

Jew-Hatred and Jihad

The Nazi roots of the 9/11 attack

by Matthias Küntzel

The idea of using suicide pilots to obliterate the skyscrapers of Manhattan originated in 1940s Berlin. "In the latter stages of the war, I never saw Hitler so beside himself as when, as if in a delirium, he was picturing to himself and to us the downfall of New York in towers of flame," wrote Albert Speer in his diary. "He described the skyscrapers turning into huge burning torches and falling hither and thither, and the reflection of the disintegrating city in the dark sky."

Not only Hitler's fantasy but also his plan of action foreshadowed September 11: He envisioned having kamikaze pilots fly light aircraft packed with explosives and with no landing gear into Manhattan skyscrapers. The drawings for the Daimler-Benz *Amerikabomber* from the spring of 1944 show giant four-engine planes with raised undercarriages for transporting small bombers. The bombers would be released shortly before the planes reached the East Coast, after which the mother plane would return to Europe.

Hitler's rapture at the thought of Manhattan in flames indicates his underlying motive: not merely to fight a military adversary, but to kill all Jews everywhere. Possessed of the notion that the whole of the Second World War was a struggle against an imaginary Jewish enemy, he deemed "the USA a Jewish state" and New York the center of world Jewry. "Wall Street," as a popular book published in Munich in 1919 put it, "is, so to speak, the Military Headquarters of Judas. From there his threads radiate out across the entire world." From 1941 on, Hitler pushed to get the bombers into production, in order to "be able to teach the Jews a lesson in the form of terror attacks on American metropolises." Towards the end of the war this idea became an obsession.

Sixty years later, it so happens, the assault on the World Trade Center was coordinated from Germany. Mohamed Atta, the Egyptian who piloted the plane that struck the North Tower of the World Trade Center; Marwan al-Shehhi, from the United Arab Emirates, who steered the plane into the South Tower; Ziad Jarrah, from Lebanon, who crashed United Airlines Flight 93 near Shanksville, Pennsylvania; and their friends Ramzi Binalshibh, a Yemeni, and the Moroccan student Mounir al-Motassadeq had formed an al Qaeda cell in Hamburg, where they held regular "Koran circle" meetings with sympathizers.

What ideas propelled Atta and the others to act? Witnesses provided part of the answer at the world's first 9/11-related trial, the prosecution of al-Motassadeq, which took place in Hamburg between October 2002 and

February 2003. One participant in the Koran circle meetings, Shahid Nickels, said Atta's *Weltanschauung* was based on a "National Socialist way of thinking." Atta was convinced that the Jews were striving for world domination and considered New York City the center of world Jewry, which was, in his opinion, Enemy No. 1. Fellow students who lived in Motassedeq's dormitory testified that he shared these views and waxed enthusiastic about a forthcoming "big action." One student quoted Motassedeq as saying, "The Jews will burn and in the end we will dance on their graves."

Amazingly, neither the American media nor the international press took much notice of this testimony, largely refusing to report on Atta's and Motassedeq's explicit Jew-hatred. The above quotations come from the weekly *Der Spiegel* and from the detailed notes of the trial taken by journalist Michael Eggers, who attended every session and wrote about it for Reuters. If this had been the trial of a Ku Klux Klan member or someone from the far right such as Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh, reports of Nazi-like dreams of exterminating the Jews would probably have made the headlines. But in this case, involving attackers of Arab background, journalists apparently found the issue irrelevant. Moreover, this Jew-hatred was no quirk of the Hamburg cell. Osama bin Laden himself declared in 1998, "The enmity between us and the Jews goes back far in time and is deep rooted. There is no question that war between us is inevitable. . . . The Hour of Resurrection shall not come before Muslims fight Jews."

Even the *9/11 Commission Report*, the summation produced by the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States in July 2004, falls short in this regard. Its chapter on "Bin Laden's worldview" makes no mention of his hatred of Jews. This silence is all the more surprising in that the commission quotes documents in which bin Laden unambiguously expresses his hatred of Jews. For example, in the "Letter to the American People" of November 2002, which the report repeatedly cites, bin Laden warns: "The Jews have taken control of your media, and now control all aspects of your life making you their servants and achieving their aims at your expense." Osama goes on: "Your law is the law of rich and wealthy people. . . . Behind them stand the Jews who control your policies, media and economy." Yet the report's authors inexplicably fail to see the significance of these words and the ideology behind them. The report also ignores the history of Islamism. It accords the entire pre-1945 period just five lines. Yet it is precisely this period that fostered the personal contacts and ideological affinities between early Islamism and late Nazism--the linkage between Jew-hatred and jihad.

Despite common misconceptions, Islamism was born not during the 1960s but during the 1930s. Its rise was inspired not by the failure of Nasserism but by the rise of Nazism, and prior to 1951 all its campaigns were directed not against colonialism but against the Jews. It was the Organization of the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in 1928, that established Islamism as a mass movement. The significance of the Brotherhood to Islamism is comparable to that of the Bolshevik party to communism: It was and remains to this day the ideological reference point and organizational core for all later Islamist

groups, including al Qaeda and Hamas.

It is true that British colonial policy produced Islamism, insofar as Islamism viewed itself as a resistance movement against "cultural modernity." The Islamists' solution was the call for a new order based on *sharia*. But the Brotherhood's jihad was not directed primarily against the British. Rather, it focused almost exclusively on Zionism and the Jews. Membership in the Brotherhood shot up from 800 to 200,000 between 1936 and 1938, according to the research of Abd Al-Fattah Muhammad El-Awaisi for his book *The Muslim Brothers and the Palestine Question 1928-1947*. In those two years the Brotherhood conducted only one major campaign in Egypt, and it was against Zionism and the Jews.

This campaign, which established the Brotherhood as a mass movement, was set off by a rebellion in Palestine directed against Jewish immigration and initiated by the notorious grand mufti of Jerusalem, Amin al-Husseini. The Brotherhood organized mass demonstrations in Egyptian cities under the slogans "Down With the Jews!" and "Jews Get Out of Egypt and Palestine!" Leaflets called for a boycott of Jewish goods and Jewish shops, and the Brotherhood's newspaper, *al-Nadhir*, carried a regular column on "The Danger of the Jews of Egypt," which published the names and addresses of Jewish businessmen and allegedly Jewish newspaper publishers all over the world, attributing every evil, from communism to brothels, to the "Jewish danger."

The Brotherhood's campaign against the Jews used not only Nazi-like tactics but also German funding. As the historian Brynjar Lia recounted in his monograph on the Brotherhood, "Documents seized in the flat of Wilhelm Stellbogen, the Director of the German News Agency affiliated to the German Legation in Cairo, show that prior to October 1939 the Muslim Brothers received subsidies from this organization. Stellbogen was instrumental in transferring these funds to the Brothers, which were considerably larger than the subsidies offered to other anti-British activists."

At the same time, the Muslim Brotherhood was the first modern organization to propagate the archaic idea of a belligerent jihad and the longing for death. In 1938, Hassan al-Banna, the Brotherhood's charismatic founder, published his concept of jihad in an article entitled "The Industry of Death." He wrote: "To a nation that perfects the industry of death and which knows how to die nobly, God gives proud life in this world and eternal grace in the life to come." This slogan was enthusiastically taken up by the "Troops of God," as the Brothers called themselves. As their battalions marched down Cairo's boulevards in semi-fascist formation they would burst into song: "We are not afraid of death, we desire it. . . . Let us die to redeem the Muslims!"

The death cult that became a hallmark of modern jihadism was laced with Jew-hatred from the very beginning. Moreover, this attitude sprang not only from European influences; it also drew directly on Islamic sources. First, Islamists considered, and still consider, Palestine an Islamic territory, *Dar al-Islam*, where Jews must not run a single village, let alone a state. At best, in

their view, this land should be *judenrein*; at the very least, Jews there should be relegated to subservient status. Second, Islamists justify their aspiration to eliminate the Jews of Palestine by invoking the example of Muhammad, who in the 7th century not only expelled two Jewish tribes from Medina, but also beheaded the entire male population of a third Jewish tribe, before proceeding to sell all the women and children into slavery. Third, they find support and encouragement for their actions and plans in the anti-Jewish passages of the Koran.

After World War II it became apparent that the center of global Jew-hatred was shifting from Nazi Germany to the Arab world. In November 1945, just half a year after the end of the Third Reich, the Muslim Brothers carried out the worst anti-Jewish pogroms in Egypt's history, when demonstrators penetrated the Jewish quarters of Cairo on the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration. They ransacked houses and shops, attacked non-Muslims, and torched the synagogues. Six people were killed, and some hundred more injured. A few weeks later the Islamists' newspapers "turned to a frontal attack against the Egyptian Jews, slandering them as Zionists, Communists, capitalists and bloodsuckers, as pimps and merchants of war, or in general, as subversive elements within all states and societies," as Gudrun Krämer wrote in her study *The Jews in Egypt 1914-1952*.

In 1946, the Brotherhood made sure that Heinrich Himmler's friend Amin al-Husseini, the former grand mufti who was being sought as a war criminal by Britain and the United States, was granted asylum and a new lease on political life in Egypt. As leader of the Palestine National Movement, al-Husseini had been a close ally of both the Muslim Brotherhood and the Nazis. Based in Berlin from 1941 to 1945, he had directed the Muslim SS divisions in the Balkans and had been personally responsible for blocking negotiations late in the war that might have saved thousands of Jewish children from the gas chambers. All this was known in 1946. Nonetheless, Britain and the United States chose to forgo criminal prosecution of al-Husseini in order to avoid spoiling their relations with the Arab world. France, which was holding al-Husseini, deliberately let him get away.

For many in the Arab world, what amounted to amnesty for this prominent Islamic authority who had spent the war years broadcasting Nazi propaganda from Berlin was a vindication of his actions. They started to view his Nazi past with pride, not shame, and Nazi criminals on the wanted list in Europe now flooded into the Arab world. Large print-runs of the most infamous libel of the Jews, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, were published in the following decades at the behest of two well-known former members of the Muslim Brotherhood, Gamal Abdel Nasser and Anwar Sadat. Both the Muslim Brothers' unconditional solidarity with al-Husseini and their anti-Jewish riots mere months after Auschwitz show that the Brotherhood did not object, to say the least, to Hitler's attempt to exterminate the Jews of Europe.

The consequences of this attitude, this blindness to the international impact of the Holocaust, continue to affect the course of the Arab-Jewish conflict

today. How do Islamists explain international support for Israel in 1947? Ignoring the actual fate of the Jews during World War II, they revert to conspiracy theories, viewing the creation of the Jewish state as a Jewish-inspired attack by the United States and the Soviet Union on the Arab world. Accordingly, El-Awaisi writes, the Brotherhood "considered the whole United Nations intervention to be an international plot carried out by the Americans, the Russians and the British, under the influence of Zionism." The mad notion of a worldwide Jewish conspiracy, suppressed in Germany since May 8, 1945, survived and flourished in the political culture of the Arab world.

In particular, Nazi-like conspiracy thinking persisted and grew. An especially striking example of its continuing influence is the charter adopted in 1988 by the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine, better known as Hamas. In this charter--which "sounds as if it were copied from the pages of *Der Stürmer*," as Sari Nusseibeh, former PLO representative in Jerusalem, has written--Hamas defines itself as "the spearhead and the avant-garde" of the struggle against "world Zionism." The Jews, the charter explains, "were behind the French Revolution [and] the Communist Revolution. . . . They were behind World War I . . . they were behind World War II, through which they made huge financial gains by trading in armaments, and paved the way for the establishment of their state. . . . There is no war going on anywhere, without having their finger in it. . . . Their plan," states Article 32, "is embodied in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and their present conduct is the best proof of what we are saying."

As in the 1930s and 1940s, the sheer absurdity of the claims makes it difficult for educated people to believe that anyone could take them seriously. Nonetheless, this notion of Jews as the root of all evil continues to inspire the mass murder of civilians in Israel and to motivate the joy with which Islamists greet those murders. "Hitler's Islamic heirs," as the historian Jehuda Bauer has called the Islamists, have replaced an anticolonialism aspiring to emancipation with a Jew-hatred aspiring to salvation through the annihilation of everyone "Jewish." It should not be surprising to find Osama bin Laden accusing "the Jews" of "taking hostage America and the West"--or to find Mohamed Atta's acquaintances attributing to him a Nazi worldview. What is truly surprising is that this Islamist hatred of Jews is often overlooked by Western analysts, political actors, and media.

As noted above, the *9/11 Commission Report* is a case in point. Instead of discussing the fact that Jew-hatred had reached epidemic proportions in the Islamic world well before September 11, the report gives the impression that Islamism originally arose in response to recent American and Western policies. This is first conveyed in a remark on the early days of Islamism, when, we are told, "Fundamentalists helped articulate anticolonial grievances," an idea that ignores crucial dimensions of the outlook of the Muslim Brotherhood of the 1930s. The stereotypical message that the West is responsible is repeated in the report's analysis of bin Laden's motives: "Bin Laden's grievance with the United States may have started in reaction to specific U.S. policies but it quickly became far deeper." The report gets the

history wrong. The al Qaeda leader was first politicized not by "specific U.S. policies," but by the writings of Sayyid Qutb and the jihadist lectures of Abdullah Azzam. As a result, the commission's explanation of al Qaeda's appeal is one-sided: "As political, social, and economic problems created flammable societies, Bin Laden used Islam's most extreme fundamentalist traditions as his match."

It is, of course, true that Islamists seek to exploit social problems for their own ends. But Islamism is not an ideology that ignites protest as it rubs up against social injustice. On the contrary, what provokes Islamist violence is any sign of modern development in the Muslim world: scientific inquiry, political or personal self-determination, economic progress, women's equality, freedom of expression in cinema and theater. The radicalization of Islam is less the consequence of poverty and lack of opportunity than their cause.

The refusal to see this and to recognize the substance of Islamist ideology--the death cult, the hatred of Jews, and the profound hatred of freedom--leads back again and again to the mistaken "discovery" that the "root cause" of terrorism is U.S. policies. Ultimately, the refusal to recognize al Qaeda's true motives results in a reversal of responsibility: The more deadly the terrorism, the greater the American guilt. The appeal of this approach is related to the specious hope it holds out: If suicide terrorism has its roots in U.S. policy, then a change in U.S. policy can assuage terrorism and the fear it induces. Al Qaeda, meanwhile, benefits, since the bloodier its attacks, the greater the anger against .□□.□□. the United States.

The same pattern explains the bizarre reaction to the Middle East conflict that is widespread in the West: The average observer, ignorant of the anti-Jewish content of the Hamas Charter, has to find some other explanation for terrorism against Jews, which must be--Israel. It is not the terrorists who are guilty, but their victims. Finding suicide terrorism incomprehensible, Westerners rationalize it as an act of despair that invites sympathy. *Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner*. Here, too, following the principle of "the more barbaric the anti-Jewish terror, the greater the Israeli guilt," the bombers' victims become the scapegoat for global terrorism. The old stereotype of Jewish guilt is thus amplified in contemporary form--and only encourages the terrorists.

A struggle against Islamism waged in ignorance of Islamist ideology weakens the West. The attribution of guilt to Israel and the United States adds fuel to the flames of Islamist propaganda and drives the wedge deeper into the Western camp rather than where it belongs--in the Muslim world.

Such blindness is especially hazardous in the case of the Iranian nuclear program, whose danger arises from the unique ideological stew surrounding it: the mish-mash of Jew-hatred, Holocaust denial, and Shiite death-cult messianism that is the context for Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons and advanced missiles. Here the worst-case scenario is not an increase in suicide bombing attacks against individuals, but a perhaps suicidal nuclear attack

on the Israeli state. Back in Munich in 1938, many believed they could resolve the Sudeten German problem with Hitler without considering how it fit into the Nazis' overall -strategy. In the same way today, in U.N. Security Council decisions and the positions of the Permanent Five, the technical aspects of Iran's nuclear program are often divorced from their ideological context.

The problem is not that the Islamists hide their goals. The problem is that the West does not listen. Osama bin Laden's chief reproach of the Americans in his "Letter to the American People" is that they act as free citizens who make their own laws instead of accepting *sharia*. The same hatred of freedom can be found in Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's letter to the American president: "Those with insight can already hear the sounds of the shattering and fall of the ideology and thoughts of the liberal democratic systems."

Not to confront the ideological roots of Islamism--notably its well-documented connection to Nazi Jew-hatred--stymies any Western push for political, economic, and cultural modernization in the Muslim world. Yet only such modernization can split the majority of Muslims, who would benefit from social progress, from the Islamists, who are willing to die to prevent it. Without challenging the ideological roots of Islamism, it is impossible to confront the Muslim world with the real choices before it: Will it choose life and hope, or does it prefer the cult of death? Will it stand up for individual and social self-determination, or will it finally submit to the mullahs' program of Jew-hatred and jihad?

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