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Hitler's Legacy: Islamic Antisemitism in the Middle East

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Nobody here will have forgotten the horrors of the most recent Middle East war, which took place this summer. But who still remembers the hopes of the previous summer, in 2005, when Israel, despite massive internal resistance, pulled all its troops and settlers out of Gaza? Back then many people hoped that the Gaza strip would develop into a model Palestinian region that could form the nucleus of a Palestinian state alongside Israel.

But what happened was the opposite. Almost immediately this territory was transformed into an outpost in a war against Israel, as new weapons dumps and arms factories sprang up everywhere. From Gaza, Islamists bombarded the Jewish state with hundreds of Qassam missiles. Why?

It was the same story in southern Lebanon. Following the withdrawal of the Israeli army in 2000, it was turned into a deployment area: Hizbollah installed over twelve thousand rockets, supplied by Iran via Syria, near the Israeli border.¹ The area was turned into a base for aggression, with a well-planned system of fortified positions and network of tunnels, from which on 12 July 2006 an attack was launched on Israeli troops. Why?

In both Gaza and Lebanon the possibility existed of a normalisation of relations with Israel, leading in all probability to an economic upturn. So

¹ Kuwaiti Daily: Iran Delivered Missiles to Hizbullah in Lebanon via Syria, in: MEMRI Special Dispatch Series No. 765, August 19, 2004.

why do Hizbollah and Hamas prioritise weapons and war rather than peace and welfare? Why are they spurred on in doing so by Iran, a country that has neither a territorial dispute with Israel nor a Palestinian refugee problem? This is the answer given by Hizbollah leader, Hassan Nasrallah: “Israel is a cancer in the region and when a tumour is discovered, it must be cut out.”² And here is what Khaled Mash’al, leader of Hamas, said: “Before Israel dies, it must be humiliated and degraded. ... We will make them lose their eyesight, we will make them lose their brains.”³ While Mahmud Ahmadinejad, the Iranian President, promises that, “Very soon this stain of disgrace will be purged from the centre of the Islamic world – and this is attainable.”⁴

My final example of this kind of statement comes from Mohammad Hassan Rahimian, the representative of the Iranian Supreme Leader, who stands even higher in the Iranian hierarchy than Ahmadinejad. On 16 November 2006 Rahimian declared that, “the Jew is the most stubborn enemy of the believers. And the decisive war will decide the fate of humanity... The reappearance of the twelfth Imam will usher in a war between Israel and the Shia.”⁵

Many Western commentators ignore such pronouncements, because they are so crazy. But were Hitler’s speeches any less crazy? Hitler sincerely believed his propaganda and attempted, in his peculiar sense of the word, to “free” the world of the Jews by murdering them. Islamists too genuinely believe in their own hate-filled tirades. They celebrate suicide attacks on any and all Jews as “acts of liberation”.

The fact that people who are not Islamists participate in this jubilation reveals a second similarity with the Nazi era. I am referring here to the impact of antisemitic brainwashing techniques, which have been refined since the days of Josef Goebbels.

² Zit. nach Josef Joffe, Der Wahnsinn an der Macht, in: Die Zeit, 20. Juli 2006

³ Zitiert nach: Memri, Special Dispatch, 7. Februar 2006.

⁴ Zitiert nach: Memri, Special Dispatch, 2. November 2005

⁵ ISNA, 16.11.2006, <http://isna.ir/Main/NewsViews.aspx?ID=News-825902>, zit. nach: Iran-Forschung. Übersetzung aus Iranischen Medien, Berlin, 17. November 2006.

One of the instruments of this brainwashing is the Hizbollah satellite TV channel *Al-Manar*, which reaches millions of people in the Arab and Islamic worlds.

Its popularity is due to its countless video clips, which use exciting graphics and stirring music to promote suicide murder. Indeed, *Al-Manar* has made the Protocols of the Elders of Zion – Hitler’s textbook for the Holocaust – into a soap opera.

Episode by episode, the series peddles the fantasy of the Jewish world conspiracy: Jews unleashed both world wars, Jews discovered chemical weapons, Jews destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki with nuclear bombs, in short, Jews have brought nothing but death and destruction upon humanity. The most bloodthirsty scenes are brought into Muslim family homes by *Al-Manar*. In one such scene a Rabbi says to a young Jew, “we have received an order from above. We need the blood of a Christian child for the unleavened bread for the Pesach [Passover] feast.” In the following shot, a terrified youngster is seized from the neighbourhood. Then the camera zooms in on the child for a close-up of his throat being cut. The blood spurts from the wound and pours into a metal basin.

Here mediaeval antisemitism is being drummed into the collective consciousness of normal Muslim families with a suggestive force comparable to that of Nazi productions such as the film “Jud Süß“. A child who has seen this scene of slaughter will be affected for the rest of his life. It will take generations to remove this mental poison from people’s minds.

When the Hizbollah-provoked war with Israel broke out in summer 2006, this investment in mass antisemitism paid off. Think of the pictures of the dead civilians in Lebanon and of the children of Beit Hanoun, killed by a stray Israeli shell. When Israel’s army is compelled to defend itself, the results are not pretty for either side. But what is decisive is the context in which one views such images. Where the emotional infrastructure of antisemitism has been built up by a steady stream of propaganda over many years, the “meaning” of such images is self-evident. By such means, an

eliminary hatred of Israel and the Jews has been fostered on a mass scale, including in people who have nothing to do with Hizbollah. Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, who as leader of Hizbollah is responsible for *Al-Manar*, can feel satisfied.

There is yet another point of contact with National Socialism – albeit a bizarre one. And that is Holocaust denial, espoused by the Iranian President with the acclaim of Hamas and Hizbollah. Here, either the dead are murdered a second time, since it is denied that they were killed the first time. Or the victims are subjected to antisemitic mockery, as in the Iranian cartoons, one of which showed Anne Frank in bed with Hitler. This is to us unimaginable malice, but it is nonetheless a part of Iranian foreign policy. I will return to this issue later.

The fact is that not a single Muslim or Jew would have been killed this summer if Hamas and Hizbollah had decided to pursue peace rather than war. Once again Judeophobia has led to terrible suffering. Peace in the Middle East requires a struggle against this hate propaganda. But what is the reason for this hatred? Is it Zionism and Israeli policies? Or might it be that Judeophobia is an integral part of Islam? Why and how did antisemitism come to the region? These are the issues I want to address now. The approach I intend to take is a historical one. So my talk centres on four excursions into history. The first takes us back eighty years. What were the relations between Jews and Muslims like in the Egypt of the 1920s?

Islamic modernism...

Prepare yourselves for a surprise: In the 1920s the Jews of Egypt were not isolated and hated, but an accepted and protected part of public life: they had members of parliament, were employed at the royal palace and occupied important positions in the economic and political spheres. The Egyptian population too were favourably inclined towards the Jews.

"It merits emphasis", reported a Viennese journalist, "that the Jewish shopkeeper and commission agent enjoy great popularity with the domestic

population and are mostly considered to be very honest."⁶ How was this possible in a country where Islam was the state religion?

Astonishingly, the century-long history of Islamic modernism is now entirely forgotten. This phase began at the start of the nineteenth century, reaching full bloom between 1860 and 1930. For example, in 1839 the Ottoman Sultan decreed equality for Jews and Christians and in 1856 this equality was established in law. This measure was motivated not only by pressure from the European colonial powers, but also by the desire of the Ottoman elite to draw closer to European civilization. Of course, the dhimmi status of the Jews meant that their situation did not improve everywhere and at once. Some Jewish communities in several Arab lands still suffered humiliations. But at least in the urban centres, Jews were permitted to become members of Parliament, hold government posts and, after 1909, were recruited into the military.⁷

In the 1920s the bulk of the Islamic elites no longer lived under sharia law. Kemal Atatürk's regime abolished it in Turkey in 1924. In 1925 Iran began to secularise under Reza Shah. In Egypt, sharia law only applied in the personal sphere, otherwise the legal code was of European provenance.⁸ In this period rather than the nation being a sub-unit of Islam, Islam was a sub-unit of the nation, in which Muslims, Christians and Jews enjoyed equal rights.⁹

The Zionist movement was likewise accepted with an open mind. For example, the editor of the Egypt's daily al-Ahram wrote: "The Zionists are necessary for this region. The money they will bring in, their intelligence and the diligence which is one of their characteristics will, without doubt, bring new life to the country."¹⁰ In the same vein, the former Egyptian minister Ahmed Zaki wrote in 1922 that, "The victory of the Zionist idea is the turning

⁶ El-Awaisi, *op. cit.*, p. 68. What the Viennese journalist noted in 1904 remained the case in subsequent decades, according to Gudrun Krämer, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

⁷ Yossef Bodanski, *Islamic Anti-Semitism as a Political Instrument*, Shaarei Tikva (The Ariel Center for Policy Research) 1999, S. 20-25.

⁸ Albert Hourani, *Die Geschichte der arabischen Völker*, Frankfurt/M. (Fischer Taschenbuch), 2000, S. 420.

⁹ Lewis, *Semites and Anti-Semites*, S. 136.

¹⁰ Stefan Wild, *Zum Selbstverständnis palästinensisch-arabischer Nationalität*, in: Helmut Mejcher, *Die Palästina-Frage 1917-1948* (Paderborn 1993), S. 79.

point for the fulfilment of an ideal which is so dear to me, the revival of the Orient". Thus in 1926 the Egyptian government extended a cordial welcome to a Jewish teachers association delegation from the British mandate territory. Later, students from the Egyptian University travelled on an official visit to Tel Aviv to take part in a sports competition there. When the conflict in Palestine escalated in 1929, the Egyptian Interior Ministry ordered its press office to censor all anti-Zionist and anti-Jewish articles.¹¹ Even in 1933, the Egyptian government allowed 1,000 new Jewish immigrants to land in Port Said on their way to Palestine.¹² No wonder, therefore, that the German Nazi party's Egyptian section was in despair in 1933. "The level of education of the broad masses is not advanced enough for the understanding of race theory", declared a spokesman for the Cairo Nazis in 1933. "An understanding of the Jewish threat has not yet been awakened here."¹³

To summarize our first trip into history: thirty years after the founding of the Zionist movement and twenty years before the creation of the State of Israel relations between Jews and Muslims in Egypt, Turkey and Iran were better than ever before. This fact shows how flexibly the Koran can be interpreted in a given historical situation. Admittedly, under European influence Christian antisemitism had entered the region, but its influence was restricted to Christian circles in the East. It was during the 1930s that this began to change.

And that brings me onto the second historical excursion.

... and Islamist reaction

To Islamic traditionalists the advance of modernity was an outrage. Their resistance laid the groundwork for what is commonly described nowadays as the "Islamist" movement, that is to say a movement combining Islamic fundamentalism with *jihad* in the sense of permanent holy war. It was from the outset both anti-modern and anti-Jewish. Its three leading protagonists

¹¹ Jankowski, op. cit.

¹² See El-Awaisi, op. cit., pp. 22ff.

¹³ Krämer, op. cit., p. 278.

were Amin el-Husseini, appointed Mufti of Jerusalem in 1921, the Syrian Sheikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam, killed in 1934 by British soldiers, and the charismatic Hassan al-Banna, who founded the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in 1928.¹⁴

Their common teacher was Rashid Rida, a religious scholar heavily influenced by the Saudi Wahhabites. Rida's three prominent students followed their master in demanding a return to sharia law and traditional Islam, so as to drive Western civilization from Palestine and the Arab world, before going on to defeat it throughout the world. Their Judeophobia was a declaration of war on the invasion of the world of Islam by liberal ideas. Nowhere was the impact of this invasion so divisive as in Palestine. As the Mufti complained to a conference of religious teachers,

“... They [i.e. the Jews] have also spread here their customs and usages that are opposed to our religion and to our whole way of life. Above all, our youth is being morally shattered. The Jewish girls who run around in shorts demoralize our youth by their mere presence.”¹⁵ For el-Husseini, “Jerusalem” was the focal point of the “rebirth of Islam” in its pure version, and Palestine was the centre from which the struggle against modernity and the Jews was to start. However, for the time being the anti-Jewish pogroms, which the Mufti organized in Palestine in the 1920s, found no echo in the rest of the Arab world.

To sum up: while the conflict between Zionism and anti-Zionism appeared on the surface to be about land, it concealed within it a far bigger conflict, over the question of how to relate to modernity. While the modernisers as a rule sought compromise with the Zionists, the Islamists denounced any attempt to reach an understanding with the Jews as treachery.

In 1937 Britain put forward the first two-state solution in the history of the Middle East conflict in the form of the Peel Plan. This compromise was

¹⁴ “He hates Western civilization with undisguised passion”, reported American journalist David W. Nussbaum after having visited the Mufti in 1946, “and except when he fled to Germany, had always given it a wide berth.” Cited in: Joseph B. Schechtman, *The Mufti and the Fuehrer*, New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1965, p.289.

¹⁵ Uri M. Kupferschmidt, *The Supreme Muslim Council. Islam under the British Mandate for Palestine*, E. J. Brill, Leiden 1987, p. 250 and p. 252.

initially supported not only by the Zionists, but also by moderate Palestinians and several Arab governments. The Mufti on the other hand decisively rejected the partition plan and would eventually succeed in imposing his view. However, until mid-1937 the balance of forces between the two currents was more or less in equilibrium. But thereafter the picture began to change. Now Nazi Germany threw its weight onto the side of the Islamists. Which brings me on to my third topic.

Islamism and National Socialism

For the Mufti, Nazi Germany was more than simply an ally in the struggle against France and Britain; he knew the nature of the Nazi regime and for that very reason was seeking an alliance with it as early as spring 1933. Berlin was at first dismissive. On the one hand, Hitler had already stated his belief in the "racial inferiority" of the Arabs in *Mein Kampf* while on the other, the Nazis were extremely anxious not to jeopardise British appeasement.

In June 1937, however, the Nazis changed course. The trigger was the Peel Plan's two-state solution. Berlin wanted at all costs to prevent the birth of a Jewish state and thus welcomed the Mufti's advances. Arab antisemitism would now get a powerful new promoter.

A central role in the propaganda offensive was played by a Nazi wireless station, now almost totally forgotten. Since the 1936 Berlin Olympics a village called Zeesen, located to the south of Berlin, had been home to what was at the time the world's most powerful short-wave radio transmitter. Between April 1939 and April 1945, Radio Zeesen reached out to the illiterate Muslim masses through daily Arabic programmes, which also went out in Persian and Turkish. At that time listening to the radio in the Arab world took place primarily in public squares or bazaars and coffee houses. No other station was more popular than this Nazi Zeesen service, which skilfully mingled antisemitic propaganda with quotations from the Koran and Arabic music. The Second World War allies were presented as lackeys of the Jews and the picture of the "United Jewish Nations" drummed into the

audience. At the same time, the Jews were attacked as the worst enemies of Islam. "The Jew since the time of Mohammed has never been a friend of the Muslim, the Jew is the enemy and it pleases Allah to kill him".¹⁶

Since 1941, Zeesen's Arabic programme had been directed by the Mufti of Jerusalem who had emigrated to Berlin. No less important than this technical innovation was the fact that the Mufti invented a new form of Judeophobia by recasting it in an Islamic mould.

The Mufti wanted to "unite all the Arab lands in a common hatred of the British and Jews", as he wrote in a letter to Adolf Hitler. But European antisemitism had proved an ineffective tool in the Arab world. Why? Because the European fantasy of the Jewish world conspiracy was totally foreign to the original Islamic view of the Jews. Only in the legend of Jesus Christ did the Jews appear as a deadly and powerful force who allegedly went so far as to kill God's only son. Islam was quite a different story. Here it was not the Jews who murdered the Prophet, but the Prophet who in Medina murdered the Jews. As a result, the characteristic features of Christian antisemitism did not develop in the Muslim world. There were no fears of Jewish conspiracy and domination, no charges of diabolic evil. Instead, the Jews were treated with contempt or condescending tolerance. This cultural inheritance made the idea that the Jews of all people could represent a permanent danger for the Muslims and the world seem absurd.

The Mufti therefore seized on the only instrument that really moved the Arab masses: Islam. He was the first to translate Christian antisemitism into Islamic language, thus creating an "Islamic antisemitism". His first major manifesto bore the title "Islam-Judaism. Appeal of the Grand Mufti to the Islamic World in the Year 1937". This 31-page pamphlet reached the entire Arab world and there are indications that Nazi agents helped draw it up. Let me quote at least a short passage from it:

¹⁶ Seth Arsenian, 'Wartime Propaganda in the Middle East', *The Middle East Journal*, October 1948, Vol. II, no. 4, p. 421; Robert Melka, *The Axis and the Arab Middle East 1930-1945* (University of Minnesota, 1966), pp 47ff; Heinz Tillmann, *Deutschlands Araberpolitik im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (East Berlin, 1965), pp. 83ff. According to Arsenian and Melka, Arabic broadcasting from Zeesen began in 1938.

“The struggle between the Jews and Islam began when Muhammed fled from Mecca to Medina... The Jewish methods were, even in those days, the same as now. As always, their weapon was slander... They said that Muhammed was a swindler... they began to ask Muhammed senseless and insoluble questions... and they endeavoured to destroy the Muslims... If the Jews could betray Muhammed in this way, how will they betray Muslims today? The verses from the Koran and Hadith prove to you that the Jews were the fiercest opponents of Islam and are still trying to destroy it.”

What we have here is a new popularized form of Judeophobia, based on the oriental folk tale tradition, which moves constantly back and forth between the seventh and twentieth centuries.

Classical Islamic literature had as a rule treated Muhammed’s clash with the Jews of Medina as a minor episode in the Prophet’s life. The anti-Jewish passages in the Koran and Hadith had lain dormant or were considered of little significance during previous centuries.

These elements were now invested with new life and vigour. Now the Mufti began to ascribe a truly cosmic significance to the allegedly hostile attitude of the Jewish tribes of Medina to the Prophet. Now he picked out the occasional outbursts of hatred found in the Koran and *hadith* and drummed them relentlessly into the minds of Muslims at every available opportunity – including via the Arabic short-wave radio station in Berlin.

Radio Zeesen was a success not only in Cairo; it made an impact in Tehran as well. One of its regular listeners was a certain Ruhollah Khomeini. When in the winter of 1938 the 36-year-old Khomeini returned to the Iranian city of Qom from Iraq he “had brought with him a radio receiver set made by the British company Pye ... The radio proved a good buy... Many mullahs would gather at his home, often on the terrace, in the evenings to listen to Radio Berlin and the BBC.”, writes his biographer Amir Taheri. Even the German consulate in Tehran was surprised by the success of this propaganda.

“Throughout the country spiritual leaders are coming out and saying ‘that

the twelfth Imam has been sent into the world by God in the form of Adolf Hitler” we learn from a report to Berlin in February 1941.

So, “without any legation involvement, an increasingly effective form of propaganda has arisen, which sees the Führer and Germany as the answer to every prayer... One way to promote this trend is sharply to emphasize Muhammed’s struggle against the Jews in the olden days and that of the Führer today.”¹⁷ While Khomeini was not a follower of Hitler, those years may well have shaped his anti-Jewish attitudes.

So let me now summarize my third point: in 1937 Germany began to disseminate an Islamic antisemitism that fuses together the traditional Islamic view that the Jews are inferior with the European notion that they are deviously powerful. At one and the same time we find the Jews being derided as “pigs” and “apes”, while simultaneously being demonised as the puppet masters of world politics. This specific form of antisemitism was broadcast to the Islamic world on Radio Zeesen. At the same time the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood was being heavily subsidized by Nazi Germany and its anti-Jewish agitation promoted. There could no longer be any talk of a balance between Islamic modernizers and Islamists.

Radio Zeesen ceased operation in April 1945. But it was only after that date that its frequencies of hate really began to reverberate in the Arab world.

And so I come on to my fourth and final point.

The Second Division of the World

After May 8, 1945, National Socialism was placed under the ban virtually throughout the world. In the Arab world, however, Nazi ideology continued to reverberate. In her report on the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann, Hannah Arendt discussed the reactions to the trial in the Arab media:

¹⁷ Communication of the German Consulate in Teheran to the Auswärtige Amt on 2 February 1941; in Klaus-Michael Mallmann und Martin Cüppers, Halbmond und Hakenkreuz. Das Dritte Reich, die Araber und Palästina, Darmstadt (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft) 2006, p. 42.

“...newspapers in Damascus and Beirut, in Cairo and Jordan did not hide their sympathy for Eichmann or their regret that he ‘had not finished the job’; a broadcast from Cairo on the day the trial opened even injected a slightly anti-German note into its comments, complaining that there was not ‘a single incident in which one German plane flew over one Jewish settlement and dropped one bomb on it throughout the last war.’”¹⁸

The heartfelt wish to see all Jews eliminated was also expressed in April 2001 by the columnist Ahmad Ragab of Egypt's second largest daily, the state-controlled *Al-Akhbar*: “[Give] thanks to Hitler. He took revenge on the Israelis in advance, on behalf of the Palestinians. Our one complaint against him was that his revenge was not complete enough.”¹⁹

Manifestly, following 8 May 1945, there occurred a twofold division of the world. The division in the political and economic system is well known as the Cold War. The second split – which was obscured by the Cold War – concerned the acceptance and continuing influence of National Socialist forms of thought. The fault line was already traced by 1946 and it had much to do with the period's most renowned Arab politician, the former Mufti of Jerusalem – and much to do as well with the opportunism of the West. In 1946, el-Husseini was sought by, among others, Britain and the USA on war crimes charges. Between 1941 and 1945, he directed the Muslim SS Divisions from Berlin and he is personally responsible for the fact that thousands of Jewish children, who might otherwise have been saved, died in the gas chambers. All of this was known in 1946. Nonetheless, Britain and the USA chose to forego criminal prosecution of Husseini in order to avoid spoiling their relations with the Arab world. France, in whose custody Husseini was being held, deliberately let him get away. The years of Nazi Arabic language propaganda had made the Mufti by far the best-known political figure in the Arab and Islamic world.²⁰ But the 1946 de facto amnesty by the Western powers enhanced the Mufti's prestige even more.

¹⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1965), p. 13.

¹⁹ *Al-Akhbar*, 20 April 2001. Ragab reiterated his thoughts in the editions of 25 April 2001 and 27 May 2001. See Anti-Defamation League, *Holocaust Denial in the Middle East: The Latest Anti-Israel, Anti-Semitic Propaganda Theme*, (New York, 2001), p. 2 (http://www.adl.org/holocaust/Denial_ME/hdme_genocide_denial.asp#1).

²⁰ Küntzel, op. cit., p. 101-3.

The Arabs saw in this impunity, wrote Simon Wiesenthal in 1946, "not only a weakness of the Europeans, but also absolution for past and future occurrences. A man who is enemy no. 1 of a powerful empire – and this empire cannot fend him off – seems to the Arabs to be a suitable leader."²¹ Now, the pro-Nazi past began to become a source of pride, not of shame. When on 10 June 1946 the headlines of the world press announced the Mufti's "escape" from France "...the Arab quarters of Jerusalem and all the Arab towns and villages were garlanded and beflagged, and the great man's portrait was to be seen everywhere", reports a contemporary observer.²² But the biggest cheerleaders for the Mufti were the Muslim Brothers, who at that time could mobilise a million people in Egypt alone.²³ It was they, indeed, who had organized the Mufti's return and from the start defended his Nazi activities from any criticism.

The two opposed views of the Holocaust collided in November 1947 in the General Assembly of the United Nations. On the one side were those who considered the Shoah a tragedy and therefore argued for a partition of Palestine and the founding of two Palestinian states: an Arab muslim state and a Jewish state: on the other, those who opposed a two-state solution in principle and whose most influential representative was none other than Amin el-Husseini, yet again playing the role of spokesman for the Palestinian Arabs. On el-Husseini's view, the Arabs "should jointly attack the Jews and destroy them as soon as the British forces have withdrawn [from the Palestinian Mandate territory]."²⁴ The Muslim Brotherhood likewise interpreted the UN Resolution from the standpoint of its anti-Semitic worldview: Hassan al-Banna, the Brotherhood's leader, "considered the whole United Nations intervention to be an international plot, carried out by the Americans, the British and the Russians under the influence of

²¹ Simon Wiesenthal, *Großmufti – Großagent der Achse*, Salzburg: Ried-Verlag, 1947, p.2.

²² Daphne Trevor, *Under the White Paper* (Jerusalem, 1948), pp. 206ff. See also Gensicke, op. cit., pp. 251ff and Küntzel, op. cit., pp. 48ff and 146ff.

²³ See: Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, London 1969, p. 328.

²⁴ Nicholas Bethell, *Das Palästina-Dreieck* (Frankfurt/Main, 1979) , p. 381.

Zionism."²⁵ So, as in 1946 with the triumphant return of the Mufti, in 1947 the reality of the Holocaust was denied a second time.

But there was yet a third viewpoint to be found in the Arab world in 1947: that of those who were not interested in the Holocaust for its own sake, but who supported the partition plan for pragmatic reasons. Particularly in Palestine there were many Arabs who were in favour of partition because they knew “that the fight against partition was futile because the Arabs had no arms and the Jews had the support of the U.S. and Britain.” Or because they were among the “tens of thousands of labourers who advanced the Jewish economy, especially by working in the citrus groves.”²⁶ “Many Palestinian Arabs thus not only refrained from fighting themselves, but also did their best to prevent foreigners and locals from carrying out military actions” writes Hillel Cohen, the first scholar to systematically investigate the movement of so-called Arab “collaborators”. “Avoidance of war and even agreement with the Jews were, in their view, best for the Palestinian Arab nation.”²⁷

This group included the Arab leaders who sympathised with the partition plan - albeit only in private, since they were afraid to openly contradict the Mufti and Muslim Brotherhood. Among them was Abdullah, Emir of Transjordan, Sidqi Pasha, Prime Minister of Egypt, Abd al-Rahman Azzam, head of the Arab League and Muzahim al-Pashashi, former Prime Minister of Iraq who argued that, “Eventually there would have to be an acceptance of the Jewish state’s existence, but for now it was politically impossible to acknowledge this publicly. To do so, he said, would cause a revolt in Iraq.”²⁸ So the cowardice of the Arab leaders and the cynicism of the West, who let the Mufti escape, paved the way for one of the most fateful watersheds of the twentieth century: the Arab military assault on Israel in 1948.

²⁵ See Abd Al-Fattah Muhammad El-Awaisi, *The Muslim Brothers and the Palestine Question 1928-1947* (London and New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 1998), p. 195.

²⁶ Hillel Cohen, *Army of Shadows. Palestinian Collaboration With Zionism 1917-1948*, Jerusalem 2006; unpublished manuscript, p. 264.

²⁷ Cohen, S. 259.

²⁸ Cited in Bruse Maddy-Weitzman, *The Crystallization of the Arab State System 1945-1954*, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1993, p. 80.

In 1952 the defeat of the Arab armies in this conflict brought to power yet another former fellow traveller of the Nazis: Gamal Abdel Nasser. Nasser had the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* disseminated throughout the Arab world and in 1964 was still assuring the *Deutsche Nationalzeitung* that, "the lie about the 6 million murdered Jews is not taken seriously by anyone." Now it was the turn of the Soviet Union to find no difficulty in overlooking the antisemitism and Holocaust negationism of an ally.²⁹ Moreover, Nasser employed many of the Nazi war criminals who had evaded justice through fleeing to Egypt in their former sphere of expertise: anti-Jewish propaganda.³⁰

After Nasser's military campaign against Israel also failed miserably in the Six-Day War of 1967, the previously incited hate against Jews was once again radicalised in an Islamist direction. Nasser's anti-Jewish propaganda was still accompanied by a fondness for life's pleasures. Now antisemitism was mixed with the Islamists' hatred for sensuality and joy in life and popularised as religious resistance against all "corrupters of the world". Now it was "discovered" that not only was everything Jewish evil, but that everything evil was Jewish.

Thus, the most important manifesto of Islamist antisemitism, the essay "Our Struggle with the Jews" by the Muslim Brother Sayyid Qutb – distributed in millions of copies throughout the Islamic world with Saudi Arabian help - declares, with allusions to Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud and Emile Durkheim, that the Jews are responsible for the worldwide moral and sexual decline: "behind the doctrine of atheistic materialism was a Jew; behind the doctrine of animalistic sexuality was a Jew; and behind the destruction of the family and the shattering of sacred relationships in society was a Jew."³¹ Now Palestine was declared sacred Islamic territory (*Dar al-Islam*), where Jews should not be allowed to govern even a single village, and Israel's destruction

²⁹ See Robert Wistrich, *Hitler's Apocalypse. Jews and the Nazi Legacy* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1985), chapter 9.

³⁰ Küntzel, op. cit., pp. 70ff.

³¹ Qutb's text was written in 1950, but could not gain acceptance in the period of Nasser's bloody suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood, to which Qutb himself fell victim by hanging. See Ronald L. Nettler, 'Past Trials and Present Tribulations: A Muslim Fundamentalist Speaks on the Jews', in Michael Curtis (ed.) *Antisemitism in the Contemporary World* (London, 1986), pp. 99ff.

a religious duty. Intellectual devastation now spread unimpeded: Jews started to be denigrated by reference to verses in the Koran as "apes", and the claim that the consumption of non-Jewish blood was a religious rite for Jews was offered up as a scientific discovery.³² The first victims of the Islamist turn were the Muslims themselves. The "struggle against depravity" means the suppression of one's own sensual needs, and the return to "sacred social bonds" means the archaic subjugation of women.

With the Iranian Revolution of 1979 Islamism gained its first great victory. Three years later Hizbollah, under the influence of Khomeini, began systematically to use human beings as bombs. The hatred of Jews was now greater than the fear of death. Whenever the possibility of a peaceful solution appeared on the horizon, it would be drowned in the blood of suicidal mass murders. The first major series of suicide bombings began in Palestine in 1993, at precisely the moment when the Oslo peace process was under way. It was resumed in October 2000 after Israel withdrew from Lebanon and had made its most far-reaching concessions yet to the Palestinian side at Camp David.³³ It was the same logic that dictated that in 2005 Israel's withdrawal from Gaza would be met by a hail of rocket attacks. So what overall conclusions can we draw from our historical survey?

First, as regards the Islamic world: history shows that how a Muslim defines his relationship to Israel and the Jews is a strictly personal decision. The Mufti made a deliberate choice to torpedo any solution through dialogue and Hamas too has made a deliberate choice to want to destroy Israel. There is nothing inevitable about such decisions.

This statement of the obvious is, regrettably, not obvious to everyone. In Tom Segev's bestseller "One Palestine, Complete", for example, we find anew the *idée fixe* of two completely unified peoples confronting one another. Each wants the country for itself. Therefore, the Jews kill the Arabs and the Arabs

³² This claim is found for example in the standard work on "The People of Israel in the Koran and the Sunna" by the most famous Sunni spiritual authority of today and Grand Imam of the Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Mohammed Tantawi, which he presented as a doctoral thesis and was published in 1968/69. See Wolfgang Driesch, *Islam, Judentum und Israel* (Hamburg, 2003), pp. 53 and 74. The most recent edition of this bestseller appeared in 1997.

³³ Joseph Croitoru, *Der Märtyrer als Waffe* (Vienna, 2003), p. 130 and pp. 165ff.

kill the Jews – a spiral of violence for which both sides are deemed equally responsible. This theory will never withstand analysis. In the Zionist camp, fundamentalist positions have always existed as well. But here they have been either kept under control by state institutions or marginalized by society, while on the Palestinian side the spirit of the Mufti continues to prevail and seeks to silence any deviation.

Second, in regards to Europe: we can see how catastrophic the consequences of European appeasement of Islamism have been and are today.

Amin el-Husseini was installed and promoted by European powers. In 1921, it was the British who appointed him Mufti against the will of the majority of Palestinians. It was the Germans who between 1937 and 1945 paid for his services. And it was the French who let him flee to Egypt in 1946, so enabling him to resume his activities. Despite this co-responsibility for the situation Europe's politicians and media continue to refuse to recognize the existence of the Islamist antisemitism of Hizbollah and Hamas. But if this factor is ignored, the scale of Islamist terror becomes the new measure of Israel's guilt. The principle then is: the more barbarous anti-Jewish terrorism becomes, the more guilty Israel is. However, those who make Israel the scapegoat for Islamist violence are not only dancing to the Islamists' tune, they are also subscribing to the latest version of the hoary old European antisemitic notion that the Jews are behind everything bad, even when they are themselves the victims. The absence of clarity is thus the beginning of complicity.

Finally, on antisemitism itself. The historical record gives the lie to the assumption that Islamic antisemitism is caused by Zionism or Israeli policy. In fact, it is not the escalation of the Middle East conflict that has given rise to antisemitism; it is rather antisemitism that has given rise to the escalation of the Middle East conflict - again and again.

There is a sure way of identifying the real roots of such antisemitism, and that is to look at the current attitude in this part of the world to Hitler and

the Nazis. If Germans in Beirut, Damaskus, and Amman are greeted with compliments for Adolf Hitler, this can hardly be Israel's doing. When Iranian cartoons show Anne Frank in bed with Adolf Hitler, what on earth has this to do with Zionism?

Today Ahmadinejad is further whipping up Judeophobia with his Holocaust denial campaign. Those who deride the Holocaust as a "fairy tale" are implicitly claiming that the Jews have been duping the rest of humanity for the past sixty years. Those who talk about the "so-called Holocaust" are insinuating that ninety percent of the world's media is controlled by the Jews, who are systematically preventing us from learning the "real" truth.

Those who view the Jews as such kind of global force of evil cannot sincerely criticise Hitler's Final Solution. Instead they will deny the Holocaust to the outside world while secretly drawing inspiration from it, as a kind of precedent that proves it can be done, that one can murder millions of Jews. Every denial of the Holocaust contains an implicit appeal for its repetition.

This antisemitism cannot be mitigated by anything Jews do or by any conciliatory step an Israeli government may take. Those who have fallen prey to the demonizing delusions of antisemitism are bound to find their prejudices confirmed by whatever the Israeli government does or does not do.

Islamic antisemitism has nothing to do with ethnic characteristics or cultural peculiarities. In fact, what we are seeing is the revival of Nazi ideology in a new garb.

Let me therefore conclude with an appeal by a Muslim, the scholar of Islam Bassam Tibi: "only when the public takes an appropriate stand against the antisemitic dimension of Islamism, will it be possible to say that they have truly understood the lessons of the Holocaust."³⁴

This paper was translated from the German by Colin Meade.

³⁴ Bassam Tibi, 'Der importierte Hass. Antisemitismus ist in der arabischen Welt weit verbreitet', Die Zeit, 6 February 2003