

The Aftershock of the Nazi War against the Jews, 1947/48

Could this war against Israel have been prevented?

by Matthias Küntzel

On 29 November 1947 over two-thirds of the United Nations membership voted in favor of General Assembly Resolution 181 proposing a partition of Palestine: 56% of the mandate territory was assigned to a Jewish state and 43% to an Arab state, with Jerusalem under international administration.¹ The Jews in Palestine danced for joy in the streets all night. The following day, eight Jews were murdered in three Palestinian Arab attacks. The Arab war to prevent the implementation of the UN resolution had begun.

The struggle lasted an entire year. The first phase of the war was conducted by irregular Arab guerrilla groups and units. The second phase began on 14 May 1948. During the afternoon of that day, David Ben Gurion announced the birth of the State of Israel. Around midnight the country was invaded from the north by Syrian and Lebanese units, from the east by Jordanian troops and from the south by the Egyptian army.² As the British Mandate had ended on the same day, there was no one to stop them. Some 6,000 Jews and an unknown number of Arabs lost their lives before the first ceasefire agreements were signed at the beginning of 1949.³

While this war has been the subject of a vast literature, scholars have not devoted sufficient attention to the reasons why the Arabs chose war. This issue requires renewed examination in the light of the disclosure of important new evidence. In recent years our understanding of the scale and significance of Nazi antisemitic propaganda directed at the Arab world has been enriched by several major new studies.⁴ Furthermore, there has been important new research on the role of Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem and of the Muslim Brotherhood.⁵ As a consequence, the assertion by Jamal el-Husseini, a cousin of the Mufti, that “the Arabs are not antisemitic, but anti-Zionist” is no longer a convincing argument.⁶ We now understand that there has been and there still exists an anti-Zionist antisemitism in which everything that

antisemites traditionally attribute to “World Jewry” is projected onto the Jewish State of Israel.⁷

The above raises the following questions: Are there elements of continuity between the Nazi war of 1939-45 and the subsequent Arab war against Israel? If so, what do they reveal about the history of the era? I hope that this paper will stimulate further research into these questions.

Who Wanted War in 1947?

The Arab world was unanimous in its public rejection of the UN Partition Plan. According to the *Middle East Journal*, early in 1948, “even those Arabs who sincerely hoped for an eventual understanding with the Jews of Palestine could see no reasonable basis for acquiescence in the partition scheme.”⁸ After the First World War, many Arabs considered that they had been betrayed by the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 by which Britain and France had designated their respective spheres of influence, disregarding the prospect of independence that London had been holding out to the Arabs. Following the Second World War, according to the *Middle East Journal*, “Palestine had become the test of the Arabs’ independence; to surrender would mean a repetition of the defeat which had come upon them after World War I.”⁹

More controversial, however, was the question of whether military force should be used to thwart a two-state solution. In 1947 most Arabs in Mandatory Palestine were opposed to war. Tens of thousands of them had found work in Jewish-dominated economic sectors such as citrus fruit production. Moreover, they were aware of the Zionists’ military strength. As Ben Gurion noted in February 1948, “most of the Palestinian Arabs refused, and still refuse, to be drawn into fighting.”¹⁰ In his groundbreaking study of Palestinian collaborators, Hillel Cohen introduces many examples of stubborn resistance on the part of Palestinian Arabs to their leaders’ calls to arms, of non-aggression pacts with nearby Jewish communities and of denial of assistance to the Mufti’s forces. There were even cases where Arabs actively supported Jewish fighters.¹¹ There was a similar absence of war-like intentions in the Arab League states of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Transjordan, Syria, Yemen and Iraq. In August 1946, the Jewish Agency reported that “the Egyptians agree that there is no other acceptable solution to the Palestine question except partition.”¹²

Such views were no longer openly expressed after the UN partition resolution. However, in December 1947 both Egypt and Saudi Arabia flatly rejected the possibility of military intervention.¹³ The Arab League repeated that position as well. Although it was agreed that recruitment centers for guerrilla volunteers should be established in Palestine, no further measures were taken. Indeed, in February 1948, Abd al-Rahman Azzam, Secretary-General of the Arab League, defined “the conflict in Palestine as a civil war into which they would send their regular troops only if foreign armies were to get involved and implement the partition by force.”¹⁴ In light of the international support for partition, such caution was understandable. “It would be a dangerous and tragic precedent if a General Assembly resolution were to be thwarted by force,” the UN Palestine Commission asserted in February 1948.¹⁵ At the same time, the United States designated any attempt to change the decision by force as an “act of aggression.”¹⁶

Foreign policy considerations, however, were not the only reason for the Arab League’s cautious stance. In private, some Arab leaders were not as unhappy with the partition plan as their public statements suggested. As Transjordan’s ruler King Abdullah stated: “The partition of Palestine was the only viable solution to the conflict.”¹⁷ The Secretary-General of the Arab League, Abd al-Rahman Azzam, expressed a similar view. According to a Jewish Agency report of August 1946, “there was only one solution, in his view, and that was partition... But as Secretary of the Arab League he could not appear before the Arabs as the initiator of such a proposal.”¹⁸ Therefore, “before the Arabs” Azzam placed exactly the opposite position on the agenda. In conclusion, while the Arab world unanimously rejected partition in public, it was divided regarding embarking upon a regular war. Why then did this war – so costly for both sides – take place? Why, out of a range of possible responses to the partition, did the most extreme, that of Hajj Amin el-Husseini, prevail? We must now look at his activities prior to the outbreak of the war.

Preparing for War

On 28 November 1941, Adolf Hitler assured his guest, the Mufti of Jerusalem, that as soon as the Wehrmacht reached the southern gates of the Caucasus, “Germany’s objective would then be solely the destruction of the Jewish element residing in the Arab sphere.”¹⁹ Three years later, with defeat looming, the Nazis started looking toward the post-war period. Europe may have been in

ruins, but there was still a will to prevent the emergence of a Jewish state even after the defeat of Germany. The following excerpt from the Mufti's memoirs is revealing:

In 1944, "Germany agreed to supply us with arms for the approaching tasks, and to this end created a large store with light arms suitable for guerrilla action... In addition, the authorities put at our disposal four light, four-engine airplanes for the transportation of war materiel to Palestine, to be stored in secret shelters, for the training of Palestinian fighters and for their preparation for the battles to follow." The material included "tens of thousands of rifles, machine guns and light weapons and great quantities of equipment and ammunition."²⁰ As part of this effort, in October 1944, five parachutists in German uniforms landed in the Jordan Valley on a mission to hide boxes of weapons previously dropped by the Luftwaffe. While these may have been isolated events, they do indicate that there was a direct link between the Nazi war effort and the subsequent struggle for Palestine regarding the supply of weapons.

Similarly, continuity with the Nazis existed on an individual level. One of the October 1944 parachutists was Ali Salameh, who served as a major in the Wehrmacht at the time. During the 1947/48 war, he was a commander in the Mufti's jihad army (*al-jihad al-muqaddas*) where he chose another German Wehrmacht officer as his adviser.²¹ The jihad army's most famous commander and its leader in Jerusalem, Abd al-Qadir el-Husseini, had also been a Nazi collaborator who had participated in the defense of the pro-Nazi regime in Baghdad.

The second volunteer force, the Arab League-sponsored Arab Liberation Army, was led by another former Wehrmacht officer, Fawzi el-Kawkji. According to *Der Spiegel*, "important positions in Fawzi's headquarters are occupied by members of the old German Wehrmacht... They are mainly former soldiers in Rommel's Africa Corps, escapees from Egyptian POW camps or Muslim Yugoslavs and Albanians who Jerusalem's ex-Mufti had previously recruited to a pro-German Mufti Brigade." "No one," the report continues, "is troubled by the fact that the German volunteers, as in the old days, have adopted "Die Fahne Hoch" [the Horst Wessel Song] as their marching song."²²

This report was later confirmed by researchers who found that at least 520 Bosnians, 67 Albanians and 111 Croatians came to Syria or Beirut in order to fight in Palestine. For example, on 14 March 1945, "a party of 67 Albanians, 20 Yugoslavs, and 21 Croats, led by an Albanian named Derwish Bashaco, arrived

by boat in Beirut from Italy. A Haganah report mentions that there was a German officer among them. They were hosted by the Palestine Arab Bureau and made their way to Damascus to join the ALA” or the Arab Liberation Army.²³ These former Wehrmacht soldiers did not play a significant military role, but their presence had a political importance. They embodied the continuity of the anti-Jewish war of extermination initiated by the Nazis. The Jews regarded their presence as proof that what was at stake in the 1947/48 war was nothing less than a repetition or continuation of the Holocaust.

However, the true embodiment of the continuity between the two wars was the Mufti himself. His antisemitism, which had cost the lives of thousands of Jews in 1944, was redirected against Israel in 1948. “Our battle with World Jewry ... is a question of life and death,” Al-Husseini wrote after his return to Cairo. It is “a battle between two conflicting faiths, each of which can exist only on the ruins of the other.”²⁴ The Arabs must “together attack the Jews and destroy them as soon as the British forces have withdrawn.”²⁵

Prior to the end of the war on 8 May 1945, the Mufti had, “with astute foresight,” according to Joseph Schechtman, moved a “large proportion of his Nazi financial backing” from Germany to Switzerland and Iraq.²⁶ Moreover, officials in Berlin also entered the post-war period. Why else would the Foreign Office have signed a contract to continue subsidizing the Mufti with some 12,000 marks per month after 1 April 1945? The ongoing contractual relationship indicates “that Nazi officials ... hoped to continue their joint or complementary political-ideological campaign in the post-war period.”²⁷

At the end of May 1946, when the Mufti arrived in Cairo, he had to remain in hiding for weeks, as he faced charges as a war criminal by Britain, the United States and Yugoslavia. Therefore, we must ask how he resumed his position as the leader of the Palestinian Arabs despite his commitment to the Nazi cause and to the side that had suffered such a bitter defeat.

The Victory of the Mufti

In 1937, the British had dissolved the Arab Higher Committee that was led by the Mufti. Henceforth, the Palestinian Arabs were leaderless. Moreover, the Arab Revolt of 1936-39 exacerbated the division of the Palestinian Arabs into the radical wing led by the Husseinis and the more moderate wing led by the Nashashibis. Nevertheless, the Arab League maintained that Palestine must be

represented. In November 1945, it established a new Arab Higher Committee, comprised of twelve members: five from the Husseini faction and five from the opposition parties: the Nashashibis' National Defense Party; the Reform Party of Dr. Hussein Khalidi; the National Bloc; the Arab Youth Congress; and the *Istiqlal* [The Palestinian Independence Party], with the remaining two claiming to be independent.²⁸ In February 1946, the Mufti's cousin and loyal ally, Jamal el-Husseini returned to Palestine from an internment camp in Rhodesia. He expanded the Committee in order to ensure the dominance of the Husseinis. The other parties reacted indignantly by setting up their own organization, the "Arab Supreme Front," at the end of May.

At the same time, Amin al-Husseini arrived in Cairo. The Mufti had been detained in France, but successfully persuaded the French government that he would advance their interests in the region. In the end, the French authorities facilitated his escape.²⁹ At the same time, the Arab League was meeting in the Syrian town of Bludan, where it arrived at a far-reaching decision: both the Committee and the Front were summarily dissolved and replaced by a new Arab Higher Committee under the leadership of Amin el-Husseini in which the Mufti's opponents were denied any role. According to Joseph Schechtman, "the Bludan 'Diktat' was a complete victory for the Mufti."³⁰ David Schiller calls it a "seizure of power, a coup."³¹

Although, at the time, Amin el-Husseini was not allowed to set foot in Palestine, the Arab League now enthroned him as the new leader of the Palestinian Arabs with an annual budget of 10,000 pounds sterling.³² This Arab decision was a provocation *vis-à-vis* the Yishuv and also destroyed the last vestiges of a Palestinian policy independent of the Mufti.

As a result, from 1946-1948, the Arabs of Palestine were destined to repeat the painful experiences of 1936-39: "The Mufti and his associates tolerated neither criticism nor opposition – even in non-political contexts – and did not hesitate to use pressure, violence and even murder to crush any reserve or disapproval. Anyone who broke the consensus of non-recognition of Jewish rights (or was even suspected of doing so) exposed himself to threats."³³ One victim was Fawzi Darwish Hussein, a cousin of the Mufti and a respected figure who had worked with Jews to advocate a binational state. In November 1946, he was murdered by the Mufti's thugs. "My cousin stumbled and received his proper punishment," remarked Jamal al-Husseini.³⁴ Another was Sami Taha, a leading trade unionist from Haifa who wanted to grant Jews certain rights and therefore was murdered in September 1947.³⁵ In 1947, when the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) attempted to gather

information, the Arab Higher Committee threatened anyone who talked to the UN body with death.³⁶

In addition to the many Palestinians who disliked the Mufti, leaders of the Arab League disliked him as well. Secretary-General Azzam considered his extremism “at least, if not more, harmful to the Arabs than to the Jews.”³⁷ Egyptian Prime Minister Isma’il Sidqi described him as “a schemer seeking his own personal interest [who] couldn’t care less if the entire Arab world were destroyed so long as he achieved his own goals.”³⁸ King Abdullah of Transjordan blamed him for the “misery” in Palestine, while Ibn Saud declared that the Mufti would not be allowed to enter his country.³⁹ In fact, everything seemed to speak against him embarking on a new career. If that were the case, why then did the Arab League appoint the most virulent Jew-hater among the Palestinian Arabs to be their leader?

The Intervention of the Muslim Brotherhood

The pressure of the Arab street determined the outcome. Many Arabs regarded the Mufti as a charismatic leader who had defied not only the British arrest warrant of 1937 but also the demands for his extradition by the British, Yugoslav and American governments in 1945. “The impunity for his actions has enhanced his prestige among the Arabs,” wrote Simon Wiesenthal in 1947. “A man (...) who is the enemy number 1 of a powerful empire – but this empire seems helpless against him – seems to them to be a worthy leader indeed.”⁴⁰ Moreover, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood encouraged popular support for the Mufti. In the 1930s the Brotherhood had received financial aid from Nazi Germany because of its antisemitic orientation. This was expressed, for example, in September 1944, when the head of the Brotherhood’s branch in Tanta described the Jews as “the parasites of the universe” and “an impudent people who used Muslim and Christian blood for their holy services in Passover.” This speaker called on his audience to hate the Jews, “to destroy them like sick dogs,” and to unite in a Jihad against them.⁴¹

Since the Mufti’s detention in May 1945, the Brotherhood had tirelessly defended and extolled him and issued threats against his enemies. Thus, in April 1946, they warned the United States that they were “ready to sacrifice [themselves], whenever necessary” in order to rescue him.⁴² Responding to the rumor that the Zionists had sentenced the Mufti to death, they stated that, “One hair of the Mufti’s is worth more than the Jews of the whole world ...

Should one hair of the Mufti's be touched, every Jew in the world would be killed without mercy."⁴³ Such threats had an impact. At the war's end the Muslim Brotherhood was still the largest and strongest political organization in Egypt with 1,500 branches and 500,000 members. By 1948, these figures had doubled or even tripled.⁴⁴

The Mufti's return to Egypt represented a major success for the Brotherhood's campaign of threats. The movement exuberantly celebrated by cheering him on with these words: "Oh Amin! What a great, stubborn, terrific, wonderful man you are... March on! God is with you! We are behind you! We are willing to sacrifice our necks for the cause! To death! Forward march!"⁴⁵ The pro-Mufti campaigns and the potential for disorder and riots on the part of the Muslim Brotherhood played a crucial role in the decision of the Egypt-dominated Arab League to appoint the Mufti as the Palestinian leader.

The Drive toward War

Pressure from the Muslim Brotherhood also contributed to the dispatch of regular Egyptian troops against the newly founded State of Israel. First, the Brotherhood established an organizational network in Palestine, comprising over 25 branches and 20,000 members. Subsequently, they exerted pressure on the Arab League and offered to enlist 10,000 fighters for Palestine.⁴⁶ Furthermore, when the League met in Cairo in December 1947, the Brotherhood brought 100,000 demonstrators into the streets. According to a contemporary account, on the terrace of the Savoy Hotel where the meeting of the League took place, "the Prime Ministers of the Arab states stood with worthy and grave expressions acknowledging, fez in hand, the salutes of the passing parade of believers."⁴⁷ The Arab League's response to this demonstration was that, for the first time, it expressed its consent to train volunteers for jihad in Palestine. The training was organized partly by Egyptian officers and partly by Brotherhood members such as Mahmud Labid.⁴⁸ Thus, a reluctant Egypt began its active participation in the fighting in Palestine.

While the Yishuv had to defend itself against guerrilla attacks, using all necessary means to do so, the Muslim Brotherhood spread rumors of horrific Zionist atrocities against Arabs in Palestine. Thus, they "created an atmosphere in which war seemed the only logical and natural process," writes Thomas Mayer. "...The [Brotherhood] Society succeeded in drawing Egypt into a full-scale military initiative in Palestine."⁴⁹ The American embassy in Damascus

confirmed this assessment. Without referring to the Brotherhood by name, they identified “the combined momentum of their own rhetoric and pressure from below” as the cause of the Egyptian invasion of Israel. The “Government appears to have led public opinion to the brink of war and [is] now unable to retreat.”⁵⁰

The significance of the Islamist war drive has been greatly underestimated in studies of the 1948/49 war. In contrast, in 1938, the Egypt government tried to suppress inflammatory propaganda regarding Palestine.⁵¹ Why could it not do so a decade later?

The Factor of Antisemitism

The 1946 Report of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry investigating the problem of European Jewry and Palestine noted that “the Nazi occupation has left behind it a legacy of anti-Semitism.”⁵² The same finding applied to the Arab countries that had not been occupied by the Nazis. From April 1939-April 1945, daily Arabic language radio broadcasts from Berlin constantly urged their listeners to prevent the birth of a Jewish state and exterminate the Jews living in Palestine. The echoes of this propaganda, which fell on receptive ears due to the anti-Jewish bias of the Qur’an and other Islamic sources, continued to reverberate even after the defeat of Nazi Germany. While the view of the British Foreign Office, which in 1946, “spoke of Arab hatred of the Jews being greater than that of the Nazis” may be exaggerated,⁵³ it is clear that wartime Nazi propaganda contributed to increased hostility toward the Jews in Arab countries. According to Thomas Meyer, pan-Islamic organizations exploited such sentiments that derived “to some extent from sympathy with the Palestinian Arabs, but also from the belief that the Jews were responsible for the shortage of food and high prices of essential products.”⁵⁴ Indeed, in 1946, even Ali Mahir, former Prime Minister of Egypt, thought that “Arab opposition to Zionism was the product of both Nazi propaganda in the Arab East and Britain’s confusing politics.”⁵⁵

To be sure, there were other possible reasons for rejecting partition than antisemitic hatred. In 1937, the Arab world had opposed the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine as envisaged by the Peel Commission. At that time, however, the Mufti and the Muslim Brotherhood were almost alone in their use of antisemitism. Ten years later, however, antisemitism was part of the public discourse, even among those who previously had been regarded as

moderates. For example, the statement by Jordanian Prime Minister Samir Rifa'i that "the Jews ... were responsible for starting the two world wars"⁵⁶ had not been heard in 1937. Such accusations were constantly reiterated in the Nazis' Arabic-language broadcasts, as Jeffrey Herf has shown in his groundbreaking study, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*.

Broadcasts from Berlin also emphasized the claim that Zionism was inherently expansionist. For example, on 8 September 1943, Radio Berlin asserted that the Jews would not be satisfied until they had made "every territory between the Tigris and the Nile Jewish." If they succeeded, "there will remain not a single Arab Moslem or Christian in the Arab world. Arabs! Imagine Egypt, Iraq and all the Arab countries becoming Jewish with no Christianity or Islam there."⁵⁷ In October 1944, a Zionist delegate found that even respected teachers at al-Azhar were citing the Brotherhood's propaganda "alleging that the Zionists aspired to the destruction of Islam by takeover of al-Aqsa Mosque" in Jerusalem.⁵⁸

With the impending defeat of Germany, there were increasingly dire warnings about the consequences for Palestine should "World Jewry" take advantage of its opportunity. The constant repetition led to a further demonization of Zionism among Arabs. Thus, two years after the liberation of Auschwitz, Ibn Saud described the Jews as an "aggressive people" whose ambitions "extend to all the Arab states where holy places are to be found."⁵⁹ Lebanese Foreign Minister, Hamid Frangieh, regarded "the expansionist efforts of Zionism "a serious threat to peace."⁶⁰ Iraqi Crown Prince Abd al-Ilah considered Zionism "the greatest tragedy of the twentieth century,"⁶¹ while an Egyptian member of parliament viewed it as "a cancer in the Arab body."⁶² It is no wonder, therefore, that an assembly of Arab kings and princes convened by Egypt's King Farouk in May 1946 struck the same note. Their resolution states as follows: "We have decided that Zionism poses a danger not only to Palestine but also to all other Arab countries and to all nations of Islam. Therefore it is the duty of all Arab countries and Islamic countries to resist the danger of Zionism."⁶³ The paranoid delusion that a few thousand Zionists in Britain and the U.S. together with the Yishuv in Palestine constituted a dangerous global power that threatened the whole Islamic world had nothing to do with reality but much to do with the cumulative impact of the years of relentless Nazi propaganda.⁶⁴

The League was not content with such statements. In December 1945, it banned Palestinian Jews from entering Arab countries⁶⁵ and announced a total boycott of trade with Jews.⁶⁶ The Muslim Brotherhood, which just recently had collaborated with the Nazis, went even further. On November 2, 1945, the

anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, the Brotherhood organized a demonstration in Cairo during which a mob broke into Cairo's Jewish quarter, attacked Jewish shops and desecrated synagogues. "The riots, which also spread to Alexandria and to the European community there, lasted two days. When they ended, police and press reports counted six dead, five of whom were Jews, and 670 injured, 500 of them in Alexandria."⁶⁷

General Amnesty for Antisemitism

After the defeat of the Arabs in December 1948, Jordan's King Abdullah removed Amin al-Husseini from his position as Mufti. Thereafter, the latter's Arab Higher Committee existed only on paper. At the same time, the Egyptian government dissolved the branches of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine and banned the organization in Egypt. Had Egyptian authorities done so after the anti-Jewish riots of November 1945, the history of the Middle East might have been very different.

Let us consider this hypothetical proposition. Had the government of Egypt banned the Muslim Brotherhood at the end of 1945, its pro-Mufti campaign would not have taken place and there would have been far less pressure on the Egyptian authorities to install the Mufti as leader of the Palestinian Arabs. Neither the Brotherhood nor the Mufti would have been in a position to whip up war fever through the use of anti-Jewish attacks in Palestine. Egypt would have held fast to its original rejection of war. The outcome would have been different, and partition might have been implemented.

History, however, took a different path. The Mufti never distanced himself from the Nazis. On the contrary, as late as 1954 he proudly stated "that Hitler admired the struggle of the Palestinian Arabs."⁶⁸ Similarly, the Muslim Brotherhood has never distanced itself from the Mufti's alliance with Hitler. On the contrary, they extolled the Mufti as the heir to Hitler's accomplishments, acclaiming him as "a hero," upon his return from Paris in 1946, who "fought Zionism with the help of Hitler and Germany. Hitler and Germany are gone, but Amin Al-Husseini will continue the struggle."⁶⁹

In 1945, the Egyptian media published detailed reports about the Holocaust and the Nuremberg Trials that opened during the same year.⁷⁰ With the victory over the Nazis, the time had also come for the final reckoning with the Mufti and his antisemitism. Egyptian authorities, however, were unable to counter

the Islamist pro-Mufti campaign. A final effort to do so took place in June 1946. The head of the Egyptian government, Isma'il Sidqi, criticized King Farouk for granting the Mufti asylum without asking the government and referred to the Mufti's "political errors" during his exile in Germany. The Muslim Brotherhood responded with furious denunciations and declared that not only had the Mufti not made any mistakes, but had been conducting the jihad in Nazi Germany just as he had to do.⁷¹ The total amnesty for the Mufti imposed by the Muslim Brotherhood ran completely counter to the spirit of the times. "The Arabs proved to be the only people in the whole world for whom close collaboration with Hitler and Mussolini was not a crime, not even a blemish on the record of a national leader."⁷²

On a local level, however, the general amnesty for antisemitism continued a bad practice. During the Second World War, the Allies had refrained from countering the Nazis' antisemitic propaganda as they did not wish to be seen as "friends of the Zionists." After the war, the Allies chose not to annoy the Arabs and thus refrained from calling the Mufti to account for his crimes. When the Mufti – that "ton of dynamite on two legs" (Winston Churchill) – resumed his political activity in Cairo, the government of Egypt did not oppose him as they did not want to anger the Muslim Brotherhood. When the Islamists called for war against the partition plan, the Arab League did not contradict them as they did not wish to appear friendly to the Jews. All the actors consistently followed the pattern of yielding to intimidation that constantly provided renewed scope for antisemitic anti-Zionism. Finally, Bernard Lewis has written that "since 1945, certain Arab countries have been the only places in the world where hard-core, Nazi-style antisemitism is publicly and officially endorsed and propagated."⁷³

Conclusion

This article has shown that the impact of antisemitism and the role of al-Husseini linked the Nazi war against the Jews with that of 1947/48. Therefore, Hillel Cohen is correct in claiming that "there can be little doubt that the Mufti's inflexible position and refusal to accept any partition proposal were the major reasons for the outbreak of war in 1948."⁷⁴ However, the Mufti might have ended his career in 1945, had the Western powers not allowed him to escape justice and had the Arabs not protected him out of opportunism. The cowardice of important figures paved the way for one of the most fateful

turning points in twentieth-century history: the war of the Arab armies against the fledgling state of Israel.

This war was not inevitable. It happened because Nazi antisemitic anti-Zionist propaganda continued to dominate the political culture of the Arab world after the defeat of Germany, thus preventing any viable challenge to the antisemitic policies of the Mufti and the Muslim Brotherhood. Therefore, the war of 1947/48 appears as an aftershock of the Nazi war against the Jews. The Middle East has never recovered from this watershed. To this day, Palestinian leaders continue to refuse to recognize the Jewish state. At present, Bernard Lewis' question, "What went wrong?" recurs more persistently than ever before. To answer this question, one cannot overlook the impact of the Nazi's antisemitic propaganda and the inability of the key Arab actors to distance themselves from it.

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Notes

1 Resolution 181 (II) Future government of Palestine, A/RES/ 181 (II), 29 November 1947,
<https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/5ba47a5c6cef541b802563e000493b8c/7f0af2bd897689b785256c330061d253?OpenDocument> (Accessed March 27, 2016)

2 *Keesing's Archiv der Gegenwart*, 14 May 1948, 1498.

3 For the stages of the war, see: Benny Morris, *1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008) and David Tal, *War in Palestine 1948: Strategy and Diplomacy* (London: Routledge, 2004).

4 Some examples of this new literature are: Jeffrey Herf, *Nazi Propaganda in the Arab World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); David Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany's War* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014); Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Martin Cüppers, *Halbmond und Hakenkreuz. Das Dritte Reich, die Araber und Palästina*

(Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006); Meir Litvak and Esther Webman, *From Empathy to Denial. Arab Responses to the Holocaust* (London: Hurst & Co, 2009).

[5](#) See e.g., Klaus Gensicke, *Der Mufti von Jerusalem und die Nationalsozialisten. Eine politische Biographie Amin el-Husseini* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2007); Barry Rubin and Wolfgang G. Schwanitz, *Nazis, Islamists, and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); Abd Al-Fattah Muhammad El-Awaisi, *The Muslim Brothers and the Palestine Question 1928-1947* (London: Tauris, 1998).

[6](#) Jamal el-Husseini on 29.September 1947 to the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine as cited by *Archiv der Gegenwart*, 29 September 1947, 1206.

[7](#) Joel Fishman, "Anti-Zionism as a Form of Political Warfare," in: Robert Wistrich, ed. *Anti-Judaism, Antisemitism, Delegitimizing Israel* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2016) [in press].

[8](#) *Middle East Journal*, 2, No. 1 (January 1948), 61.

[9](#) Ibid.

[10](#) Ben Gurion, *Bamaarakha*, vol. 4, part II, 283-84 as cited by Efraim Karsh, *Palestine Betrayed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 115

[11](#) Hillel Cohen, *Army of Shadows: Palestinian Collaboration with Zionism, 1917-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 3 and 231-58.

[12](#) "Summary of Talks in Egypt," prepared by the Jewish Agency Political Department, 29 August 1946 as cited by Neil Caplan, *Futile Diplomacy, Vol. II: Arab-Zionist Negotiations and the End of the Mandate* (London: Frank Cass, 1986), 266.

[13](#) Thomas Mayer, "Arab Unity of Action and the Palestine Question 1945-48," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 22, No 3 (July 1986), 345.

[14](#) "Chronology of International Events and Documents," as cited by *Archiv der Gegenwart*, 16 February 1948, 1385.

[15](#) "UNO-Bulletin," as cited by *Archiv der Gegenwart*, 16 February 1948, 1385.

[16](#) According to a draft resolution put by the USA to the Security Council on 25 February 1948, as cited by *Archiv der Gegenwart*, 5 March 1948, 1408.

[17](#) Kirkbride (Amman) to London, 30 July 1947, FO 371/61876, E7242 as cited by Thomas Mayer, *Arab Unity of Action*, 344.

[18](#) "He [Azzam] would be prepared to support partition on [one of] two conditions: if one of the Arab states took into its hands the initiative and found the strength and courage to propose the thing in the League Council, or if the British requested him to work along these lines." See: "E. Sasson Report," Cairo, 9 August 1946 as cited by Caplan, *Futile Diplomacy*, 264-5.

[19](#) Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin, eds, *The Israel-Arab Reader* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 54. The Nazi preparations for the destruction of the Palestinian Jews are described by Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Martin Cüppers in *Nazi Palestine: The Plan for the Extermination of the Jews in Palestine* (Washington D.C.: Enigma Books, 2010).

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