration....My enemy's enemy is my friend." Himmler agreed, declaring "Germany [and] the Reich have been friends of Islam for the past two centuries, owing not to expediency but to friendly conviction. We have the same goals."<sup>[65]</sup>

The Mufti provided a foldout pamphlet for the **Handschar** troops titled (in German) "Islam and Judentum" translated as Islam and Judaism which concluded with: "The Day of Judgement will come, when the Muslims will crush the Jews completely: And when every tree behind which a Jew hides will say: 'There is a Jew behind me, Kill him!' "<sup>[66]</sup>

Eventually three divisions of Muslim SS soldiers were involved in the region. These included: The Waffen SS 13th **Handschar**, 21st **Skanderberg**,<sup>[67]</sup> and the 23rd **Kama** "Dagger". The Nazis granted the Muslim Divisions, most specifically the Bosnian Divisions, more autonomy and less restrictions from the Croatian



Regime.<sup>[68]</sup> For instance, in the *Handschar* SS Division headquarters the picture of the Croatian head of state was replaced by a photo of Haj Amin al-Husseini, and the *Handschar* were perceived as undermining Croatian authority.<sup>[69]</sup>

Edwin Black writes:

Although Handschar was mostly an anti-partisan force, when they did encounter Jews, the brutality exhibited shocked even the local villagers who were accustomed to Nazi atrocities. In one case, Hungarian Jewish slave laborers being guarded by Handschar were so viciously and mercilessly abused, local townspeople became outraged and wondered if they could help. But they could not. The maltreated Jews quickly became incapable of continuing in their work project. At that point, they were all marched away for mass shooting.<sup>[70]</sup>

The Muslim Waffen SS divisions participated in a number of operations (both conventional and unconventional) against the partisans. In 1944 these included Operation Signpost, Operation Sava, and Operation Easter Egg.<sup>[70]</sup> Although 21st Waffen SS Division Skanderberg consisted of less than 6,500 active-duty troops, Black writes:

“its men were brutal in decimating Serb villages, having called for the utter extermination of the Serbian Christian population. Jews were luckier than the Serbs because many Albanian Muslims risked their lives and those of their families to shelter the small Jewish population of several hundred. Nevertheless, Skanderberg units rounded up some 300 Jews in Pristina and ... other Jews ... who were later deported to certain death.”<sup>[70]</sup>

The Mufti and some other Arab Muslims also visited concentration camps. Fritz Grobba wrote on 17 July 1942:

I reported considerable concern ... about the participation of members of the entourage of Prime Minister Galiani [Rashid Ali, the ousted coup plotter who fled Iraq at the time of the Farud] and of the Grand Mufti in SD [secret security police] courses and site visits to concentration camps ... The visit by three assistants of the prime minister [Galiani] and one of the Grand Mufti at concentration camp Oranienburg had already taken place. The visit lasted about two hours with very satisfying results ... the Jews aroused particular interest among the Arabs.... It all made a very favorable impression on the Arabs.<sup>[71][72]</sup>

During this time the Mufti and some other Arabs (Fawzi al-Qawuqji, Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni, Abu Ibrahim al-Kabir, Sheikh Hassan Abu Saud, Hasan Salama, Wasef

Kamal, Arif Abd al-Raziq, Abdul Latif, Rasem Khalidi, etc.) continued contributing to the Axis propaganda efforts. For instance, on 3 November 1943 the Berlin-based radio program “Voice of Free Arabism” broadcast a condemnation of Jewish Zionist settlement in Palestine which contained the following:

Should we not curse the time that has allowed this low race to realize their desires from such countries as Britain, America, and Russia? The Jews kindled this war in the interests of Zionism ... the world will never be at peace until the Jewish race is exterminated. Otherwise wars will always exist. The Jews are the germs, which have caused all the trouble in the world.<sup>[73]</sup>

*Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler also requested that the Mufti found an SS Mullah school especially for so-called “Russian Turks” from the Muslim territories of the USSR who served in the SS. These were designed in the “Eastern Turkey Federation” and “Caucasian Arms Association” organized within the Waffen SS. The Mufti responded to Himmler’s request by founding the school in November 1944 in Dresden. An ‘Imam School’ had been previously opened on 21 May 1944 in Guben.<sup>[74]</sup>

#### 4.4 North Africa



The Algerian Saïd Mohammedi (on the left) assisted the German Luftwaffe (Air Force) during World War II, after which he joined the Algerian Revolution in 1954.



On January 20, 1942, 15 high-ranking Nazi Party and German government officials met at a villa in Wannsee, a Berlin suburb, to coordinate the execution of the "Final Solution" (Endlösung) of the Jewish Question. At this **Wannsee Conference**, Reinhard Heydrich, Heinrich Himmler's deputy and head of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (Reich Security Main Office, or RSHA), noted the numbers of Jews to be eliminated in each territory. In the notation for France there are two entries, 165,000 for Occupied France, and 700,000 for the Unoccupied Zone, which included France's North African possessions, i.e. Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia.<sup>[75][76][77]</sup>

The SS had established a special unit of 22 people in 1942 "to Kill Jews in North Africa". It was led by SS *Obersturmbannführer* **Walter Rauff**, who helped develop the mobile gassing vehicles the Germans used to murder Russian prisoners and Jewish people in Russia and Poland. A network of labor camps was established in Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco.<sup>[78]</sup> Over 2,500 Tunisian Jews perished during a six-month period in these camps.<sup>[79]</sup>

According to **Robert Satloff**, only one Arab in North Africa, Hassan Ferjani, was convicted by an Allied military tribunal in World War II for performing actions that led to the deaths of Jews, male members of the Scemla family of Tunisia, while many Arabs acted to save Jews.<sup>[80]</sup> For instance, **King Mohammed V** refused to make the 200,000 Jews who were living in Morocco wear yellow stars, even though this discriminatory practice was enforced in France. He is reported to have said: "There are no Jews in Morocco. There are only subjects."<sup>[81]</sup>

## 5 Arab incorporation and emulation of fascism

### 5.1 Nationalists

Many emerging movements in the Arab world were influenced by European fascist and Nazi organizations during the 1930s. The **Young Egypt Party** ("Green shirts") closely resembled the Hitler Youth and was "obviously Nazi in form".<sup>[82]</sup> The **Syrian Social Nationalist Party** (SSNP) adopted styles of fascism. Its emblem, the red hurricane, was taken from the Nazi *swastika*,<sup>[83]</sup> leader Anton Saada was known as al-za'im (the Führer), and the party anthem was "Syria, Syria, über alles" sung to the same tune as the German national anthem.<sup>[84]</sup> He founded the fascist SSNP with a program that Syrians were "a distinctive and naturally superior race".<sup>[85]</sup>

**Gamal Abdel Nasser** (who would become Egypt's second president in 1956) recorded his sympathy and his disappointment at Germany's defeat. **Rashid Ali al-Gaylani** was resuscitated as a hero in **Saddam Hussein's** Iraq. **Saddam Hussein's** uncle **Khairallah Talfah** participated in the **Rashid Ali al-Gaylani** regime.<sup>[25]</sup>

### 5.2 Fundamentalist Pan-Islamists

Although the Mufti may be the most well-known Arab collaborator with Nazi Germany, there were other influential Arab and Muslim political leaders who made common cause with the Germans. **Hassan al-Banna**, an ally of the Mufti who founded the **Muslim Brotherhood** in 1928, openly acknowledged the common interests with National Socialist anti-Jewish and anti-Zionist politics, and actively collaborated with the Nazis:

Al-Banna was also fascinated by Hitler. Both hated Jews, democracy, and Western culture. When the war broke out, the Muslim Brothers promised that they would rise up and help General Rommel and make sure to kill the Allies in Egypt. The Muslim Brothers representative for Palestine, the grand Mufti of Jerusalem (al-Husayni), worked for the **Third Reich** during the war and played a major role in the recruitment of the SS Arab division that would be known as the "SS Handjar." The "Himmler to Mufti telegram" of November 1943 attested the alliance between Nazi Germany and the Mufti: "the firm foundation of the natural alliance that exists between the National Socialist Greater Germany and the freedom-loving Muslims of the whole world." The Muslim Brothers were not prosecuted after the war despite the participation of the Mufti and "freedom-loving Muslims" in the Holocaust. In the second half of the 1930s, the Muslim Brothers were strongly engaged to help the Palestinians. They raised and channelled funds to fight the Jews, and intensified contacts with religious leaders in Palestine. Banna was interned from 1941 to February 1942 due to his "critic" of the British presence. The secret apparatus of the Muslim Brothers bombed British clubs during the Second World War and assassinated Egyptian officials. In 1945, the Palestinian question became even more explosive, and the Muslim Brothers were organizing violent demonstrations against the Jews. Military training centers were set up to send volunteers in Palestine to fight "Zionism."<sup>[86]</sup>

## 6 See also

- 13th Waffen Mountain Division of the SS Hand-schar (1st Croatian)
- 21st Waffen Mountain Division of the SS Skanderbeg (1st Albanian)
- 23rd Waffen Mountain Division of the SS Kama (2nd Croatian)

- Arab rescue efforts during the Holocaust
- Collaboration with the Axis Powers during World War II
- Mein Kampf in the Arabic language
- Operation ATLAS

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- [8] Stefan Wild (1985). "National Socialism in the Arab near East between 1933 and 1939". *Die Welt des Islams, New Series* **25**: 126—173. doi:10.2307/1571079. Wir werden weiterhin die Unruhe in Fernost und in Arabien schüren. Denken wir als Herren und sehen in diesen Völkern bestenfalls lackierte Halbaffen, die die Knute spüren wollen.
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## 9 External links

## 8 Further reading

- *Nazi Palestine: The Plans for the Extermination of the Jews in Palestine* by Klaus-Michael Mallmann, Martin Cüppers, trans. by Krista Smith (Original German title: *Halbmond und HakenKreuz: das Dritte Reich, die Araber und Palastina*)
- *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World* by Jeffrey Herf (Yale University Press, 2009) ISBN 978-0-300-14579-3.
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- Bruno de Cordier, *The Fedayeen of the Reich: Muslims, Islam and Collaborationism During World War II* in *The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* Vol 8, No 1, 2010.
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- “A Backgrounder of the Nazi Activities in North Africa and the Middle East During the Era of the Holocaust” (PDF).

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