



**NAZI**  
**PROPAGANDA**  
**FOR THE**  
**ARAB WORLD**

**JEFFREY HERF**



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For Sonya and In memory of Jeannie Rutenburg, 1950-2009

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# Preface

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During World War II, the Nazi regime distributed, in Arabic, millions of printed leaflets and broadcast thousands of hours of shortwave radio programs to diffuse its ideology throughout North Africa and the Middle East. This book is a history of the ideas, individuals, and institutions involved in that effort. It draws on underutilized and unused archival sources to shed new light on the nature and scope of Nazism's ideological extension beyond Europe and the adaptation of its messages to the local politics and Islamic religious idioms of the region. It is a sequel to my previous work on Nazi propaganda aimed at a domestic audience. It adds to a historical scholarship that draws attention to the connections between World War II and the Holocaust in Europe and the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern dimensions of the war, and in particular to the failed attempt to extend the Holocaust to encompass the Jews in the countries of that region. As Alexander Kirk, the American ambassador to Egypt, put it in one of his many important wartime dispatches from Cairo about 'Axis Broadcasts in Arabic;' Nazi shortwave radio poured forth hatred of the Jews "ad nauseam." The fate of 700,000 Jews living in the Middle East and North Africa depended on the outcome of the fighting between the Allies and Axis forces in North Africa. The propaganda barrage was an instrument used simultaneously to try to win the war against the Allies as well as to extend Nazism's genocide of the Jews. The diffusion of anti-Semitism was at the center of this effort.

Although this book is first and foremost a work of history about a distinct set of events in the past, it also documents a chapter in the history of the lineages and origins of ideas that emerged in Arab radicalism and Islamist politics after World War II. Radical anti-Semitism and the ideas of Nazism and fascism ceased to play a major role in European politics after 1945, but traces of the melange of Nazi ideology, radical Arab nationalism, and fundamentalist Islam that emerged in wartime Berlin do persist in the Middle East. Though they were often on the political margins, these ideologies were not discredited as extensively as they were in Europe. The political and ideological collaboration between officials of the Nazi regime and pro-Nazi Arab exiles in wartime Berlin introduced the ideas of twentieth-century European totalitarianism into an Arab and Islamic context. They did so both by secular denunciations of Zionism, Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union and by asserting that there was an elective affinity between Nazism and what the Nazis claimed Islam to be. In that sense, the propaganda campaign was a chapter in the history of what I earlier called "reactionary modernism;" namely, the use of the most modern technology of the time to advance a political and cultural revolt against the West's liberal political traditions.

In postwar Europe, on the whole, anti-Semitic conspiracy theories and equally absurd hatreds rooted in ancient religious texts became a disgraced and dead relic buried in the ruins of the Third Reich. But in the postwar Middle East, these notions persisted in elements of radical nationalist and Islamist politics. The ideas and events examined in this book are one piece of the explanatory puzzle that accounts for this tragic afterlife in another context. An adequate history of the reception of the propaganda offensive awaits the efforts of scholars who work primarily on North Africa and the Middle East. Here I offer readers the most extensive record to date of what Nazi Germany was communicating to Arabs and the Muslims of North Africa and the Middle East during World War II.

As a work of intellectual and cultural history, this book also documents and interprets an important chapter in what one could call the dark history of globalization and cultural interaction.

simple-minded optimism seeks to convince us that contact and communication between people from different cultures will invariably foster international understanding, peace, and goodwill. Sometimes it has. In this case, the collaboration of officials of the Nazi regime with Arab allies in wartime Berlin demonstrated that the opposite was also possible. The more these political allies exchanged ideas, the more they reinforced, renewed, and accentuated some of the worst elements of their respective civilizations, namely, hatred of Jews and of Western political modernity. This direct gaze at the results of their collaboration during World War II will, I hope, contribute to the contemporary criticism that the aftereffects so richly deserve.



# Acknowledgments

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With pleasure, I acknowledge the people and institutions that supported the research and writing of this book. Thanks are due to archivists at the United States National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland, for their assistance in locating relevant files of the United States Department of State. Lawrence MacDonald, in particular, helped unravel some of the complexities of the World War II-era American intelligence files. My fellow historian Richard Breitman, himself a pioneer in the scholarly use of American intelligence and diplomatic files in the United States National Archives regarding the Holocaust, shared both his deep knowledge of them as well as encouragement for this project. His assertion that our National Archives contain a great deal of material of interest to historians of modern European history has turned out to be even more accurate than I anticipated.

A fellowship at the American Academy in Berlin in fall 2007 and the support of its director Garret Smith and his excellent staff facilitated research in German archives. Yolanda Korb's assistance with library acquisitions was particularly helpful for the research. Archivists Martin Hanselmann, Mareike Fos-senberg, and Dr. Martin Kroger at the Political Archive of the German Foreign Ministry (PAAA) in Berlin; Elfriede Frischmuth at the German Federal Military Archive in Freiburg (BA-MA); and staff at the German Federal Archive (BAB) and at the Zentrum für Modernen Orient (ZMO), both in Berlin, facilitated my work in their collections. A sabbatical leave from the University of Maryland at College Park, for spring semester 2008 gave me the time needed to complete the research and much of the writing.

I am particularly grateful to Martin Coppers and Klaus-Michael Mallmann. The importance of their research and writing on Nazi Germany and the Middle East is evident in the text and notes of this book. Dr. Coppers graciously shared his knowledge of the relevant files and offered comments on the manuscript. Thanks to David and Dawn Cesarani for their kind hospitality during my research at Britain's National Archives (NA) in Kew Gardens. Both the informative Web site of Britain's National Archives and the professional staff helped in locating files quickly.

I benefited greatly from the computerized ordering of files at the Political Archive of the German Foreign Ministry, the National Archives in Britain, the German Federal Archives in Berlin and Freiburg. Thanks are due to the archive administrators of the PAAA, NA, ZMO, and the United States National Archives for permitting the use of digital cameras in the archives. In so doing they are facilitating a minor revolution in the speed and reliability with which researchers can make copies of needed files at dramatically reduced costs.

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Thanks are due as well to the comments of the anonymous reviewers of my article "Nazism in Germany's Propaganda Aimed at Arabs and Muslims during World War II and the Holocaust: Old Themes, New Archival Findings," forthcoming in the journal *Central European History* (spring 2010).

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Arthur Eckstein and Jeannie Rutenberg shared friendship and acute insights about past and present while this book was in progress. As she has done for many years and projects, my wife, Sonya Michelson, offered her customary scholarly insight, probing questions, and support. It's a very special pleasure to dedicate this book to her.

## A Note on Terminology and Spelling

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The Nazi regime claimed its policies were "anti-Jewish" but not "anti-Semitic." As the term "anti-Semitism" is now understood to refer to hostility to Jews but not to non-Jewish "Semites" understood as peoples who live in the Middle East, I adopt the conventional understanding of anti-Semitism meaning hostility of varying degrees aimed only at Jews. The word "Axis" as in "Axis Broadcasts in Arabic" refers to the wartime coalition of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, Imperial Japan, and the assorted less powerful allies.

During World War II, American and British government officials used the spelling "Moslem" for believers in Islam. In citing the original documents, I have left the spelling intact. When referring to believers in Islam in the text, I have used the accepted English-language contemporary spelling "Muslim."

During World War II and since, the issue of how best to spell Arabic names in English has not been settled. In the interim, scholarly texts have arrived at different conclusions. When referring to such figures as Haj Amin el-Husseini, Rashid Ali Kilani, and Hassan al-Banna—all of whose names have been rendered differently by different observers and scholars—I have left the spelling found in the original American and British reports intact. When referring to them myself, I use the above spelling which, though they do not command unanimous approval, appear to have been accepted by knowledgeable English-language scholars.



# Introduction

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T

his book documents and interprets Nazi Germany's propaganda efforts aimed at Arabs and Muslims in the Middle East and North Africa. It pushes the history of Nazism beyond its customary Eurocentric limits and draws attention to the European dimensions of Arabic and Islamic radicalism of the mid-twentieth century. On shortwave radio and in printed items distributed in the millions, the Third Reich's Arabic-language propaganda leapt over the seemingly insurmountable barriers created by its own ideology of Aryan racial superiority. From fall 1939 to March 1945, the Nazi regime broadcast shortwave Arabic programs to the Middle East and North Africa seven days and nights a week. The broadcasts were well known at the time, and fragments have received some scholarly attention since. Although a significant scholarly literature exists concerning Nazi Germany's efforts to influence events and sentiments in the Middle East, the preponderance of its print and radio propaganda has not yet been documented and examined. These materials remain far less examined than the propaganda aimed at German and European audiences and have not been previously interpreted by a historian of the cultural and intellectual themes of Nazi Germany during World War II and the Holocaust.

This book is a sequel to, and draws on the arguments of, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II and Holocaust*. In that work I examined the translation of radical anti-Semitism ideology into a narrative of ongoing events presented within Germany, mostly in print and image. By "radical anti-Semitism," I referred to the Nazis' blend of hatred and interpretation according to which an actual political actor called "international Jewry" was held responsible for World War II and the resulting death and devastation. At its core, radical anti-Semitism was fundamentally a political accusation that attributed enormous power and enormous evil to the Jews. Hitler claimed that the Jews were intending to exterminate the Germans, and he thus decided to exterminate them first. Projection and paranoia were the handmaidens of mass murder. This book explores the results of a fateful cooperation between officials of the Nazi regime and Arab and Islamic collaborators. It extended the paranoid political accusations of radical anti-Semitism of a German and European provenance to encompass the political and religious controversies roiling North Africa and the Middle East before and during World War II. The collaboration, though short-lived, left behind traces and lineages outside Europe that persisted long after the Nazi regime was destroyed and Nazi ideology discredited in Europe. In particular, the central political accusations of radical anti-Semitism were diffused beyond their European origins into an Arabic and radical Islamic context. As with the propaganda directed at Germany and Europe, Nazi propaganda aimed at the Middle East was simultaneously the expression of deep-seated convictions held by Hitler and the Nazi leadership and an instrument of war and diplomacy. It drew on already existing elements of German and European political, intellectual, and cultural traditions, including religious traditions, and drove them to extremist conclusions. The same was true of the radical nationalism and radical Islamism that made common cause with the Third Reich. No less than Nazism in the German and European context, it too was inconceivable without it.

own civilizational and cultural background. Neither of the resulting ideologies and their shared deep hatred of the Jews were simply the result of these past traditions, nor could their emergence in the mid-twentieth century be explained simply by the pressures of the moment. They both built on and broke with elements of their respective civilizations.

This history of Nazi propaganda for the Arab lands during World War II reminds us that ideologies can simultaneously be instruments serving political aims as well as the expression of beliefs held to be true beyond any ulterior purpose they may serve. On May 23, 1941, Adolf Hitler issued his Directive No. 30 to the German military leaders, dealing with policy toward the Middle East. He declared that the "Arab freedom movement [Freiheitsbewegung] in the Middle East is our natural ally against England." At the time, Hitler's efforts to strengthen "forces hostile to England" were focused on Iraq, where a pro-Axis coup had taken place in Baghdad several months earlier. Directive No. 30 called for sending military missions, assistance from the Luftwaffe, and weapon deliveries to pro-Axis forces. Hitler assigned responsibility for propaganda in the Middle East to the German Foreign Ministry in cooperation with the High Command of the Military (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht). The core idea of the propaganda campaign was as follows: "A victory for the Axis [that is, Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, Imperial Japan, and their allies] will bring about the liberation of the countries of the Middle East from the English yoke and thus realize their right to self-determination. Whoever loves freedom will, therefore, join the front against England." In fact, as we will see, the German Foreign Ministry had been broadcasting Arabic-language propaganda over shortwave radio since September 1939. Directive No. 30 would intensify those efforts and integrate them into Hitler's hopes for military success in the Middle East.

In this book I draw extensively on previously unused and underused archival sources that make it possible for the first time to present a full picture of Nazi wartime propaganda. In so doing, I analyze the Nazi regime's adaptation of its general propaganda themes, aimed at its German and European audiences, to the religious traditions of Islam and the regional and local political realities of the Middle East and North Africa. This adaptation was the product of a political and ideological collaboration between officials of the Nazi regime—especially in its Foreign Ministry but also of its intelligence services, the Propaganda Ministry, and the SS and its Reich Security Main Office (Reichssicherheitshauptamt)—and pro-Nazi Arab exiles in wartime Berlin. It drew on a confluence of perceived shared political interests and ideological passions as well as on a cultural fusion, borrowing, and interaction between Nazi ideology and certain strains of Arab nationalism and Islamic religious traditions. The following chapters document and examine the results of a meeting of hearts and minds, not a clash of civilizations.

In wartime Berlin, radical anti-Semitism of European and German-speaking provenance found common ground with radical anti-Semitism rooted in Koranic verses and the commentaries on them in the traditions of Islam. Just as Nazi anti-Semitism was inseparable from a radicalization of already existing elements within European culture, so the anti-Semitism of the pro-Nazi Arab exiles was inseparable from a radicalization of already existing elements within the traditions of Islam. In both cases, these twentieth-century extremists engaged in "the work of selective tradition"; that is, they actively reworked received traditions, emphasizing some elements and diminishing others. As a result of their shared passions and interests, they produced texts and broadcasts that each group could not have produced on its own. Through this active labor of conserving and reworking their own

traditions while also drawing on foreign beliefs, the Nazis and their Arab collaborators created the possibility for a cultural connection in the midst of migration from the periphery to the center and the albeit short-lived, expansion of the Nazi center to the Middle Eastern periphery.<sup>3</sup> Cultural and intellectual historians of Nazism have long demonstrated that it can neither be separated from nor reduced to its European, German, and Christian predecessors. These were but one condition necessary for its emergence. The same is true of the radical nationalism and Islamism of the Arab exiles who joined forces with Hitler's regime. Their political outlook could neither be separated from nor reduced to its Arabic or Islamic background. These groups came together during World War II in the shared project of radicalizing their past traditions. In contemporary academic language, their meeting in wartime Berlin was a chapter in the history of transnationalism and cultural fusion. It was one that brought out the most destructive elements of the respective civilizations.'

The Nazis taught the Arab exiles the finer points of twentieth-century anti-Semitic conspiracy thinking and how to apply it to ongoing events in the Middle East. From the Arabs in Berlin, the Nazis learned that their hatred of the Jews was not unique and that they had at least some soul mates and allies in North Africa and the Middle East. For Hitler and his associates, it came as a welcome discovery that a non-European tradition could foster radical anti-Semitism. In the process, Nazism became less Eurocentric while Arab and Islamic radicalism drew on modern, European totalitarian ideology. The Nazi leadership sought ways to burst the bounds of nationalist particularism and even the doctrine of the Aryan master race in order to appeal to Arabs and Muslims. The Arabs and Muslims in Berlin engaged in a variant of what I have called "reactionary modernism" as they demonstrated a mastery of modern propaganda techniques in the interest of advocating a revival of a fundamentalist version of Islam.<sup>5</sup> Radical anti-Semitism did not enter Arab and Islamic politics because of the cleverness of Nazi propagandists; on the contrary, their cleverness lay partly in their understanding that some currents in Arab politics and the religion of Islam offered points of entry for a positive reception of Nazism's message. Nazi officials working with the Arab exiles in Berlin and the Orientalists working for the SS and the Foreign Ministry believed that the Koran, as well as commentaries and oral folk wisdom, offered powerful points of connection with modern European anti-Semitism. Thus their propaganda combined appeals to secular Arab nationalists with distinct religious appeals to Muslims. Neither the Nazis nor the Arab exiles could have achieved alone what they achieved together. Hitler's dictatorship had few native speakers of Arabic who also were familiar with the details of local politics in the Middle East. The Arab exiles in Berlin made up for the deficiencies. In return, the exiles from Palestine and Iraq now had a way of reaching a mass audience in their home countries. Fascist Italy's and Nazi Germany's shortwave radio transmitters, their printing presses, and, from 1940s to 1943, their armies fighting in North Africa made that possible.

Nazi Germany's Arabic-language propaganda was not primarily the result of the translation of Nazi ideology and canonical texts into Arabic. Although *Mein Kampf* and *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* had been translated into Arabic before 1939, neither, in contrast to the propaganda campaign in Germany and Europe, figured prominently in Arabic propaganda. Rather, it was a selective reading of the Koran and a focus on the anti-Jewish currents within Islam, combined with Nazi denunciations of Western imperialism and Soviet Communism, that offered Nazi propaganda its points of entry to Arabs in North Africa, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq and to Muslims in the Middle East in general. At times, German diplomats limited appeals to Arab nationalism and radical Islam in order not to undermine Fascist Italy's imperial ambitions in North Africa. Yet in most of the Middle East

and in North Africa as well, especially following Axis setbacks in 1942, the distinction between secular and religious dimensions became insignificant. In the same texts and broadcasts in which they spoke the secular language of attack on American, British, and "Jewish" imperialism, Nazis also appealed to what they depicted as the ancient tradition of hatred of the Jews within Islam itself. Nazi Germany presented itself both as an ally of Arab anti-imperialism and as a soul mate of the religion of Islam as it understood it. Before and during the war, Nazi Germany stressed that it was as an uncompromising enemy of Zionism, a stance that resonated in circles well beyond those of active sympathizers with Nazism and fascism.

"Jihad made in Germany" and the appeal to Arabs to revolt against British and French colonialism had been a component of German policy during World War I. Although the majority of Muslims ignored appeals to revolt against British, French, and Russian interests, the German Foreign Ministry gained experience in the use of politicized Islam in its efforts to undermine the other European powers in the Middle East. Some of the veterans of German Middle East diplomacy in World War I, such as Werner Otto von Hentig, would play a role in the far more extensive efforts that developed during World War II. Nazi propagandists built on previous experience yet added the components of radical anti-Semitism and conspiratorial theories as incitement to mass killing of the Jews. Germany's efforts in the Middle East during World War II were limited by the resources available and by priorities of the war in Europe. Nevertheless, as we will see, Nazi Germany's military and propaganda exertions were extensive and were defeated only as a result of major military engagements by the Allies in North Africa.<sup>7</sup> After the war, Fritz Grobba (1886 -1973), who had been the German ambassador to Iraq from 1937 to 1941 and then played an important role in Berlin in Germany's Middle East policies during World War II, claimed that "Hitler and [Foreign Minister Joachim von] Ribbentrop displayed total disinterest for Arab aspirations" and that "the Arab movement made more concerted attempts to exploit Germany than did Germany to exploit the Arab movement."<sup>8</sup> In fact, Hitler, Ribbentrop, and a host of high-ranking officials in the Foreign Ministry as well as Heinrich Himmler and officials in the SS's Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) showed strong and continuing interest in making appeals to Arabs and Muslims. Their failure was not due to lack of effort but to its inadequacy in the face of the Allied military and political counteroffensive.

During the 1930s, Britain's commitment to the establishment of a homeland for the Jews made the Balfour Declaration of 1917 come under increasing pressure in the face of Arab opposition to Jewish immigration to Palestine. In 1934, Fascist Italy pioneered Arabic-language radio broadcasts on its Radio Bari station. Along with print materials distributed from its consulates in the region, the Italians seized on the opportunity created by Arab opposition to Zionism and to British and French colonialism and by the growth of pan-Arab and pan-Islamic ideology in the 1930s. The result, as one historian has noted, was an "unlikely partnership between an aspiring colonial power [Fascist Italy] and an anti-colonial movement [Arab nationalism]." Not surprisingly, the Axis powers' search for allies among Arabs and Muslims in North Africa and the Middle East during World War II and the interaction of the war in the region with the war in Europe have long preoccupied military and diplomatic historians.<sup>9</sup> In 1965, the East German historian Heinz Tillmann published the first comprehensive history of Nazi Germany's policy in the Middle East up to 1943.<sup>10</sup> In 1966, Lukasz Hirszowicz's *The Third Reich and the Arab East* presented an enduring synthesis of military, diplomatic, and political history that covered the entire period of the war.<sup>11</sup> He established the chronology and key causal arguments concerning the prospects for victory by and the causes of defeat.



of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany in the region, especially in Iraq and Egypt. In subsequent years, historians in West and East Germany further elaborated on the military and diplomatic dimensions of Nazi Germany's policies toward the Arab countries during the war.<sup>13</sup> Recently, Norman Goda's important work on German strategy in North Africa has underscored its importance both for the outcome of the war in Europe and for Hitler's aspirations to attack the United States.<sup>14</sup>

In 2006, two German historians, Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Martin Cupper, broke new ground with *Halbmond und Hakenkreuz: Das Dritte Reich, die Araber und Palestina* (Crescent and Swastika: The Third Reich, the Arabs and Palestine). In addition to working in the diplomatic archives that Hirszowicz and others had examined, Mallmann and Cupper drew on German diplomatic as well as military and SS archives that had been opened and declassified in the interim to bring the issue of the possible extension of the Holocaust from Europe to the Middle East to the center of scholarly discussion. Mallmann and Cupper discovered that the SS had an *Einsatzgruppe Afrika*, a paramilitary task force, under the leadership of SS Obersturmbannführer (Adolf Eichmann and Rudolf Hess, the commandant of Auschwitz, had the same SS rank) Walter Rauff, ready to work behind the lines of Rommel's Africa Corps to extend the Final Solution of the Jewish Question in Europe to the Jews of North Africa and the Middle East." The question of whether or not they would be able to do so depended on the outcome of the battles at El Alamein and later in Tunisia between Erwin Rommel's Panzerarmee (Armored Forces) and the Allied armed forces. As the Israeli historian Tuvia Friling has pointed out, in 1942, given the proximity of Rommel's Africa Corps, the fear of a German invasion of Palestine was "indeed real" among its Jewish population. In light of the tensions between the British and the Jews in Palestine, it is ironic to note that the British and Australian victory at El Alamein was a decisive turning point both in the history of World War II and in the successful effort to prevent the extension of the Holocaust to the 700,000 Jews of the Middle East.<sup>16</sup> The following chapters offer abundant evidence of the anti-Semitic propaganda barrage that, as had been the case in Europe, would have accompanied any Middle Eastern mass killing operations.

A significant historical scholarship has documented the actions and beliefs of the most important public face and voice of Nazi Germany's Arabic-language propaganda, Haj Amin el-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. He was born in Jerusalem in 1895 or 1897 to a family long active in Jerusalem's politics. Following World War I, he led opposition to the Balfour Declaration and Jewish immigration to Palestine. In 1921, Herbert Samuel, the British High Commissioner for Palestine, appointed Husseini to the position of Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, a post that came with lifetime tenure. As Mufti, his primary task was to serve as an Islamic scholar who interpreted and expounded Islamic law. Husseini saw no boundary between religion and politics and played a major role integrating Palestinian and Arab nationalism with Islamic themes. He was a leader of the Arab revolt of 1936-39 and established contacts with Italian and German officials during that time. Fearing arrest by the British, he fled to Lebanon in 1937 and then in 1939 to Iraq, where, in 1941, he participated in a pro-Axis coup with Rashid Ali Kilani. When the British deposed that government, he fled again—to Tehran, Ankara, and then to Rome and Berlin, where he participated in the propaganda campaign explored in this work. He met Hitler, Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, the head of the SS Heinrich Himmler, and other high-ranking diplomats and military officials. The mutual admiration between Husseini and Hitler, based in part on their shared hatred of the Jews, has long been a matter of public record. Details about his collaboration with Heinrich Himmler and his knowledge about the Holocaust came to light after the war. Husseini was a key figure in finding

common ideological ground between National Socialism, on the one hand, and the doctrines of Arab nationalism and militant Islam, on the other."

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Yet the history of Nazi Germany's Arabic-language propaganda to the Middle East was far more than another interesting chapter in one man's biography. Rather, it was a program that involved a large number of high-ranking German government officials along with pro-Nazi Arab exiles in wartime Berlin. The Germans who were part of this effort include intelligence officers, diplomats, military officers, various staff members of the German Foreign Ministry's Department of Radio Policy, announcers, writers, and editors along with the prominent Arabic-language announcer Yunis Bahri as well as other generally anonymous native Arabic-speaking announcers and writers. The broadcasts were the result of a cooperative effort. The Department of Radio Policy worked closely with the Foreign Ministry's Political Department, and in both it was Office VII that dealt with Orient matters. In October 1941, Hitler resolved a dispute between Ribbentrop and Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels by assigning primary responsibility for foreign-language propaganda to the Foreign Ministry. In the Foreign Ministry's Political Department, Wilhelm Melchers directed policy toward the Middle East, and Kurt Munzel led the office in the Department of Radio Policy that worked on Arabic radio broadcasts. Erwin Ettl served as the German contact with Haj Amin el-Husseini, while Fritz Grobba worked closely with ex-Iraqi prime minister Rashid Ali Kilani. In Erwin Rommel's Africa Corps, Konstantin Alexander Freiherr von Neurath, son of the former German foreign minister Konstantin von Neurath, and Hans Alexander Winkler wrote Arabic leaflets for distribution in North Africa and the Middle East. Experts on the Orient working for and with Heinrich Himmler's Reich Security Main Office, the headquarters of the SS, also participated.<sup>18</sup> These and other officials and some university scholars worked together with pro-Nazi Arab exiles who could translate Nazism's message into fluent, colloquial Arabic.

The Arabic propaganda campaign, especially with shortwave radio, was far more extensive than focus on the Mufti alone would suggest. Fascist Italy broadcast Arabic programs from 1934 to 1945. Nazi shortwave Arabic broadcasting began in October 1939 and continued until February or March 1945. Berlin in Arabic and the Voice of Free Arabism (VFA) broadcast a mixture of music, news, and commentary seven days and nights a week. Information about the size of the listening audience remains scarce. In August 1941, a United States Office of War Information (OWI) report estimated that there were about 90,000 shortwave radios in the region: 150 in Aden, 55,000 in Egypt, 4,000 in Iraq, 24,000 in Palestine, 6,000 in Syria, and 25 in Saudi Arabia.<sup>19</sup> An OWI report of January 1942 estimated that the numbers had increased to 60,000 in Egypt, 10,000 in Iraq, 20,000 in Syria, 500 in Saudi Arabia, and 40,000 (mostly Jewish) listeners in Palestine. The numbers in Algeria (70,000) and in Morocco (45,770) included many Europeans.<sup>20</sup>

These radios were often heard in cafes and other public places and were crucial to propaganda efforts in the Middle East because rates of illiteracy in the region were so significant. In Palestine, the British mandatory government census of 1931 put the overall literacy rates among Arabs seven years and older at about 20 percent. Among Muslims, it was 14 percent (25 percent among men and only 7 percent among women). Government surveys conducted after World War II found illiteracy rates to be almost 80 percent in Egypt and 85 percent in Libya. By 1947, another observer assessed the literacy rate among Palestine's Arab community to be 27 percent for Christians and 21 percent for Muslims (35 percent for men and 7 percent for women).<sup>21</sup> Shortwave radio reached a far larger audience than

did print materials. Nevertheless, throughout the war, Axis propaganda aimed at the Middle East also included the distribution of millions of Arabic-language leaflets and brochures. Some were dropped from the air by the German air force, the Luftwaffe. Others were distributed on the ground by propaganda units accompanying Rommel's Panzerarmee, by German diplomats in Tunisia, and by networks of German secret agents and Arab collaborators moving about on railways and on small boats in the Mediterranean.

Only a small fragment of this barrage survived the Allied bombing raids on Berlin, the chaos of the last years of war, and the probable intentional document theft and destruction by the persons who produced them. Although transcripts of a great many of Nazi Germany's German-language radio broadcasts are to be found in German archives, the same cannot be said of the regime's Arabic-language wartime broadcasts. But what was lost to posterity in Berlin was being transcribed and translated into English in the American Embassy in wartime Cairo under the direction of Alexander C. Kirk, first head of the legation and then U.S. ambassador to Egypt from March 29, 1941, until March 29, 1944. Kirk came to Cairo from Berlin, where in 1939 and 1940 he served as charge d'affaires at the United States Embassy. In that capacity, he sent Washington important reports on the Nazi regime's anti-Jewish policies and developed contacts with the German anti-Nazi Resistance. During his tenure, the U.S. and British embassies in Cairo became the nerve center for Allied military and intelligence operations in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Kirk's staff became the most important recorder anywhere of the Axis Arabic-language propaganda offensive.

Although American diplomats in Cairo had been paying attention to German Arabic shortwave broadcasts since they began in 1939, Kirk expanded such efforts. He began to send regular summaries of the broadcasts to the office of Secretary of State Cordell Hull in Washington on September 13, 1941.<sup>22</sup> By April 1942, he had organized a staff of native Arabic speakers, stenographers, and translators whose task was to produce verbatim English transcripts of "Axis;" that is, Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy's, Arabic-language radio broadcasts to the Middle East. He sent these dispatches between ten and thirty pages every week to the State Department in Washington until March 1944. An interim official, John Jacobs, and then Kirk's successor as ambassador, Pinkney Tuck, continued to do so until the broadcasts ceased in the last months of the war in spring 1945. The reports circulated among high-ranking officials in the United States government.<sup>23</sup>

The resulting several thousand pages of verbatim, English-language texts, called "Axis Broadcasts in Arabic," constitute the most complete record of Arabic-language shortwave radio broadcasts by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy during World War II. In 1977, the State Department files of the American Embassy in Cairo in the U.S. National Archives in College Park, Maryland, were declassified. As far as I have been able to determine, this book is the first work to use them, certainly to use them extensively. The Cairo transcripts demonstrate that the Arabic-language radio barrage was far more extensive than a focus on the Mufti alone would suggest.<sup>24</sup> Very importantly, the "Axis Broadcasts in Arabic" transcripts also document the intersection of broadcast propaganda with German military strategy—both in periods of euphoria over prospects of imminent victory and in times of rage and despair in the face of setbacks from 1943 on. Radical anti-Semitism was a central component throughout the broadcasts. Where Nazi propagandists in Europe informed audiences that the Nazi regime was then in the process of exterminating Europe's Jews, the Arabic-speaking announcers on Berlin in Arabic and the VFA would on a number of occasions urge listeners to take

matters into their own hands, to, as they put it, "kill the Jews." The Cairo transcripts offer unprecedented documentation of the merging of National Socialist with radical Islamist anti-Semitism and its diffusion to the Middle East, as well as of the incitement to violence and murder purveyed by the Arabic-language radio broadcasts from Nazi Germany.

During the war, the Germans, Americans, and British all tried to assess the impact and reception of Nazi propaganda in the Middle East. The Germans' intelligence networks provided a reasonably accurate grasp of which political and religious groups were most sympathetic to their cause. That said, Germany's wartime abilities to assess the impact of its foreign-language propaganda were not impressive. The works of Richard Breitman and Shlomo Aronson have drawn our attention to the efforts of U.S. and British intelligence agencies to monitor Nazi communications and plans, both in general and, in Aronson's case, in the Middle East.<sup>25</sup> This book also draws on reports by American and British diplomats, intelligence agents working for the U.S. Office of Strategic Services (OSS), from branches of the U.S. military, and for the Office of War Information as the United States and Britain tried to assess what impact fascist and Nazi propaganda was having in the region. They did so without the benefit of modern methods of research on mass audiences in a region with very high rates of illiteracy. Nevertheless, with a mixture of anecdotes, reading of the local press, and contacts with informed local observers, Allied intelligence reports are important sources for any history of the Arab and Muslim reception to the Axis powers. A fully adequate account must be done by historians who can read Arabic and/or Persian. I hope that the documentation and interpretation of Nazi propaganda that this book offers will contribute to such efforts and to the opening of the relevant archives of Arab governments and of relevant Arab and Islamic organizations and institutions.<sup>26</sup> American and British intelligence reports generally avoided broad claims about what most Arabs and Muslims were thinking about the events of the day. Instead their focus was on specific groups, institutions, and individuals known to have pro-Axis sympathies. Moreover, American and British officials were fully aware of and, indeed, were working with Arab political leaders who supported the Allied cause. Furthermore, all of the leading officials of the Axis and the Allied powers believed that the issue of propaganda's success or failure was inseparable from the stark facts of victory or defeat between the Allies and the Axis in the battles in North Africa. The outcome of these battles, that is, the military history of these years, was decisive both for the course of the war and for the intellectual and cultural history of the region.<sup>27</sup>

As a student of the intersection of ideas and politics in modern German history, I share with many fellow intellectual and cultural historians a preoccupation with the reading and interpretation of texts in their contexts, and their audience and reception. Though the question of the reception of Nazism in Arabic propaganda is of great importance, it cannot be adequately done before we look at the texts themselves. As I worked on Nazi propaganda aimed at a German audience, I observed a tendency in some historical scholarship to draw the mistaken conclusion that the regime's propaganda was so familiar, well understood, and documented that the most interesting questions primarily concerned its reception and impact on intended audiences. Yet I found that a close reading of even the most famous texts of Hitler, Goebbels, and their associates formed the basis for a fresh interpretation of Nazi propaganda. This is even more the case when examining the vastly less well known texts of the regime's Arabic-language propaganda.

Some Arabic-language printed materials distributed in North Africa and the Middle East did find

their way into the German Foreign Ministry archives, especially from the files of the embassies in Paris and Rome.<sup>28</sup> English-language translations—those done by Kirk's staff in Cairo and more recent ones of print matter done for this book—are now the most comprehensive documentation available of Nazi Germany's wartime Arabic propaganda. Where possible, I have compared original German language policy guidelines and texts of leaflets and speeches with the English-language translations of the Arabic broadcasts produced by the Americans in Cairo. I've concluded that the American translations reflect the letter and spirit of the originals. Moreover, the translations done in the American Embassy in wartime Cairo render texts that are very much in accord with everything else we know about the themes and even word choice of Nazi propaganda. I hope that one result of my work will be to bring the "Axis in Arabic" documents to the attention not only of historians of the Nazi regime but also of those working on the history of the Middle East during and after World War II. Now that these documents have, albeit belatedly, entered into historical scholarship, readers can judge what to make of the propaganda campaign documented in the pages that follow.

The material in this work demonstrates that the Nazi leadership viewed radical anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism as indispensable points of entry into Arab and Muslim hearts and minds.<sup>29</sup> Throughout the war, Nazi Arabic radio repeated the charge that World War II was a Jewish war whose purpose in the region was to establish a Jewish state in Palestine that would expand into and dominate the entire Arab and Muslim world. Moreover, the broadcasts asserted that the Jews in the mid-twentieth century were attempting to destroy Islam just as their ancestors had been attempting to do for thirteen centuries. They claimed that an Allied victory would be a victory for the Jews, whereas an Axis victory would bring liberation from first British and then American and also "Jewish" imperialism. An Axis victory would prevent the formation of a Jewish state in Palestine and create a Europe dominated by powers that respected and had much in common with the traditions of Islam. Throughout the war the Americans, the British, and the Germans concluded that the association with the Jews and Zionism was a drag on Arab support for the Allies while the anti-Zionist policies of the Nazi regime fit well in a broad current of political sentiment in the Middle East. In their Arabic-language materials, Nazi propagandists moved seamlessly between references to the secular conspiracy theories of modern anti-Semitism, on the one hand, and quotations from the Koran and other religious texts and authorities, on the other. In this propaganda, there was no distinction between hatred of the Jews and opposition to Zionism.

The issue of the impact of fascism and Nazism on the Middle East and its aftereffects has become inseparable from contemporary political controversies about anti-Semitism, radical Islam, "Islamic fascism;" and international terrorism since the attacks of September 11, 2001.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, my own scholarly interest in these issues emerges partly from reflections on the blend of modern and reactionary elements in both Nazism and fascism in the 1940s and radical Islamism of recent decades.<sup>31</sup> Yet this work is first and foremost a work of history. It presents previously unknown little-known material that adds greatly to our understanding of Nazi Germany's effort to gain allied supporters, and collaborators among Arabs and Muslims during World War II and the Holocaust. It is a study of the diffusion of ideology and of a meeting of hearts and minds that began from very different civilizational starting points.



# Defining Anti-Semitism

1933-1939

# N

azi ideology posed two seemingly insurmountable barriers to successful appeals to Arabs as a national, regional, and ethnic group, and Muslims, as a religious grouping. First, Hitler had written that an Aryan master race existed at the pinnacle of a hierarchy of other, clearly inferior races. How, then, could the Nazis find allies and collaborators among non-European "races"? Second, the Nazis made anti-Semitism a core element of their program. For Arabs and Muslims in the Middle East, anti-Semitism could be interpreted as applying also to non-Jewish Semites, such as themselves. Before the Nazi regime could engage in a propaganda campaign with any hope of success, its leaders needed to clarify these two issues. Officials in the German Foreign Ministry bore the primary responsibility for finding allies and collaborators. They had thought most about how to appeal to "non-Aryans" and non-Jewish Semites, including Arabs, Persians, and the Muslims of the Middle East and North Africa. These officials also understood that the perception that Nazi Germany was racist toward Arabs and Muslims constituted a serious drawback compared with the universalist appeals of liberal democrats to all individuals and with the Communists' appeals to workers of all countries.

Nazism's most famous book, *Mein Kampf*, clearly presented Hitler's views on Aryan racial superiority. Any reader could discern that he did not believe in the equality of all human beings and saw this inequality as rooted in racial biology. Hitler also left no doubt about his disdain for Arabs. In contrast to hopes in Imperial Germany for aid from the Arabs in World War I, he harbored no hope for "any mythical uprising in Egypt" or that others were "ready to shed their blood for us." English machine guns and fragmentation bombs would bring such a holy war "to an infernal end." It was, he continued, "impossible to overwhelm with a coalition of cripples a powerful state that is determined at stake, if necessary, its last drop of blood for its existence. As a volkish man, who appraises the value of men on a racial basis, I am prevented by mere knowledge of the racial inferiority of these so-called 'oppressed nations' from linking the destiny of my own people with theirs." The reader of *Mein Kampf* would correctly conclude that Hitler's contempt for the Egyptians was consistent with his belief in the superiority of an "Aryan race." Further, such a reader might also plausibly conclude that Hitler's anti-Semitism had a broad meaning. Although they applied first and foremost to the Jews, his comments about the Egyptians suggested that his contempt for Semites extended to Arabs and Muslims.

Yet one Arab reader who shared Hitler's hatreds drew other conclusions. On March 31, 1933, two months after Hitler came to power, Haj Amin el-Husseini, Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, called on Heinrich Wolff, head of the German Consulate in Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> In his report to the *Auswärtiges Amt* (Foreign Ministry), Wolff wrote that Husseini said, "Muslims inside and outside Palestine welcome the new regime in Germany and hope for the spread of fascist, antidemocratic state leadership to other countries." In his view, "current Jewish influence on economy and politics" was "damaging

everywhere and needed to be fought." In the hope of doing economic damage to the Jews, Husseini opined that "Muslims hope for a boycott of the Jews in Germany because it would then be adopted with enthusiasm in the whole of the Muslim world." Further, he was willing to spread the boycott message among Muslims traveling through Palestine and to "all Muslims." He also looked forward to trade with "non-Jewish merchants" dealing in German products.<sup>3</sup> Husseini's remarks on March 1933 demonstrated his early enthusiasm for the Nazi regime based on his ideological support for its antidemocratic and anti-Jewish policies. Wolff reported that though anti-Jewish sentiment was not widespread in the Arab population, it was more prevalent in the upper strata and among the intellectuals, who together protested against "Jewish immigration, Jewish land purchases, and Jewish capital."<sup>4</sup> The clear implication of Wolff's memo was that if the Nazi regime made appeals to Arabs and Muslims, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and perhaps others might become potential allies and collaborators.

In these same months, Hitler's ideological pronouncements and those of the Nazi Party were translated into government policy in the form of the racial legislation. On April 7, 1933, the government announced the "Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service." Paragraph 1, which came to be known as the "Aryan paragraph," read: "(1) Civil servants who are not of Aryan descent are to retire." Article 2 of the "First Decree for Implementation of the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service," issued on April 11, 1933, stated, "A person is to be regarded as non-Aryan if he is descended from non-Aryan, especially Jewish, parents or grandparents. It suffices if one parent or grandparent is non-Aryan." In spring 1933, a purge of Jews from positions in government and the universities began. On September 15, 1935, the by then purged and Nazified Reichstag unanimously promulgated the Reich Citizenship Law. Article 2 stated, "A citizen of the Reich is only that subject, who is of German or kindred blood and who, through his conduct, shows that he is bound desirous and fit to serve faithfully the German people and Reich."<sup>6</sup> In November 1935, the Law for the Defense of German Blood and Honor forbade marriages between Jews and Germans.

Some Nazi officials interpreted the laws broadly as applying to "nonAryans" who also were not Jewish. In 1935, one Johannes Ruppert, the son of the Turkish officer and a German woman, was forced to leave the Hitler Youth, a group to which he had belonged since 1933. His expulsion stemmed from his comrades' belief that as the son of a Turkish man he was not a full Aryan as required by the Reich Citizenship Law. Ruppert sought assistance from the Turkish Embassy in Berlin to clarify how "the Aryan question" affected his case. The Turkish Embassy brought the matter to the attention of the Foreign Ministry. In a note of December 20, 1935, a Foreign Ministry official wrote that "opening up the Aryan question in relation to Turkey is extraordinarily undesirable as well as dangerous for our relations with Turkey." Moreover, it was "absolutely essential that the question whether or not the Turkish people are to be viewed as Aryan in accord with German legislation should be decided in the affirmative as soon as possible." In the international context of 1935, it was imperative to avoid "placing a cloud" over Germany's relations with Turkey, a likely development if the Turks were to be characterized as non-Aryan. It was important that Ruppert be reinstated in the Hitler Youth and given assistance in finding employment as soon as possible so that he would not make further inquiries at the Turkish Embassy.<sup>8</sup>

The Ruppert case led diplomats in Turkey, in the Arab states, in Iran, in French North Africa, and in India to wonder if the term "anti-Semitism" referred to non-Jewish "Semites." Did the Aryans



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