

# Grand Mufti Haj Amin al-Husaini and the Nazis

by Ibn Warraq (January 2018)



Grand Mufti Haj Amin al-Husaini and Adolph Hitler

**I**n *Nazis, Islamists, and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (2014), Barry Rubin and Wolfgang Schwanitz cogently argue that the Grand Mufti Haj Amin al-Husaini (also “el-Husseini,” 1895–1974) was an important figure in the founding of modern Arab and Islamist politics who “played a central role in the Islamist movement’s survival during the 1950s and 1960s,” making it possible for “the movement’s revival in the 1970s to gain hegemony in Iran, Turkey, and much of the Arabic-speaking world and Iran by the early twenty-first

century.”[\[1\]](#) This alone warrants al-Husaini’s inclusion in this study, but his collaboration with the Nazis, which has been misinterpreted by some recent scholars such as Matthias Küntzel,[\[2\]](#) must also be taken into consideration.

Historians like Küntzel claim that modern Islamic antisemitism was derived entirely from the Nazis. But as Rubin and Schwanitz repeatedly emphasize, al-Husaini and later Islamists such as al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, and the Ayatollah Khomeini all drew on their own backgrounds, traditions, and doctrines to spread their antisemitism. Al-Husaini

advocated genocide even before the Nazi government did so. His 1937 Appeal to All Muslims of the World urged them to cleanse their lands of the Jews, and it was translated into German in 1938. Urging the use of force against all Jews in the Middle East, al-Husaini both gave his parallel version of Hitler’s doctrine and laid the foundation for the anti-Semitic arguments used by radical Arab nationalists and Islamist down to this day. A half-century later, every speech and sermon from Hamas, Hizballah, Iran’s regime, the Muslim Brotherhood, and al-Qaeda echoed all of the grand mufti’s main points in his declaration.[\[3\]](#)

In his analysis, Rubin and Schwanitz explain, al-Husaini “combined traditional Islamic hatred of Jews with arguments framed by modern political concepts.”[\[4\]](#) He quoted constantly from the Koran, Sira, and hadith to lay out his claims: Jews are cursed and evil; they were expelled from Egypt because they exploited the Egyptian people; (citing al-Tabar) they tried to kill Moses; they were punished by God for their sins; they spread disease; they hated, tried to discredit, and, finally, tried to poison Muhammad; they are out to destroy

Islam. The Grand Mufti's diatribe ends thus:

I present to my Muslim brothers in the entire world the history and the true experience which the Jews cannot deny. The verses from the Koran and hadith prove that the Jews have been the bitterest enemies of Islam and continue to try to destroy it. Do not believe them. They know only hypocrisy and guile. Hold together, fight for Islamic thought, fight for your religion and your existence! Do not rest until your land is free of the Jews. Do not tolerate the plan of division, for Palestine has been an Arab land for centuries and shall remain Arab.[\[5\]](#)

Rubin and Schwanitz conclude: "It is wrong to see al-Husaini and his fellow radicals as merely importing European antisemitism or being influenced by the Nazis. The two groups' ideas developed in parallel from their own histories and political cultures . . . The two sides came together on the basis of both common interests and similar worldviews."[\[6\]](#)

In an October 1944 speech to the imams of the Bosnian SS Division fighting for the Nazis, al-Husaini stated: "Nearly one-third of the Koran concerns the Jews. The Koran calls upon all Muslims to protect themselves against the Jews and to fight them wherever they may meet."[\[7\]](#)

## **Al-Husaini, Islam, and Violence**

On the whole, al-Husaini's role as the father of modern, violent Arab radical movements has been overlooked because he

allied himself with the Nazis and the losing side in World War II, and was implicated in the humiliating defeat of the Arabs by the Israelis in 1948. He was too closely identified with the Palestinian cause, when he was actually the leader of the international radical Arab forces, both Islamist and nationalist. When the nationalists gained power, al-Husaini's earlier part in keeping the two factions together was again forgotten. And, as noted above, al-Husaini was responsible for fundamentalism Islam's survival in the 1950s and 1960s and its 1970s revival.[\[8\]](#)

Muslims from many Muslim countries recognized al-Husaini's leadership and came to pay their respects in Jerusalem, his personal base. He was in close contact with the Muslim Brotherhood through Muhammad Mustafa al-Maraghi. In 1931, al-Husaini organized the General Islamic Congress in Jerusalem, which resulted in the formation of the Islamic World Congress and his election as president. Several international branches contributed funds to the head office in Jerusalem.

At first, al-Husaini concentrated in building a strong united state that would be nationalist and Islamist, and playing both cards, garnered mass support from a religiously oriented public that was not ready to accept secular nationalism. He also persuaded the Nazis that he was leader of the world's Muslims and Arabs. Al-Husaini's and the radical faction's most significant tactic at this stage "was to make militancy the test for legitimacy. The most extreme stance became the legitimate mainstream one; anything more moderate was portrayed as treason to Islam and the Arab people. Using this standard, al-Husaini and his allies could blackmail and intimidate Arab governments, threatening to discredit or even assassinate anyone who wanted to compromise with the West or to oppose their goals."[\[9\]](#)

Al-Husaini was also able to impose his will on how the Palestinian cause would be handled. He and his allies were now in a position to influence and galvanize the masses through sermons at mosques, rousing speeches, "intimidating mobs, and demonstrations." [\[10\]](#) Al-Husaini also demonized the British and Americans, presenting them as enemies of Islam and simultaneously convincing his followers that Germany would soon rule the world. The result was an alliance of Palestinian Arabs, Syrian and Iraqi nationalists, and Egyptian Islamists with Hitler's regime.

Whereas the earlier German-Ottoman bond "had been built on defending the status quo in the Ottoman Empire while destroying their rivals' colonies, [t]he new Nazi-Arab nationalist and Islamist alliance . . . sought revolutionary political and social change everywhere in the Middle East." [\[11\]](#) The radicals, with their intransigence and violence, were obviously at odds with the moderate politicians and leaders who doubted that a hardline approach could succeed, but al-Husaini believed he could win because Allah was on the side of the Muslims. This indicates how al-Husaini's influential tactics would determine the future of the Middle East: "The basic approach of al-Husaini and his comrades continued through the careers of such leaders as Abd an-Nasir, Arafat, the al-Assad family, al-Qaddafi, Saddam Hussein, and bin Ladin, as well as with Iranian Islamists like Khomeini and Mahmud Ahmadinejad." [\[12\]](#)

Al-Husaini laid down the halt to the exodus of Jews from Germany as a condition for his support for Hitler, and bargained in the same way with the Allies—any migration from Germany would mean the migration to Palestine. The British had

to close all migration of Jews to Palestine as well in order to keep the ambiguous support of the Grand Mufti and the Arabs. Al-Husaini, thus, can be justly held accountable for his role in the Holocaust.

Nazi Germany launched a well-organized campaign in the Middle East, urging the elite in the respective countries to embrace pro-Nazi, anti-Semitic sentiments. "In Beirut and Baghdad, Cairo and Jerusalem, Kabul and Tehran, Tripoli and Tunis, local Nazi Party branches coordinated military and SS intelligence, businessmen, and academics to spread the influence of Hitler's regime. There were also Nazi Party branches in Alexandria and Port Said; Haifa and Jaffa; and Adana, Ankara, Istanbul, and Izmir."[\[13\]](#) It was Nazi policy to subsidize and use ideologically compatible Islamist and nationalist groups such the Muslim Brotherhood, the fascist Young Egypt Party, al-Husaini's forces in Palestine, and various other groups in Iraq and Syria.

In Iran one of the students to benefit from German training was Nawab Safavi, who later became the main radical Islamist leader and al-Husaini's closest ally. But it was in Iraq that Germany held the greatest influence, since the Iraqi nationalists were hoping for help to develop their economy. Acting for the Abwehr, German military intelligence, al-Banna received about one thousand Egyptian pounds a month from 1939, and perhaps earlier, from the German News Bureau in Cairo.[\[14\]](#)

In June 1940, when the war seemed to be going Germany's way, al-Husaini wrote to Franz von Papen, the German ambassador to Turkey, offering him his support. Unlike the nationalists, al-Husaini dreamed of an Islamic caliphate with himself as the caliph ruling over the Islamic umma. His short-term goal was

the creation of a fully independent state comprising Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, and Iraq, which he would lead. Having already created a popular network throughout the Arabic-speaking world and Muslim countries further East, al-Husaini had managed to unite, for the moment, the nationalists and Islamists.[\[15\]](#)

By March 1941, Hitler accepted al-Husaini as the de facto leader of the Muslims of the entire Middle East, and accordingly gave his total support to the Grand Mufti, praising the Arabs as an ancient civilization. The Germans gave al-Husaini a hundred thousand reichsmarks,[\[16\]](#) with twenty thousand more every month paid equally by Germany and Italy.[\[17\]](#)

Pro-German forces were now on the rise in the Middle East. Ba'th, a Pan-Arab nationalist party closely based on the fascist model, had been founded in November 1940, Alfred Rosenberg's anti-Semitic 1930 work on racial theory, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* (Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts), having influenced the party's founders.

As Rubin and Schwanitz point out, for both Hitler and al-Husaini the Jews were the arch-villains responsible for the sorry state of their respective countries and civilizations:

For Islamists, hostility to Jews and other infidels was rooted in their reading of Muslim texts but they identified the modern turning point [in their recent decline] as the 1924 decision to abolish the caliphate. Ignoring the fact that this system had not functioned for centuries, al-

Husaini argued that to dissolve Islam's unique global bond was suicidal, especially given its clash with Anglo-American democracies and their "Jewish advocates."

. . . So while Hitler and the Nazis blamed the Jews for the fate of Germans and "Aryans" generally, al-Husaini and the radical nationalists and Islamists did the same thing regarding the fate of Arabs and Muslims. They did not need the Nazis to teach them this idea. They had already invented stories using elements from their own religious, cultural, and historical traditions.[\[18\]](#)

Al-Husaini asked Hitler's help in destroying the Jews in Palestine, and beseeched him to stop Jews from leaving Germany. Hitler had allowed 537,000 Jews to leave Germany between 1933 and 1941, but with al-Husaini's anti-Semitic rhetoric and his insistence on eliminating Jews "fresh in his ears," Hitler made the decision to prepare the "final solution of the Jewish question."[\[19\]](#)

## **A True Radical Muslim Hero**

After the war, al-Husaini escaped prosecution as a war criminal because Western powers calculated that such prosecution would harm their geopolitical standing in the Middle East. The Muslim Brotherhood, and the rest of the Muslim world, considered al-Husaini a true Muslim hero because of his past radicalism. Al-Banna wrote:

Great welcome should be extended to him wherever he goes,



as a sign of appreciation for his great services for the glory of Islam and the Arabs....What a hero, what a miracle of a man. We wish to know what the Arab youth, cabinet ministers, rich men, and princes of Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Tunis, Morocco, and Tripoli are going to do to be worthy of this hero. Yes, this hero who challenged an empire and fought Zionism, with the help of Hitler and Germany. Germany and Hitler are gone, but Amin al-Husaini will continue the struggle.[\[20\]](#)

After returning to Egypt, al-Husaini continued his struggles in the name of Islam with Arabs who had been Nazi collaborators and now served as his military commanders, men such as al-Qawuqji, Abd al-Qadir al-Husaini, and Salama. In 1939, the Nazis had sent the Arabs some arms that were hidden in the Egyptian desert. These were recovered by al-Husaini with the help of the Muslim Brotherhood, and used to drill the Holy Jihad Troops (al-Jihad al-Muqaddas), organized by Abd al-Qadir, who had fought in Iraq as a pro-Nazi, in a secret training camp near the Libyan border.

Al-Qadir was killed leading al-Husaini's main army in the Palestine War in 1948, but al-Husaini continued to intimidate Arab leaders to accept his uncompromising position: "Like al-Husaini and his own movement, most of the other forces pushing for intransigence and war over the Palestine issue also came from the same radical Arab and Islamist faction that had cooperated with the Nazis: the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Syria as well as militant nationalists and Islamists in Syria and Iraq."[\[21\]](#)

After the Arabs' disastrous defeat by newly-created Israel in 1948, al-Husaini devoted the next twenty-five years to

promoting radical Islamism in order to take revenge not only on the West and Israel, but also the Arab nationalists. He kept the movement alive, though savagely repressed by its former radical nationalist partners, looking to create a worldwide radical Islamist movement—a goal that today no longer seems impossible. Al-Husaini began by founding the League of Jihad Call in Cairo in 1951, which reestablished his ties with the Muslim Brotherhood and the fascist Young Egypt Party.

### **Consolidating Efforts**

Al-Husaini was undoubtedly behind the assassinations of moderate leaders from Jordan and Lebanon who wanted to establish some sort of peace with Israel. He also helped former German Nazis, some of whom he managed to convert to Islam, to obtain new identities and jobs in the Middle East. (It is forgotten that nearly four thousand Germans involved in war crimes escaped to the Middle East, finding welcome and work. The number of German war criminals who escaped to South America was considerably smaller: between 180 and 800.)

Al-Husaini maintained his contacts in Pakistan, where he organized annual meetings of his Islamic World Congress from 1949 to 1952. In Iran he consolidated his standing with Islamists such as Nawab Safavi, the ex-Nazi agent. At the 1953 Islamic World Congress in east Jerusalem, al-Husaini met and encouraged the Iranians Abd al-Qasim al-Khasani, the leading Islamic cleric, and Safavi, the leader of the radical Islamist group, Fida'iyyun al-Islam. He reestablished his friendship with the Egyptian Said Ramadan, who worked with al-Husaini and the Muslim Brotherhood. Also present was Sayyid Qutb, the Brotherhood's leading ideologue who would become the godfather

of modern Islamist ideology.

Despite a short-term decline of the Islamist groups due to Safavi's execution, Kashani's withdrawal from politics, and Qutb's eventual imprisonment and execution, it was clear that al-Husaini had planted the seeds of revolution and violence, for "one of al-Kashani's disciples was Khoemini; Safavi's example inspired revolutionary terrorist Islamist groups in Iran . . . The Muslim Brotherhood, its many even more radical spin-offs, and indeed all the revolutionary Islamist groups of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries owe a big debt to al-Husaini's and Qutb's innovative thinking."[\[22\]](#)

Just as the Muslim Brotherhood was about to takeover in Egypt in 2011, Tariq Ramadan, the highly regarded Islamist intellectual living and teaching in the West, wrote an op-ed in the New York Times claiming that the Muslim Brotherhood and its leader, his grandfather, had never been Nazi collaborators. He even insisted that the Brotherhood was an antifascist organization that had wished to emulate "the British parliamentary model" during the 1930s and 1940s. But Rubin and Schwanitz have carefully demonstrated otherwise:

[T]he Brotherhood was clearly well financed and armed by the Nazis before and during the World War II. Collaborating with the Germans and al-Husaini, it planned an uprising to support the German army's conquest of Egypt as well as to kill Cairo's Jews and Christians. The only reason this plot failed was that the British stopped the German advance and forced King Faruq to replace pro-German politicians in the government. One aspect of the Brotherhood's campaign to portray itself as moderate in the early twenty-first century was to rewrite its history.[\[23\]](#)

The cooperation of Said Ramadan who, it has been mentioned was Hasan al-Banna's son-in-law and Tariq Ramadan's father, with al-Husaini was noted by the CIA in 1953. Ramadan acted as al-Husaini's agent, running messages to Iran's al-Kashani. Later, Al-Husaini "selected Said Ramadan as his successor to lead the European-based Islamist movement." [\[24\]](#) He was al-Husaini's protégé, and would eventually inherit the ex-grand mufti's "Islamist network, financial base, and institutional assets in Switzerland and elsewhere." [\[25\]](#) Al-Husaini made him a member of the secretariat of the World Muslim Congress, and two years later its secretary general. Ramadan moved to Syria, where he continued working for al-Husaini and the Brotherhood. Al-Husaini helped finance his magazine, al-Muslimin, a vehicle for the ideas of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood.

When the Arab nationalist regimes began repressing the Islamists, the latter retreated to Europe, where they began a relentless campaign of Islamic propaganda, building mosques, founding Islamic institutes, and taking control of Muslim associations and journals. Said Ramadan's decades of activity and energy saw to it that by the year 2000 many Islamic communities were led by Brotherhood members. Ramadan's primary concern was to keep control of the Munich mosque built by Syrian-born Ali Ghalib Himmat and an Uzbek, Nur ad-Din Namanjani. When Himmat took over in 1973, Ramadan was able to found the Islamic Center in Geneva with funds from Saudi Arabia. A similar center appeared in London, but the Munich center remained the most important to Islamism and the Brotherhood in West Germany. [\[26\]](#)

The ideological parallels between the Nazis and the Muslim Brotherhood, and in fact all Islamist movements, are striking,

and compounded by the Brotherhood's collaboration with the Nazis. A comparison of statements and declarations by key Islamist ideologues reveals their resemblance to one another, and to those of al-Husaini. For example, Sayyid Qutb wrote:

The Jews did indeed return to evil-doing, so Allah gave to the Muslims power over them. The Muslims then expelled them from the whole of the Arabian Peninsula...Then the Jews again returned to evil-doing and consequently Allah sent against them others of his servants, until the modern period. Then Allah brought Hitler to rule over them. And once again today the Jews have returned to evil-doing, in the form of "Israel" which made the Arabs, the owners of the land, taste of sorrows and woe.[\[27\]](#)

For many Islamists, the Holocaust enjoyed divine sanction.

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[\[1\]](#) Barry Rubin and Wolfgang G. Schwanitz, *Nazis, Islamists, and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 87.

[\[2\]](#) Matthias Küntzel, *Jihad and Jew-Hatred: Islamism, Nazism and the Roots of 9/11* (New York: Telos Press Publishing, 2009).

[\[3\]](#) Rubin and Schwanitz, *Nazis, Islamists*, 94–95.

[\[4\]](#) *Ibid.*, 95.

[5] Andrew G. Bostom, *The Mufti's Islamic Jew-Hatred: What Nazis Learned from the 'Muslim Pope'* (Washington, DC: Barvura Books, 2013), 25–33.

[6] Rubin and Schwanitz, *Nazis, Islamists*, 95.

[7] Quoted in Bostom, *Mufti's Islamic Jew-Hatred*, 19.

[8] Rubin and Schwanitz, *Nazis, Islamists*, 87.

[9] Ibid., 89.

[10] Ibid., 90.

[11] Ibid., 91.

[12] Ibid., 92.

[13] Ibid., 110.

[14] Ibid., 118.

[15] Ibid., 119.

[16] In the 1930s, one Reichsmark was worth \$4.20, so 100,000 Reichsmarks would have been worth \$420,000.00.

[17] Ibid., 127

[18] Ibid., 158, 159.

[19] Ibid., 162.

[20] Quoted in *ibid.*, 199.

[21] Ibid., 201.

[22] Ibid., 206.

[23] Ibid., 234.

[24] Ibid., 233.

[\[25\]](#) Ibid., 248.

[\[26\]](#) Ibid., 249

[\[27\]](#) Ronald L. Nettler, *Past Trials and Present Tribulations: A Muslim Fundamentalist's View of the Jews* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1987), 86–87; quoted in Rubin and Schwanitz, *Nazis, Islamists*, 251.

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