

ISLAMIC ANTISEMITISM – HOW IT ORIGINATED AND SPREAD

About the meaning of the booklet “Islam and Jewry” and the Bludan Congress of September 1937

by Matthias Küntzel

Islamic anti-Semitism, although not restricted to the Islamist movements, is a key factor in the Islamists' war against the modern world. It lies behind Tehran's desire to destroy the “cancerous tumor” of Israel and motivated the recent Iranian attack on Israel by an armed drone. It inspires Recep Tayyip Erdogan's threat that Israelis won't be able “to find a tree to hide behind”, a clear allusion to a *hadith* that demands the killing of Jews.¹ It causes Mahmoud Abbas to deny any connection between Jerusalem and the Jews² and transforms the political conflict between Israel and the Arabs into a religious struggle between right and wrong. Islamic antisemitism mobilizes the terrorists of the Islamic State to murder Jews in Europe and it ensures that not only in Amman, but also in Berlin and Malmö Arabs threaten Jews with this particular war cry: “Khaybar, Khaybar, O Jews; the army of Muhammad will return.” Khaybar is the name of an oasis inhabited by Jews that Mohammed conquered in blood in 628. It is also the name of an assault rifle made in Iran and a type of rocket used by Hezbollah to fire at Israeli cities in 2006.

In this paper, I will discuss first the hallmarks of Islamic antisemitism. What distinguishes it from other forms of Jew-hatred? My second part deals with the history of Islamic antisemitism, focusing on the booklet *Islam and Jewry* and its dissemination by the Bludan Arab Congress of September 1937. Finally, I will deal with some current effects of Islamic antisemitism.

What does the term “Islamic antisemitism” mean?

This term is neither a general attack on Islam, whose texts also include Jew-friendly passages, nor a general accusation against Muslims, quite a few of whom are against antisemitism. Instead, it refers to a specific kind of antisemitism based on a fusion of two sources: The anti-Judaism of early Islam and the modern antisemitism of Europe.

European antisemitism, as manifested in the phantasm of the Jewish world conspiracy, was alien to the original image of the Jews in Islam. Only in the Christian tradition do Jews appear as a deadly and powerful force capable of killing even God's only son. They were able to bring death and ruin on humanity – being held responsible for outbreaks of the plague. The Nazis believed in the phantasm of the Jews as the rulers of the world, who were thus also responsible for all its misfortunes. There was, according to their phantasm, only one way to the redemption of the world: the systematic annihilation of the Jews.

Not so in Islam. Here, it was not the Jews who murdered the Prophet, but the Prophet who murdered Jews: In the years 623 to 627, Mohammed had all the Jewish tribes in Medina enslaved, expelled or killed. Therefore, some typical features of Christian antisemitism did not appear in the Muslim world: “There were no fears of Jewish conspiracy and domination, no charges of diabolic evil. Jews were not accused of poisoning wells or spreading the plague.”³ Instead, Muslims used to treat the Jews with contempt or condescending toleration. The hatred of Jews fostered in the Qur'an and in the Sunnah pursued the goal of keeping them down as dhimmis: hostility was accompanied by devaluation. In Shiite Iran Jews were even perceived as being unclean. When it was raining, they were forbidden to take to the streets so

that their “impurity” would not be transferred to Muslims. This cultural imprint made the idea of Christian antisemites, that Jews of all people could represent a permanent threat to the world, seem absurd.

This, however, changed with the emergence of Islamic antisemitism. Its essence is the fusion of Islamic anti-Judaism from the old scriptures with modern European antisemitism - hence the combination of the worst Islamic and the worst Christian images of the Jews. A case in point is the Charter of Hamas. In Article 7, this Charter cites a *hadith* in which the Prophet Muhammad says that the Muslims will kill the Jews “when the Jew will hide behind stones and trees. Then stones and trees will say: O Moslems, O Abdulla, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him.” At the same time, Article 22 of the same Charter states that the Jews “were behind World War I ... [and] were behind World War II ... There is no war going on anywhere without having their finger in it.”⁴ This text simultaneously portrays the Jews on the one hand as degraded, fleeing and hiding, and, on the other, as the secret and true rulers of the world. Logically, this combination is as absurd as the Nazi belief that Jews simultaneously control Communism and the Wall Street. However, through this very mixture, both components become radicalized: European antisemitism becomes recharged by the religious and fanatical moment of radical Islam, while the old anti-Judaism of the Qur’an – supplemented by the world conspiracy theory – receives a new and eliminatory quality.

One prominent feature of this new quality is the conviction that Jews everywhere, in league with Israel, are behind a sinister plot to undermine and eradicate Islam. As early as during the 1930s, Amin el-Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem, claimed that the Jews were eager to destroy the holy Muslim sites in Jerusalem. In the 1950s, Sayyid Qutb continued this propaganda in his pamphlet,

"Our Struggle With the Jews": The "bitter war which the Jews launched against Islam ... has not been extinguished, even for one moment, for close on fourteen centuries until this moment, its blaze raging in all corners of the earth."⁵ The seventh century is here again associated with the twentieth century and Qur'anic statements about Jews mixed with the phantasm of a worldwide conspiracy. This viewpoint excludes compromises: "Muslims and Jews [are] locked in a timeless and total confrontation, until one completely subjugates the other".⁶ Thus, the political conflict between Arabs and Zionists about Palestine became Islamized and changed into a religious struggle of life and death. How and when did this kind of Jew-hatred come about?

Islam and Jewry and the Bludan conference

Islamic antisemitism did not develop spontaneously but was invented and used as a means to an end. This process began about 80 years ago in the context of Arab attempts to stop the Zionist immigration to Palestine which considerably increased in the 1930s. The first text that propagated sheer Jew-hatred in an Islamic context by mixing selected anti-Jewish episodes of Mohammed's life with the so-called wickedness of Jews in the 20th century was a 31-page brochure in the Arabic language with the title *Islam and Jewry*, published on August 18, 1937 in Cairo. On the one hand, this text builds on the traditions of early Islam: "The battle between the Jews and Islam began when Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina", we read here. "At that time the Jewish methods were already the same as today. Their weapon as ever was defamation. ... They said Muhammad was a swindler..., they tried to undermine Muhammad's honor..., they began to ask Muhammad senseless and unsolvable questions. ... But with this method too, as before, they had no success. So they ... tried to eradicate the Muslims."

At the same time, the text attacks the Jews in the diction of European antisemitism as "great businessmen", "exploiters", "microbes" and as the perpetrators of the plague. Since Muhammad's days, we read here, the Jews have been constantly trying to "destroy Muslims." "The verses from the Qur'an and hadith," the brochure concludes, "prove to you that the Jews have been the bitterest enemies of Islam and continue to try to destroy it. Do not believe them, they only know hypocrisy and cunning. Hold together, fight for the Islamic thought, fight for your religion and your existence! Do not rest until your land is free of the Jews."⁷

This brochure was an innovation in several ways. First, while the classical Islamic literature treats Mohammed's struggle with the Jews as a minor episode in the life of the Prophet, now "Muhammad's conflict with the Jews has been portrayed as a central theme in his career and their enmity to him given a cosmic significance".⁸ Second, the anti-Jewish components of Islam, which had previously been dormant or of less significance were suddenly invested with new life and vigour. Third, the anti-Jewish verses of the Qur'an were generalized and considered valid for the twentieth century: Converging with European racism, the Jews were attributed a certain unchanging nature with negative characteristics. Fourth, the religious patterns have been combined with elements of a paranoid conspiracy theory: The Muslims were considered to be eternal victims ("They try to eradicate the Muslims") in order to legitimize new forms of aggression ("Do not rest until your land is free of the Jews") which were more reminiscent of the policies of the Nazis than the attitudes of Mohammad.

In September 1937, this pamphlet achieved significance through its distribution at the "National Arab Congress" in Bludan, a health resort in Syria, 30 miles (50 kilometres) northwest of Damascus. This congress, held from September 8 to 10, 1937, shaped

the development of the Middle East conflict in two respects: Firstly, it was the starting point of a pan-Arab movement centred on the fight against Zionism. In addition, it was the source from which the pamphlet *Islam and Jewry* reached the Arab world.

Both developments are linked with the name of Amin el-Husseini. He wanted to prevent the partition of Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state as proposed by the British "Peel Commission" in June 1937 and supported by London. Defeating the "Peel Plan" and intimidating those Arabs who were in favor of it was the main purpose of the Bludan Congress. The Mufti could not attend in person. On July 17, 1937, an attempt by the British mandate power to arrest him had failed.⁹ Thereafter, he remained hidden in the mosque district of Jerusalem until October 1937, when he fled to Beirut. Nevertheless, the participants in the congress appointed him Honorary President of the Assembly.

Already in June 1937, the Mufti had visited Damascus to prepare the Bludan congress and appoint those responsible for its further arrangements.¹⁰ According to a report by the German Consul General of Beirut, Amin el-Husseini also "provided the funds to rent the two largest hotels in Damascus and Bludan and grant a large number of penniless participants rooms without charge"¹¹ No wonder, then, that the congress attracted 411 participants, although only 250 people were allowed into the hall of the "Grand Hotel of Bloudan", where the congress took place. 160 came from Syria, 128 from Palestine, 65 from Lebanon, 30 from Transjordan, 12 from Iraq, six from Egypt and one delegate from Saudi Arabia. Among them were important Arab personalities such as the former Iraqi Prime Minister Naji al-Suwaidi, who presided over the meeting. Acting members of Arab governments, however, stayed away from this anti-British performance.

This congress was not a public event. Even newspaper reporters were not allowed inside during discussions. However, Colonel Gilbert MacKereth, the British consul in Damascus at that time, arranged for a person in his confidence to attend the congress. Based on the reports of this spy, MacKereth in his "memorandum Bludan Congress" of September 1937, described the event as "a manifestation of Judeophobia". In relation to this, he referred to "a startlingly inflammatory pamphlet entitled 'The Jews and Islam' which was handed to each member of the congress on his arrival. It had been printed in Egypt." Annex V of MacKereth's memorandum, written by his spy, carries the headline: "Description of a violently anti-Jewish Pamphlet printed in Cairo for the Palestine Defense Committee there which was given to each of the persons attending the Bludan congress." This memo gives a summary of the pamphlet's content, leaving no doubt that the Cairo publication of August 1937 was distributed here.¹²

During the war, Nazi Germany printed and disseminated *Islam and Jewry* nearly unchanged in several languages and editions. For example, there is proof that in 1942 the Spanish authorities confiscated about 1,500 copies of "a German propaganda pamphlet in the Arabic language called 'The Islam and the Jews'" that had been sent to the German consulate in Tangiers. According to the German Foreign Ministry, these brochures were to have been distributed "unobtrusively" in Spanish Morocco. The Spanish authorities, however, who were responsible for Tangiers, prevented this. They were of the opinion that "the distribution of such a propaganda directed against the Jewish elements in Spanish Morocco could not be permitted" and had all copies confiscated and destroyed.¹³

In 1943, another 10,000 copies of the same pamphlet were printed in Zagreb, this time in Serbo-Croatian (*Islam I Zidovstvo*), and distributed in Bosnia and Croatia.

Half of the texts were circulated among Muslims by the local office of the Propaganda Squadron Croatia in Banja Luka; the remaining copies were spread by its local representatives in Sarajevo. Other copies were published and distributed in German language.¹⁴ Though there is currently no overview of the spread of this pamphlet, *Islam and Jewry* might well be regarded as the forerunner of Sayyid Qutb's notorious text "Our struggle with the Jews" of the 1950s. In his seminal work about Islam and Nazi Germany's war, David Motadel regards *Islam and Jewry* as "one of the most significant examples of this kind of religiously charged anti-Jewish propaganda dispersed among Muslims"¹⁵ while historian Jeffrey Herf deemed this text "one of the founding texts of the Islamist tradition, one that defined the religion of Islam as a source of hatred of the Jews."¹⁶ But who, in fact, published and wrote *Islam and Jewry*?

Who authored *Islam and Jewry*?

The publisher of the first Arabic edition of *Islam and Jewry* was Mohamad Abdel Taher, Director of the "Palestinian-Arab Bureau of Information" in Egypt. Taher was a well-known journalist from Palestine who had lived in Cairo for many years. He was, according to the Norwegian professor of Middle East Studies, Brynjar Lia, one of Amin el-Husseini's "Palestinian contacts in Cairo" and is said to have contributed to the transfer of German Nazi money to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁷ Sir Miles Lampson, Great Britain's ambassador to Egypt, called him a "notorious agitator".¹⁸ Al-Taher was also centrally involved in the Bludan congress as a member of its Propaganda Committee. Nonetheless, he was not the author of the pamphlet. "A distinguished Arab wrote this book about the Jews and their behavior," wrote al-Taher in his short preface to *Islam and Jewry* "and we greatly appreciate it".¹⁹ But who was that "distinguished Arab"? This secret was revealed neither in Cairo in

August 1937, nor in Bludan a month later. It was in Germany that Amin el-Husseini was first named as the alleged author of *Islam and Jewry*. In 1938, the Berlin-based "Junker and Dünnhaupt Verlag" published the entire pamphlet under the title: "Islam-Judaism. Call of the Grand Mufti to the Islamic world in 1937".²⁰ In subsequent editions initiated by the Nazis during the Second World War, the Mufti continued to be named as the author.

Whether el-Husseini was in fact the sole initiator and author of this booklet is, however, an open question. There is no doubt that the Nazis used this pamphlet for their own propaganda purposes. Were they also involved in its creation? On the one hand, the Arabic text is characterized by a poetic style of writing, such as can be found in other texts of the Mufti.²¹ On the other hand, the Mufti never claimed authorship.

Nazi propagandists, in the course of their efforts to mobilize the Arabs against the Jews, had discovered that their racist antisemitism was met with incomprehension. As a consequence, they started to use the Islamic creed as a door opener to gain access to the Muslim masses. To quote David Motadel: "Berlin made explicit use of religious rhetoric, terminology, and imagery and sought to engage with and reinterpret religious doctrine and concepts. ... Sacred texts such as the Qur'an ... were politicized to incite religious violence against alleged common enemies. ... German propaganda combined Islam with anti-Jewish agitation to an extent that had not hitherto been known in the modern Muslim world."²² In 1937, the Nazis were el-Husseini's closest allies. The "only great power interested in Arab victory over the Jews of Palestine and fully trusted by the Arabs is Germany", Fritz Grobba, the German Ambassador in Baghdad stated in a report about a visit by the Mufti's emissaries at the beginning of January 1937.²³ In the summer of 1937, when the

Mufti was hiding on Jerusalem's Temple Mount, he was in contact with representatives of Nazi Germany through a middleman. At that time, Nazi propagandists had already discovered the antisemitic potential of Islam. Thus, in April 1935, the Nazi magazine *Weltkampf* published an article about the "antisemitic movement in Islam".²⁴ Later on, Johann von Leers, one of the most notorious Nazi agitators, published essays on "Jewry and Islam as opposites".²⁵ The historian Robert Wistrich recounts that von Leers "had praised Islam in 1936 for successfully eliminating the 'Jewish threat' in Arabia."²⁶

German historian Martin Finkenberger, who has extensively researched Johann von Leers' biography, writes: "According to von Leers' own statement, he had been in contact with Arab students in Berlin since 1933 at the latest, some of whom had connections to El-Husseini. ... Von Leers claims to have made contact with the Mufti himself around 1936."²⁷ It is thus still unclear how the writing and publication of *Islam and Jewry* came about and what role the Nazis played in this.

In addition, we do not know what contacts al-Taher, the publisher of *Islam and Jewry*, might have had with German agents in Egypt in 1937. On the one hand, the "Palestinian Arab Bureau of Information", which he headed, was suspected of collaborating with Nazi agents.²⁸ On the other hand, his son, Hassan Eltaher, said that his father had been asked to contact Nazi agents. However, he had refused and never had such contacts.²⁹ It is unclear how the 1938 German translation of *Islam and Jewry* was organized and who did it. There is also no answer to the question of why Ferdinand Seiler, the then German Consul in Beirut, did not mention this anti-Jewish pamphlet in his four-page report about the Bludan Congress.³⁰ Germany after all had a privileged position at Bludan: Although the congress was not open to non-Arab international observers, the press officer of the NSDAP/AO in Beirut managed

to attend the conference through his personal contacts to some of the organizers.³¹

The Nazi daily *Völkischer Beobachter* reported about this event and even included a large photo.³²

While historians have still to answer important questions about *Islam and Jewry* and Bludan, the political context which facilitated the emergence of Islamic antisemitism is quite clear. In his short preface, Al-Taher connected *Islam and Jewry* to the fight against the partition of Palestine as proposed in the 1937 Peel Plan: The Palestinian-Arab Bureau of Information is publishing this work because Muslims and Arabs "should know about Jews just now while the Jews seek to create a state by eliminating Muslims and Arabs".³³ The brochure itself culminates in the following call: "Do not tolerate the partition plan, for Palestine has been an Arab country for centuries and shall remain Arabic forever."³⁴ *Islam and Jewry* was thus intended to theologize the territorial conflict between Jews and Arabs in order to prevent the realization of a partition proposal for Palestine - the first important attempt at a compromise - which had initially met with a degree of approval from some moderate Arabs.

Islamic antisemitism, at the same time, served the purpose of confronting the Jews with a kind of total war: If the evil of the Jews is immutable and permanent, transcending time and circumstances, there is only one way to cleanse the world of them – by their complete expulsion or annihilation. This idea was propagated daily between 1939 and 1945 by Nazi Germany's Arabic-language broadcasts.³⁵ Thus, in December 1942, El-Husseini delivered a speech at the opening of the Islamic Central Institute in Berlin, in which he declared that "today's world Jewry" would lead humanity "into the abyss of perdition, just as they did during the lifetime of the prophet." It was "the same Jewish influence, ... that has hounded the peoples in this

grueling war, the tragic fate of which only benefits the Jews."³⁶ The delusion that the Jews of all people were behind the Second World War and stood to profit from it was taken directly from the Nazi propaganda arsenal.³⁷ In a speech broadcast in March 1944, the Mufti termed the Jews "bacilli" and "microbes" and called on Muslims "to drive all Jews out of Palestine and the other Arab and Islamic countries with determination and strength. Spend all efforts to ensure that there is no longer a single Jew or single colonialist left in these countries."³⁸

Both aspects mark Islamic antisemitism to this day: the strict refusal to compromise with Jews and the call to expel or destroy them. The publication of *Islam and Jewry* and the subsequent campaigns of Islamic antisemitism have changed the perception of the Jew within Islamic societies. They have strengthened an exclusively anti-Jewish reading of the Islamic scriptures, popularized European conspiracy theories in the Arab world on a mass scale and continue to agitate against the Zionist project in genocidal terms, as the following two examples will show.

The eschatological “final solution”

“Anyone who looks for Islamic anti-Jewish pronouncements can even find a tradition according to which the Resurrection will be preceded by a massacre of the Jews by the Muslims – an eschatological ‘final solution’”, wrote Yehoshafat Harkabi in his seminal study of 1972, *Arab attitudes to Israel*.³⁹ As proof, he quoted the following *hadith* from the 1937 pamphlet *Islam and Jewry*:

“Said the Prophet, on whom be peace: the hour of the Resurrection will not come until the Muslims fight the Jews and the Muslims kill them, until the Jews hide behind the stones and trees, and then the trees and stones will say: Oh Muslim! Oh Abdallah! Here is a Jew behind me, come and kill him! Apart from the *gharqad*, for it

is one of the Jews' trees. Said the Imam al-Tabari: The *gharqad* is a well-known tree, with thorns, which is to be found in Jerusalem, where the killing of the *Dajjal* and the Jews will take place."

This is a particularly cruel *hadith*. It not only makes the killing of the Jews essential to the Muslims' final salvation but also makes even the tree – symbol of living nature - and the stone – symbol of dead nature – demand that the Jews be killed, as if the whole universe were condemning them to death. It is a sadistic *hadith* because it shows the Jew not as a dangerous, but as a frightened and trembling figure who tries to hide but is nevertheless dragged out of his concealment and relentlessly killed.

Such expressions, continues Harkabi, "cannot be said to be an essential part of Islam; they are dormant, even unknown to its adherents ... so long as they are not repeated with some frequency."⁴⁰ But that is exactly what has happened. In 1937 began the popularization of this cruel *hadith*, which today is certainly, at least in the Arab world, one of the best known and most quoted *hadiths*. In 1937, London's Foreign Office learned about it for the first time when the Saudi Arabian Minister in London told an official of the British Foreign Office, "about the anti-Jewish propaganda which is being carried out among the more ignorant and fanatical Moslems of most Arab countries". In evidence, this Saudi Arabian minister provided the Foreign Office with the Arabic version of this very *hadith* together with an English translation.⁴¹

Twenty years later, not only "ignorant and fanatical Moslems", but the religious elite was spreading this text. Cairo's al-Azhar for example, the oldest and most prestigious Muslim religious university, devoted the October 1968 issue of its monthly periodical *Majallat al-Azhar* to an approving article about this *hadith*. Its author, Sheikh Nadim Al-Jisr, a member of the Islamic Research Academy, emphasised its

contemporary importance.⁴² For thirteen centuries its meaning was hidden, he explained, for it was not fitting to kill the impotent Jewish minorities. Finally, however, its meaning has been unfolded. In order to enable this *hadith* to be realized, God had ordained that the Jews should attain power and establish a State, which facilitates and justifies killing them all.⁴³

In his book "The People of Israel in the Qur'an and the Sunnah," Mohammed Sayyid Tantawi, the Grand Sheikh of al-Azhar between 1996 and 2010, added his support to the thesis that the destruction of Israel is divinely predestined.⁴⁴ The Muslims couldn't destroy the Jews while they were spread throughout the world. Thus, according to Tantawi, the main purpose of the ingathering of the exiled Jews and the establishment of the State of Israel is the implementation of Allah's promise of bringing annihilation upon them.⁴⁵ He cites the above-mentioned *hadith* as evidence "that a decisive war would ensue between Muslims and Jews in which Muslims would win as long as they ... lead the coming battle for Palestine as a religious struggle".⁴⁶

The Iranian revolution of 1979 further reinforced the religious interpretation of the Palestinian conflict. In 1988, Hamas included the *hadith* of the trees and stones in its Charter, which remains in force until this day. Since then, the genocidal promises of this *hadith* have been repeated in countless sermons and numerous variations in many parts of the Islamic world.⁴⁷ The Shiite interpretation of it, for example, expects that the victorious battle against the Jews will cause the return of the Shiite Messiah, the Twelfth Imam. Iran's Grand Ayatollah Nuri Hamadani insisted that it was necessary to "fight the Jews and vanquish them so that the conditions for the advent of the Hidden Imam [i.e. the Shiite messiah] be met." He thus hinged the redemption of the Muslims or even of the whole world upon the destruction of Israel.⁴⁸

Iran's "final solution" for Palestine

Iran's rulers clearly consider the ambition to destroy Israel to be part of a religious war. Already in 1963, at the beginning of his career, Ruhollah Khomeini concentrated his antisemitic attacks on "the enemies of the Qur'an", reports his biographer Amir Taheri. Khomeini advised his followers to "recall and explain the catastrophes inflicted upon Islam by the Jews and the Baha'is." He claimed that the Israeli government had printed millions of copies of "a falsified Qur'an" in a bid to "destroy our glorious faith."⁴⁹ Later on, Khomeini, who had been a regular listener of the Nazis' Persian-language broadcasts, concentrated his attacks on the claim that Jews in league with Israel are behind a plot to destroy Islam: "Israel does not want the Qur'an to be in this kingdom. Israel does not want the *ulama* of Islam to be in this kingdom. Israel does not want the rules of Islam to be in this country."⁵⁰ Khomeini propagated the extinction of Israel for religious reasons – as a precondition for Muslim unity and Islamic revival and as a core duty in the struggle against the "moral corruption" embodied by a decadent Western culture. In the same vein, Khomeini's successor, Revolutionary Leader Ali Khamenei, has described "the war on Palestine [as] a war on the existence of Islam": "The fate of the world of Islam and the fate of all Islamic countries ... depend on the fate of Palestine." His conclusion is clear: "We believe that annihilation of the Israeli regime is the solution to the issue of Palestine"⁵¹

We see here the product of a delusion according to which the Jews want to eradicate Islam: The announcement of and preparation for a religiously motivated war against Israel, which affects not only the region, but the world. Today, as 80 years ago, the destructive goal of Islamic antisemitism goes hand in hand with a declaration of war against so-called collaborators: "All Arabs who collaborate with the Jews should be destroyed before they help the Jews destroy us", announced Nazi

Germany's Arabic-language radio program back in April 1943.⁵² A generation later, Khomeini declared: "It is the duty of all Islamic countries to completely eradicate Israel. ... Any relation with Israel and its agents ... is religiously prohibited and constitutes a hostility to Islam".⁵³ Another generation later, Ahmadinejad exclaimed: "If someone ... recognize[s] the Zionist regime – he should know that he will burn in the fire of the Islamic Ummah [nation]".⁵⁴ Finally, in April 2018, after Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman recognized Israel's right to exist, Ali Khamenei responded immediately and attacked this "act of betrayal by some Arab heads of states" by calling it "a big unforgivable sin."⁵⁵

Islamic antisemitism has, on the one hand, lost none of its destructive potential: together with the cult of martyrdom it belongs to the ideological repertoire of both Shiite and Sunni Islamists and fuels their anti-Jewish war, not only in Ankara, Ramallah and Amman but also during demonstrations in Malmö and Berlin. Its abhorrence of peace with Israel increases the danger of all-out war.

We are currently witnessing, on the other hand, a period of thaw in parts of the Arab world not only with respect to Israel, but also with regard to new debates about antisemitism and Islam. Recently, for example, 'Abd Al-Hamid Al-Hakim, a prominent Saudi intellectual, called via Twitter "to uproot the culture of hatred for Jews" while his colleague Mash'al Al-Sudairi blamed Amin el-Husseini in the London based Saudi daily *Al-Sharq Al Awsat*: "He was the one who tried to combine the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Nazi-ideology" and "damaged the [Palestinian] cause more than anyone else."⁵⁶

This essay makes clear that Islamic antisemitism is a relatively recent invention which the Nazis used as part of their propaganda. Perhaps, in the context

of an intra-Islamic debate, the time is now ripe for a serious challenge to this ideology.

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¹ Alexander Gruber, “Erdogans Erlösungsantisemitismus: Kein Baum wird die Juden schützen,” *MENA-WATCH*, December 15, 2017, accessed May 3, 2018, <https://www.mena-watch.com/mena-analysen-beitraege/erdogans-erloesungsantisemitismus-kein-baum-wird-die-juden-schuetzen/>.

² “Abbas at OIC summit: Israel’s violations absolve us from our commitments,” *Wafa-News-Agency*, Dec. 13, 2017, accessed May 3, 2018, http://iinanews.org/page/public/news_details.aspx?id=226907#.WurNEpdCTcs.

³ Bernard Lewis, *Semites and Anti-Semites. An Inquiry into Conflict And Prejudice*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986) 122.

⁴ Hamas Covenant of 1988, accessed May 3, 2018, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp.

⁵ Ronald L. Nettler, *Past Trials and Present Tribulations. A Muslim Fundamentalist's View of the Jews* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1987) 83-4.

⁶ Martin Kramer, "The Jihad Against the Jews," *Commentary*, March 14, 2004, accessed May 3, 2018, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/the-jihad-against-the-jews/>.

⁷ Translated from the German version of "Islam-Judentum. Aufruf des Großmufti an die islamische Welt im Jahre 1937" in: Mohamed Sabry, *Islam-Judentum-Bolschewismus* (Berlin: Junker & Dünhaupt, 1938) 22-32. According to Andrew G. Bostom, there isn't "any evidence that central themes from European Christian antisemitism are invoked" in this text. See Andrew G. Bostom, *The Mufti's Islamic Jew-Hatred* (Washington, D.C.: Bravura Books 2014) 33. Bostom's booklet contains a complete (albeit sometimes imprecise) translation of the German text of *Islam and Jewry* into English.

⁸ Lewis, *Semites and Anti-Semites*, 128.

⁹ Matthias Küntzel, "Terror und Verrat. Wie der Mufti von Jerusalem seiner Verhaftung entging," *Mena-Watch* Wien, Juli 5, 2017, accessed May 3, 2018, <http://www.matthiaskuentzel.de/contents/terror-und-verrat>.

¹⁰ Yehuda Taggar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem and Palestine Arab Politics, 1930-1937* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1986) 454.

¹¹ *Report about the Bludan conference of September 16, 1937*, British National Archive (BNA), GFM 33/611, Serial 1525.

¹² MacKereth's memo of September 14, 1937 including Annex 1 – Annex 6 is published in: Elie Kedourie, "The Bludan Congress on Palestine, September 1937," *Middle Eastern Studies* 17. no. 1 (1981), 107-125. This is currently the only known report of the distribution of "Islam and Jewry" at Bludan. This source, however,

seems to be credible. Kedourie praised MacKereth in his above-mentioned article as “one of the shrewdest and most knowledgeable of British representatives in the Middle East – perhaps even the most intelligent and the soundest of judgement during this particular period.”

¹³ “Beschlagnahme einer deutschen Propagandaschrift , ‘Der Islam und die Juden’ (in arabischer Sprache)”, *Zentrum Moderner Orient Berlin*, Höpp-Archiv, No. 01.10.015.

¹⁴ Jennie Lebl, *The Mufti of Jerusalem Haj-Amin el-Husseini and National-Socialism* (Belgrade: Cigoja Stampa, 2007) 311-319; Motadel, *Islam*, 196 and Thomas Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division “Prinz Eugen”* (Frankfurt: Campus 2003) 233.

¹⁵ Motadel, *Islam*, 196.

¹⁶ Jeffrey Herf, “Haj Amin al-Husseini, the Nazis and the Holocaust: The Origins, Nature and Aftereffects of Collaboration,” in: *Jewish Political Studies Review* 26, no. 3&4 (2016): 15.

¹⁷ Brynjar Lia, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt. The Rise of an Islamic Mass Movement 1928-1942*, (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1998) 179.

¹⁸ *Palestine: Egyptian press*, 18. August 1937, BNA FO 371/20811.

¹⁹ I am grateful to the Arabist and historian Dr. Edy Cohen, who discovered the original Arabic booklet and translated its cover page for me.

²⁰ Sabry, *Islam-Judentum*, 22-32.

²¹ Verbal message from Dr. Edy Cohen.

²² David Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany's War* (London: Belknap of Harvard University Press, 2014) 76, 97.

²³ *Grobba, Bagdad, den 5. Januar 1937*, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts (PAAA), Akten betreffend Judenfragen, Pol. VII, R 104791.

²⁴ Kureshi, "Antisemitische Bewegung im Islam," *Der Weltkampf* 12, no. 136 (1935): 113-115.

²⁵ Johann von Leers, "Judentum und Islam als Gegensätze," *Die Judenfrage in Politik, Recht, Kultur und Wirtschaft* 6, no. 24 (1942): 275-77.

²⁶ Robert Wistrich, *A Lethal Obsession. Anti-Semitism from Antiquity to the Global Jihad* (New York: Random House, 2010) 611.

²⁷ I thank Martin Finkenberger for this information, which he sent to me in October 2016.

²⁸ Gudrun Krämer, *Minderheit, Millet, Nation? Die Juden in Ägypten 1914-1952* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1982) 291.

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³⁰ *Deutsches Generalkonsulat, Panarabischer Kongress in Bludan*, BNA GFM 33/611, Serial 1525.

³¹ Götz Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon. The ambivalence of the German option, 1933-1945* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009) 159.

³² Pas. Kairo, Nach dem Panarabischen Kongreß von Bloudan, *Völkischer Beobachter*, September 19, 1937.

³³ According to the translation by Dr. Edy Cohen.

³⁴ Translated from the German version of "Islam-Judentum".

³⁵ See Jeffrey Herf, *Nazi Propaganda For The Arab World* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press 2009).

³⁶ Gerhard Höpp, ed., *Mufti-Papiere. Briefe, Memoranden, Reden und Aufrufe Amin al-Husainis aus dem Exil, 1940-1945* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2001) 125-26.

³⁷ See Herf's brilliant depiction in: Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy. Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

³⁸ Höpp, *Mufti-Papiere*, 211.

³⁹ Yehoshafat Harkabi, *Arab Attitudes to Israel* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972) 269.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ *Palestine: Authentic sayings of the Prophet Mohammad*, BNA, FO 371/20812.

⁴² Harkabi, *Arab attitudes*, 269.

⁴³ D.F.Green [that is David Littman) published al-Jisr's article in his collection D. F. Green (ed.), *Arab Theologians on Jews and Israel*, (Geneva: Editions de l'Avenir Genève, 1971) 42-47.

⁴⁴ The 4th edition of Tantawi's book was published in 1997 in Cairo and goes back to his 1966 doctoral thesis of the same name. See Wolfgang Driesch, *Islam, Judentum und Israel*, (Hamburg: Deutsches Orient-Institut, 2003) 53.

⁴⁵ Shaul Bartal, "Reading the Qur'an: How Hamas and the Islamic Jihad Explain Sura al-Isra," in: *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 14 Dec 2016, accessed May 3, 2018, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2016.1265514> .

⁴⁶ Driesch, *Islam, Judentum*, 88-9.

⁴⁷ "California Friday Sermon: Imam Ammar Shahin Cites Antisemitic Hadith", *Middle East Media Research Institute* (MEMRI), July 21, 2017, Clip No. 6133; "Egyptian Preacher Sayed Ahmad Ali Denies the Holocaust, States: There Can Be No Peace with the Jews", *MEMRI*, August 4, 2017 to August 11, 2017, Clip No 6226.

⁴⁸ Meir Litvak, "The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Holocaust: Anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism," *Journal of Israeli History* 25, no. 1 (2006): 272.

⁴⁹ Amir Taheri, *The Spirit of Allah. Khomeini & the Islamic Revolution* (Bethesda: Adler&Adler, 1986) 132.

⁵⁰ Taheri, *The Spirit*, 139.

⁵¹ Ali Khamenei, *The Most Important Problem of the Islamic World. Selected Statesments by Ayatollah Khameinei About Palestine* (Teheran 2009) 13, 51, 101, accessed May 3, 2018, <http://s15.khamenei.ir/ndata/news/18463/Palestine-english.pdf>.

⁵² Jeffrey Herf, *Nazi-Propaganda for the Arab World*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009) 171.

⁵³ *Das Palästinaproblem aus der Sicht Imam Khomeinis* (Teheran: Institution zur Koordination und Publikation der Werke Imam Khomeinis, Abteilung Internationale Beziehungen, 1996), 97.

⁵⁴ "Iranian President at Tehran Conference", *MEMRI* Special Dispatch Series No. 1013, October 28, 2005.

⁵⁵ „Knocking Saudis, Khamenei calls interacting with Israel ‚betrayal‘, backs Hamas“, *Times of Israel*, April 4, 2018.

⁵⁶ Z. Harel, "Shift In Saudi Media's Attitude To Israel – Part II: Saudi Writer Who Visited Israel: We Want An Israeli Embassy in Riyadh; We Should Make Peace With Israel, Uproot Culture of Hatred For Jews", *MEMRI*, May 29, 2018, Inquiry & Analysis Series No. 1399 and "Saudi Writer: The Arab League Summits Are Completely Pointless; Palestinian Leaders – First And Foremost Jerusalem Mufti Al-Husseini and PLO Leader Arafat – Damaged the Palestinian Cause The Most", *MEMRI*, Mai 31, 2018, Special Dispatch No. 7499.