

THE UNFOLDING OF THE AUTONOMY CONFLICT IN PALESTINE

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The Holy Land is located at a geopolitical fault-line of world religions, civilisations and world-systems. It is an area that has provided a link between the Euphrates and Nile valleys for thousands of years, it is the cradle of monotheism, a symbolic and actual centre of religious activities. Several religions of the world consider themselves the followers of the spiritual legacy formed here. It is far beyond the scope of the present paper to provide a comprehensive analysis of the contacts between the followers of the Abrahamic religions: Jews, Christians and Muslims, over the millennia; discussion will thus be focused on the first half of the 20th century and the Jewish-Muslim coexistence in the Holy Land.

The Middle East was traditionally characterised by tolerance to diversity up to the end of the 19th century; Muslims were well known to be highly tolerant to non-Muslim believers. Several peoples and religious denominations lived side by side in natural peace and did not consider each other archenemies. Jewish and Arab myths of identity reach far back in time, right to Biblical times. As regards historic origins, Jews and Arabs are brother peoples, tracing their descendance to Abraham of Shem's branch. At the same time, the relatively peaceful coexistence of Jews and Arabs does not only originate in the fact that they are all the children of Abraham, i.e. semitic people speaking semitic languages. The fundamental teaching of the Prophet declares that religion may not be forced,¹

which means that understanding and tolerance toward Jews and Christians is a basic expectation for Muslims.

Until the mid-20th century and the formation of the Jewish state, there were no mass reactions and violent actions taken against Jewish communities in the Arab world, save the Palestine conflicts and the 1941 Iraq pogrom. In his broad-ranging work, Zsolt Rostoványi² has given a detailed analysis of the age-old phenomenon that Jewish people coexisting with Muslim communities had far more fortunate fates than the ones living under Christian authority, where they had to suffer many forms of harassment and persecution. In North Africa and the Middle East, Muslim Arabs provided safe conditions of life to Jews, who played an important role in the economic development of Muslim areas. In contrast to several European countries, Arabs did not force Jews that lived among them into ghettos: there were no Jewish quarters surrounded by walls and locked up for the night in their towns. Historical sources inform us that a thousand years ago, i.e. in the decades around the turn of the last millennium, relations of people in the Holy Land were characterised by cooperation between Jews and Muslims against Christians.³

In the territories ruled by Muslims, behaviour toward non-Muslims was far more humane than that of Europeans to the non-Christian population. Jews and Christians under Muslim rule were

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¹ Qur'an 2:256.

² Rostoványi, Zsolt, *Együttélésre ítélve: Zsidók és palesztinok küzdelme a Szentföldért*. Budapest, Corvina, 2006.

³ Arkoun, Mohammed (ed.), *Histoire de l'islam et des musulmans en France du Moyen Âge à nos jours*. (Préface de Jacques Le Goff.) Paris, A. Michel, 2006, 68.

regarded as subordinate and legally discriminated but, being excellent taxpayers, they were protected and left undisturbed in their religious life. Although a sense of inferiority was clearly made felt to Jewish communities in Muslim regions, Jews were not forced into a situation of excommunication. In the Turkish Empire, Jews could freely enter and leave Palestine as the Sultan's subjects; they could move about the vast territories of the realm stretching from North Africa to the Balkans. The leaders of the empire were even more hospitable to those who had fled Christian Europe. Immigrants from Europe and Jewish subjects at the same time preferred the parts of the empire where economic and political conditions were favourable: they would most often choose Constantinople, Damascus or Cairo over Palestine.⁴ Jews living in the Middle East and in a shared domain of history and traditions, adapted to their Arab surroundings and proficient in the Arab tongue were regarded as Arab Jews. They were Arabs as far as language, culture and way of life is concerned; they differed from their neighbours only in their faith.⁵

Anti-Jewish attacks were thus alien from the traditions of Muslim communities. Events akin to actions against Jews by European Christians, racial antisemitism and Arab hatred of Jews were uncharacteristic of the Muslim world. Racial antisemitism and allegations of Jews striving to achieve total control of the world may be regarded as typically European phenomena,⁶ intensifying in Europe with the great antisemitic campaigns that swept France and

Germany in the 1870s. The phrase 'antisemitism' itself, as a notion clearly differentiated from religious and emotional hatred, was introduced by German journalists at the very end of the 1870s.⁷ Similarly to many other Western ideas, antisemitism also arrived from Europe, transmitted by Westerners to the Middle Eastern region. The majority of antisemitic writings spread in the area were translations of European, mainly French, sources. The induction of European antisemitism in the Arab world is sometimes attributed to 16th and 17th century French merchants and missionaries,⁸ but scholarly works date the advent of antisemitism in the Middle East to the last third of the 19th century, stressing the role of colonisation in the background to the process. Arab hatred of Jews nevertheless did not take roots in the Middle East in its European sense, in the form of antisemitism or antijudaism attacking the Jewish way of life with its traditions and customs, but as antizionism, the negation of the right to exist for a Jewish state in the territory of the Arab-populated Palestine. Attention must however be drawn to the fact that Arab antisemitism (judeodemonisation)⁹ and Jewish anti-Arabism derive from the same stem. The ideas of "Out with the Jews from Palestine!" and "Out with Palestinians from Palestine!" tend to compete with each other to an equal degree, with most Arabs using the words 'Jewish', 'Zionist' and 'Israeli' as synonyms since the middle of the 20th century.¹⁰

It is *sharīf*¹¹ Husayn and the Cairo British consul Sir Henry McMahon's often ambiguously

⁴ Halpern, Ben, *The Idea of the Jewish State*. Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1961, 105; Makai, György, *Izrael Állam és a cionizmus*. Budapest, Kossuth, 1973, 18-19.

⁵ Lewis, Bernard, *Az iszlám válsága*. Budapest, Európa, 2004, 23.

⁶ For a detailed discussion of the appearance of European antisemitic ideas in the Arab world see: Küntzel, Matthias, *Von Zeesen bis Beirut*. Source: <http://www.matthiaskuentzel.de/contents/von-zeesen-bis-beirut>

⁷ Bergmann, Werner, *Geschichte des Antisemitismus*. München, Beck, 2002, 6; Lewis, Bernard, „*Treibt sie ins Meer!*“. *Die Geschichte des Antisemitismus*. Frankfurt am Main, Berlin: Ullstein, 1989, 92.

⁸ Stillman, Norman A., 'Antisemitism in the Contemporary Arab World', Curtis, Michael (ed.), *Antisemitism in the Contemporary World*. Boulder, Westview Press, 1986, 74.

⁹ Ágnes Heller introduces the term 'judeodemonisation' in the discussion of Muslim-Arab hatred of Jews because she interprets this phenomenon as one deriving from the amalgamation of pagan judeophobia and modern antisemitism. Heller, Ágnes, 'Gondolatok a baloldali antiszemitizmusról'. *Szombat* 2 (2007), 10.

¹⁰ Israeli, Raphael, 'Anti-Jewish Attitudes in the Arabic Media 1975-1981'. Wistrich, Robert S. (ed.), *Anti-Zionism and Antisemitism in the Contemporary World*. Basingstoke, Macmillan in association with the Institute of Jewish Affairs, 1990, 102.

¹¹ The word *sharīf* means *nobleman* in literal translation. The title was used by Muhammad's relatives and their numerous descendants who commanded particular respect and were constantly engaged in rivalry. From the 10th century to 1924 the emir governors of Mecca were called *sharīf* (*alida sharīf*). Throughout the centuries, there was an uninterrupted competition between many great families to gain the emir's position.

and inaccurately phrased correspondence that is commonly regarded as the first significant body of documents on the way to the historical success of Zionism. The Ottoman Empire, already weakened by defeats in North Africa and the Balkans, joined World War I, siding with Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, shortly after the outbreak, in autumn 1914. The Ottoman Empire's entry to war worked toward a new strengthening of the Arab imperial idea. Before the Great War London was engaged in traditionally good relations with Istanbul but following the initiation of Ottoman-German joint operations directed towards the Nile valley, London quietly sent word to the Meccans that it would now be willing to consider backing an anti-Ottoman Arab uprising, a plan categorically refused at the beginning of that same year. For more than a year, the British war cabinet made attempts to satisfy the emerging needs of the Arab movement under the leadership of Husayn, the emir of Mecca.

Sharīf Husayn, blood kin to Prophet Muhammad, who considered himself the number one man of the holiest Muslim places and who wanted to seize the leadership of the Middle Eastern pan-Muslim caliphate from the sultan and place it into Arab (actually, his own) hands, in a letter dated 14th July 1915 requested the British consul delegated to the capital of Egypt, (declared a British protectorate) to make certain that Great Britain would guarantee the independence of Arab-populated lands in return for special favours over other countries in trade relationships. In his reply, Sir Henry McMahon expressed the assurance of the British government to back sharīf Husayn's attempts for Arab independence. At the same time he indicated that the territories not entirely populated by Arab ethnicity would not come under the rule of the future independent Arab caliphate – without clearly defining what these territories were. He was also rather vague regarding the affiliation of the Holy Land, i.e. he left open the situation of the territory. McMahon's promise, which deliberately or unwittingly encouraged the realisation of Zionist endeavours as well, sowed the first seed of the later developing feud.

In 1909, Zionist Jews founded Tel-Aviv, "the first entirely Jewish city in modern history",¹² the

commercial centre of the future Israel. Aliyas, events of Jewish immigration to Palestine,¹³ an area of primary strategic importance to the British, started in the last decades of the 19th century, with arrivals especially from Russian territories. As late as the end of World War I, the number of Jews living in the territory of Palestine did nevertheless not reach one tenth of the population there. The gestures of the British, who wished to gain control of the Middle Eastern regions of the Ottoman Empire were especially important in the Jewish immigration process. In the Middle East of the first half of the 20th century His Majesty's diplomats likewise embraced the interests of the increasingly populous Jewish community arriving in Palestine. Great Britain had strong business and political ties with Middle Eastern Arab countries but it also had to take into consideration the fact that Jews could gain significant influence in the Middle East. For this reason, Britain created an intimate triangle and wanted to remain true to both his old and new love. The key to the wavering British policy in the Middle East must be seen in the fact that the country wished to keep more than one way open for its interests at the same time. If in need of finding an ally for its political steps, Britain could play out the two competing parties against each other, which means making the emerging Jewish-Arab problem a part of various negotiation processes.

Influential Jewish personalities living in Great Britain took significant roles in the political preparation work of the Jewish state. The lobbying of Chaim Weizmann and Lord Rothschild within official British circles was crowned with success. In a letter to Lord Rothschild of 2nd November 1917, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, Arthur James Balfour lent his support to the Zionist movement in the name of the British government, promising a national home to the Jewish people, without exactly designating its borders, in a Palestine that at the time still belonged to the Ottoman Empire, and where – it has to be stressed again – approximately ninety per cent of the population were Arabs, and Jews only amounted to a part of the remaining ten per cent. Balfour's sparingly worded declaration, made to the head of the banking dynasty on the backing of the creation of the Jewish home in Palestine proved to be fatal to

¹² Goldschmidt, Arthur, *A Közel-Kelet rövid története*. Budapest, Maecenas, 1997, 277.

¹³ The name of the territory is of ancient Greco-Roman origin; its inhabitants were called *Palaistinoi* in classical Greek times.

Arabs in the Middle East. The idea of an obligation to secure the protection of rights to non-Jewish communities living in Palestine, also included in Balfour's well-intentioned letter, was later completely forgotten.

When Jewish immigration to Palestine, a part of the Ottoman Empire, started at the beginning of the 1880s, the Turkish government consented to Jews settling in small communities, and without privileges, in any region of the empire except Palestine. The Balfour declaration in effect annihilated this decree of 1882. In the 1920 Sèvres treaty signed (but never ratified) by the victorious great powers and Turkey there appears the promise given to Zionists in the Balfour declaration, according to which a Jewish national home must be formed in the territory of Palestine.

The Balfour declaration counts as a milestone in the history of Zionism. The idea of Zionism first received official recognition from a great power: Britain exactly twenty years after the first Zionist congress. The British, acquiring a mandate over Palestine a few years after the issuing of the declaration, by this means provided the foundation to the circumstances without which the Jewish state would have remained but a dream. In return for achieving these significant results, Chaim Weizmann was elected president of the world Zionist organisation in 1921 and president of the Jewish immigration organisation, the Jewish Agency in 1929; later, from February 1949 he came to be the first president of the Jewish state (1949-1952).

Britain, naturally, was not completely unselfish in lending its support to Herzl's programme: indeed, this step was taken in its own interest. With this support, Britain wished to check allied France's ambitions in the Middle East. On the other hand they thought that the presence of Jews in Palestine, the larger area of the Suez Canal, of primary importance to the British, would be useful against Arabs. The British did not wish a viable Arab state to be born in Palestine but counted on the immigrant Jews to need the British protective umbrella in the face of Arab resistance.

Balfour's stance launched expectations and

inspired aspirations which worked to escalate and sharpen controversies in the previously sensitive Arab-Jewish relations in the area. A respectable Jewish representative of the contemporary British political élite labelled Balfour's letter superfluous and provocative because he saw it as a challenge that would radically overturn the life of diaspora Jews and the Middle East: "the only Jewish member of the British government, Edwin Montagu expressly objected to the declaration, fearing that the voicing of the national status of Jews – or, for that matter, their being different at all – would only strengthen antisemitism, putting already assimilated Jews – or those wishing to assimilate – in an especially difficult situation."¹⁴ The famous author of the emblematic work *Darkness at Noon*, Arthur Koestler, the Jewish writer and Zionist enthusiast in the mid-1920s, expressed his opinion on Balfour's pro-Zionist letter, the first diplomatic triumph of Zionism, in an ironic voice: "It is a document in which a nation ceremoniously promises to give another nation the land of a third."¹⁵ The promise of the British, as pointed out by Koestler, not only carries in itself the possibility of the creation of the Zionist state but also all the controversies of the loss of territory by Palestinians.

The Ottoman Empire, deep in crisis and widely called 'the sick man of the Bosphorus' in 19th century Europe, joined the war in autumn 1914 as Germany's ally, sealing its own fate with this step. After four years, the Ottoman Empire, like the German Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, was in ruins. During World War I, several schemes surfaced regarding the future of the Middle Eastern region, the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire; it was mostly the basic notions of the Brit Sir Mark Sykes and the Frenchman Georges Picot, settled in a secret exchange of memoranda in spring 1916 that were put under seal and realised at the San Remo League of Nations Conference in 1920. Special attention must be drawn to the fact that while the elegant gentlemen seated at the negotiation table at the middle of World War I precisely drew up their spheres of interest in the region, there was no concrete decision made on Palestine: the territory was

¹⁴ Rostoványi, Zsolt, *Együttélésre ítélve. Zsidók és palesztinok küzdelme a Szentföldért*. Budapest, Corvina, 2006, 80; Smith, Charles D., *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History with Documents*. Boston, Mass., Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001, 74-75. My translation.

¹⁵ Koestler, Arthur, *Promise and Fulfilment*. London, Macmillan, 1949, 4.

to come under international control. The letter from the British Prime Minister to Lord Rothschild nevertheless indicates that Britain thought of Palestine as its own, and felt it could dispose of the area with due magnanimity.

The victorious powers assembled in Versailles after World War I wished to reorganise the world. In order to aid the formation of the American concept regarding the Middle East, President Woodrow Wilson sent the heir to the Chicago plumbing “empire”, Charles R. Crane, together with Henry King, the president of Oberlin College, to Syria and Palestine in 1919. The delegation, better known as the King-Crane Commission, was of the opinion on the Zionist proposal to create a Jewish state that it could not be achieved in a peaceful way and would be the most brutal possible breach of the civil and religious rights of non-Jewish communities in Palestine. The work of the committee, which conducted a careful examination in the area nevertheless remained an insignificant chapter in the history of diplomacy: their proposals were thrown into the whirlpool of the Versailles peace conference, only to disappear without trace.¹⁶

Taking into account the potential interests and needs contained in the Sykes-Picot agreement, which clearly attests to the tight British-French ties, a resolution was passed in San Remo for the Middle Eastern territories ruled by the Ottoman Empire to remain under the control of the great Western European powers, divided between the British and the French in a mandatory system, for a previously undetermined period of time. There was no mention of the august idea of autonomy voiced before. The two victorious great powers created several new states with a few strokes of the pen. The new masters of the area paid no attention to the fact that the Arab regions in the Middle East had wanted to gain their freedom in the 19th century with early pan-Arabic movements striving for liberation from the rule of the Ottoman Empire and the achievement of autonomy. Great Britain and France continued to strengthen their dominant role in the region; it was at this time that they stood closest to the fulfilment of their age-old

dream to repaint the regions of North Africa and the Middle East which to them seemed white patches in the colours of their own flags.

The Middle Eastern settlement following the end of World War I did not bring about stabilisation in the area. Nor was it the aim of the great powers. In dismantling the Ottoman Empire the British and French strove to make transition permanent and did everything to ensure their hegemony over the Arabs. From this respect what seemed most evident to them was to create small-scale and weak states, kept in conflict with one another according to the principle of ‘divide and rule’, putting them under their own influence – and they did this in a Middle Eastern region which for millennia had lived and thought in imperial dimensions.

The destruction of former traditional structures based on strong historical ties nevertheless had unexpected results. By virtue of the fact that the Western great powers, the British and French settled political state borders peremptorily and thus created previously unseen political formations and state structures in “previously unified territories that belonged together culturally, ethnically or from other points of view (an example to this is Syria, Lebanon and Transjordan created in the territory of former Greater Syria)”, insisting on even giving the names to these new countries themselves, “they gave an impulse to the evolution and strengthening of united Arab nationalism on the one hand and local, particular nationalisms on the other”.¹⁷ Palestine, which had belonged to Greater Syria (beside Syria, Lebanon and Jordan) and in turn to an even greater unit, the Fertile Crescent belt (with Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Kuwait), was declared according to preliminary expectations of the great powers a British mandatory territory on commission of the League of Nations on 24 July 1922. Although this League of Nations resolution only came into effect on 29th September 1923, the constitution of the mandatory territory passed in spring 1923 prescribed a British consul at the head of civil administration in Palestine.

In the years following its creation, the Balfour declaration – in which Great Britain promised and the League of Nations agreed to form the Jewish national home in the territory of Palestine in the

¹⁶ Lacey, Robert, *The Kingdom: Arabia and the House of Saud*. New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981, 226.

¹⁷ Rostoványi, Zsolt: *Islám a 21. század küszöbén*. Budapest, Aula, 1998, 135. My translation. The term Transjordan designates the territories east of the Jordan.

future – generated heated debates with its ambiguous use of terms, similar to many regulations in international treaties (“Jewish National Home”). In July 1922 the British government gave a new interpretation to the text of the declaration from its own point of view. In the *White Paper* hallmarked by Churchill’s name the British cancelled their previous promise to the Arab party to create an Arab state on the entire territory of Palestine, while they declared to Zionists their continued wish to form the Jewish national home, but only in a designated part of Palestine. In a certain sense this stance contained a negative message for Zionists, but practically it meant that the British government made immigration to the land of Palestine easier. It was on 17th May 1939, more than a decade and a half later, on the eve of World War II that the leaders of Britain made public the next *White Paper* containing British policy guidelines regarding Palestine: the *MacDonald White Paper*. This government resolution set the limit of Zionist Jewish immigration to Palestine in seventy-five thousand for the following five years and put significant restrictions on Jewish land acquisition in Palestine. With this regulation, the British managed to dampen the activities of anti-Zionist and anti-British Arab movements but at the same time they entirely lost the trust of the world Zionist organisation.

Large groups of Jews sought their fortunes in Palestine in the first half of the 20th century. Tens of thousands of Jewish immigrants arrived from all parts of the world in the years after World War I, occupying territories and creating colonies in Palestine. The Yishuv, the Palestine Jewish community formed its first armed defence organisation, the Haganah, in 1920-1921. The numbers of Jews, well known as an industrious and proficient people, is estimated approximately one hundred thousand in the area at this time. In the thirties, two hundred thousand Jews inhabited Palestine; at the middle of the same decade, almost four hundred thousand, and on the eve of World War II the number of the Jewish population rose to half million,¹⁸ but the Jewish National Home did not come into existence between the two world wars.

Expectations formed in the defence of Palestinians and Palestine Arabs (the Balfour-decla-

ration in 1917 and the King-Crane Commission Report in 1919) proved to be illusoric; in effect they counted next to nothing. Arab-Jewish relations became increasingly tense in the 20s and 30s with animosity often turning into riots and street fights and the number of bloody incidents kept rising. In the course of mass Jewish immigration into Palestine primordial (ethnic and religious) loyalties strenghtened to such a degree by the mid-30s that an attempt was made to settle power relations with arms in 1936. The Palestinian Arab uprising that broke out in April 1936 forced the British government to station a hundred and forty thousand soldiers in this mandatory area. In the course of the Arab uprising, drawn out for years, both Palestinians and Jews suffered great losses of lives. A factor in the intensifying armed conflicts between Jews and Arabs was the blind eye the British had turned to the formation and operation of Jewish and Arab armed forces and military organisations. Both communities defended themselves and their claims in the open confrontation, demanding possession of the whole of Palestine as a national territory. In the times of armed violence the most complex approach to the problem was given by David Ben Gurion, when in 1938 he declared: when we say the Arabs are the aggressors and we are defending ourselves, we only spell out half of the truth. If we think of our safety and our lives, then we are indeed only defending ourselves. [...] But this fight is only a component of the conflict, which is essentially of political nature. Politically speaking, we are the aggressors, and they are the ones defending themselves.¹⁹

Arab-Jewish coexistence in Palestine was hot with flaming opposition by the mid-thirties, which prompted the British to focus on solutions of the *division* of Palestine, plunged in ever deeper conflict, into a larger Arab and a smaller Jewish state according to the contemporary ratio of the two populations. Jerusalem was to remain under British control. David Ben Gurion, well aware of the softness of the borders in the area, “accepted the plan, as ‘a partial Jewish state is not the end but the beginning, a powerful boost to our historical effort to regain the whole land’”. The Arabs rejected the plan, declaring whole Palestine a part of the ‘Arab

¹⁸ Gilbert, Martin, *Izrael története*. Budapest, Pannonica, 2000, 79.

¹⁹ David Ben Gurion quoted by Simha Flapan, *Zionism and the Palestinians*. London, Croom Helm, 1979, 141.

homeland'. (The division plan did have Arab supporters, as well – for example emir Abdullah – but they feared to openly profess their views in the face of the general mood of the people.)”²⁰ It was also clear to Arab politicians that if they now accepted the establishment of the Jewish state in a part of Palestine, then, later, the Jewish state would claim the whole of Palestine. The division plan acceptable for the League of Nations was rejected by the Arabs partly because in their opinion it would not count much that they would get a larger state than the Jews as better quality, more fertile lands would be given to the Jewish state. The political attempt to form two states, an Arab and a Jewish one, at this point failed; the opposing parties would not hear of a single-state solution, a common Arab-Jewish state.

It was the Arab uprising between 1936 and 1939 that opened the eyes of the British ruling Palestine under international authorisation to the unmanageability of ethnic conflicts emerging in the wake of Jewish immigration. At the same time, in the decades previous to the creation of the Jewish state Great Britain equally patronised the cause of Zionism and Arab endeavours but supported each party in a different way from what they wanted. In the second half of the thirties the two-timing British would witness a gradual strengthening of the Palestine Zionist organisations, while the efficiency of Palestinian self-defence kept diminishing. The internal feud of rival Palestinian clans almost consumed Palestinian forces, and looking out to the broader horizon, the same division characterised Arabs living in the neighbouring territories as a result of their divergent interests.

Violent affrays between Zionists and Palestine Arabs significantly contributed to the surfacing of anti-Jewish sentiments in the area and deepened the negative evaluation of Zionism. The Arab reaction against Jews was largely founded on their anti-zionism, thus in this sense it is entirely different in its origin from European antisemitic reactions cha-

racteristic to the last third of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century. During World War II and the years before and after, the political leaders of the Arab world, which stood largely under British and French colonial rule, sought out of necessity (and not out of ideological convictions) the favours of the countries that stood in opposition to the great powers of the 'deep West'. It was this reason that made them drift first toward the Axis powers and then, the Soviet Union.

A paradoxical process took beginning in the Middle East from the mid-1930s: hatred of the British, who sought to satisfy Zionist demands and yet also favour Arabs pushed the leaders of the Arab resistance into the train of the Third Reich, while the Nazi persecution of Jews boosted the numbers of Jewish immigrants to Palestine. The intensification of Fascism in Europe had a significant effect on the Arab world; on the eve of World War II several Italian and German politicians discovered similarities between Fascist ideas and the teachings of Islam. It must however be properly stressed that it was not Nazi propaganda that captivated the thought of the people living in the Middle East and they were not infected by the Nazi spirit or deformed by the closed system of National Socialism. The nations subjugated to British and French rule discovered their rescuers in the enemies of the great European imperial powers that controlled the Middle East. They unconditionally believed that Fascist powers showing sympathy to Muslims would ensure truth, peace, and the respect of the Prophet's laws for Arabs. In the second half of the 1930s and the beginning of the 40s, pro-Fascist Arab regimes saw the realisation of independence in the allegiance with Germany and Italy and considered self-rule attainable with their collaboration.

In forming the strategic alliance, Middle Eastern Arabs kept two targets in focus at the same time: on the one hand, achieving the cessation of British and French hegemony, and on the other,

²⁰ Rostoványi, Zsolt, *Együttélésre ítélve. Zsidók és palesztinok küzdelme a Szentföldért*. Budapest, Corvina, 2006. Ben Gurion quoted by Dennis Ross, *The Missing Peace. The Inside Story of the Fight for Middle East Peace*. New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004, 18-19. The Abdullah ibn al-Husayn mentioned in the text later became the first ruler of Jordan declared in 1950. He was shot and killed by an armed man of the organisation *al-Jihad al-Muqaddas* at the entrance to the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem on 20th July 1951.

²¹ Schwipps, Werner, 'Wortschlacht im Äther'. Deutsche Welle (ed.): *Wortschlacht im Äther. Der deutsche Auslandsrundfunk im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Geschichte des Kurzwellenrundfunks in Deutschland 1939-1945*. Berlin, Haude & Spener, 1971, 58.; Tillmann, Heinz, *Deutschlands Araberpolitik im Zweiten Weltkrieg*. [Schriftenreihe des Instituts für allgemeine Geschichte an der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg. Bd. 2.] East Berlin, Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1965; Küntzel, Matthias, *Von Zeesen bis Beirut*. Source: <http://www.matthiaskuentzel.de/contents/von-zeesen-bis-beirut>

the prevention of the flow of Zionist Jews into Palestine and the elimination of Jewish settlements founded there. The Arabs formed their allegiances without being aware of the basic characteristics and aims of Hitler's regime, or, indeed, without showing interest in anything beyond the Jewish question. It must also be stressed that Middle Eastern Arabs did not take complicity in the crime of the annihilation of European Jews. The allegiance between National Socialist Germany and the Arabs barely went beyond slogans, yet managed to create significant reverberations.

It was Sir Herbert Samuel, the first British consul in Palestine and widely known for his Zionist demands as early as the beginning of World War I who appointed Haj Amin al-Husseini (1895-1974) the chief mufti of Jerusalem. Al-Husseini would then utilise his position to spearhead Palestine Arab nationalism. Raising his voice against British rule in the Middle East and the Zionist colonisation of Palestine to an equal degree, he welcomed Hitler's ascendance to power in Germany and turned to the new German chancellor for help as early as spring 1933. Talks stalled because at that time Germans still viewed Great Britain as a potential ally: Arab overtures were rejected by the Germans. 1938, the year that counted as the time of hopes for Great Britain and France was in reality already Hitler's year, who achieved one success after the other. Seeing Hitler's break forward, Haj Amin al-Husseini, exiled from Palestine in 1937, settling in Lebanon, and later, in Iraq, once again turned his attention towards Germany on the eve of World War II. At this time, he received clear encouragement to a common fight; in 1938 a high-powered shortwave radio station located near the German capital commenced a

series of daily broadcasts in Arabic to the Middle Eastern area that would continue for six years.²¹

The chief mufti of Jerusalem initiated a personal meeting with the Führer, which took place in November 1941 in the capital of Germany. The guest representing all Arabs assured his host of the loyalty and devotion of "Arabs" in the course of the talks, and offered Hitler the support of the "Arabs". Although the formation of an allegiance with the ethnically Semitic Arabs contradicted official Nazi ideology, but in order to weaken the British and the Americans, Germans sympathised with "warlike" Islam.²² The idea of pan-Arabism found no support with Hitler but even without this, Haj Amin al-Husseini, urging close collaboration with a Third Reich bursting with power, declared his commitment to the Germans in a radio speech in the first days of the first battle of el-Alamein, on 3rd July 1942. He spoke of Jews as the common enemy of Arabs and the Axis powers.²³ Although the Palestine Arab authority, known as an enthusiastic admirer of the Nazis, maintained good relations with Heinrich Himmler, cooperation between Haj Amin al-Husseini and Nazi leaders was in fact restricted to informal meetings to forge common plans. With the establishment of the Muslim Academy in Dresden and the Berlin Arab Bureau the first steps were taken to build out the institutional framework of German-Arab relations, but the gradual German collapse buried this network of ties under itself.

Following the fall of the Third Reich the Kingdom of Egypt provided safe haven for several Hitler followers and sympathisers. In the years after the world war, the former chief mufti of Jerusalem also enjoyed King Farouk's hospitality in Cairo.²⁴ The theoretically independent and neutral Egypt

²² Morse, Chuck, *The Nazi Connection to Islamic Terrorism. Adolf Hitler and Haj Amin al-Husseini*. New York, iUniverse, 2003, 65; Vermaat, Emerson, *Haj Amin al-Husseini. Nazi collaborator and model for today's Islamists*. Source: <http://www.militantislammonitor.org/article/id/3381>; Trifkovic, Serge, *Islam's Nazi Connections*. Source: http://www.mideastnewswire.com/archive/me_nc_islamists.html.

²³ Höpp, Gerhard (ed.), *Mufti-Papiere. Briefe, Memoranden, Reden und Aufrufe Amin al-Husainis aus dem Exil, 1940-1945*. Berlin, K. Schwarz, 2001.

²⁴ For a comprehensive survey of the issue see: Bethell, Nicholas, *Das Palästina-Dreieck, Juden und Araber im Kampf um das britische Mandat 1935 bis 1948*. Frankfurt am Main, Propyläen-Verlag, 1979; Nicosia, Francis R., 'Arab Nationalism and National Socialist Germany, 1933-1939. Ideological and Strategic Incompatibility'. In: *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12 (1980), 351-372; Nicosia, Francis R., *The Third Reich and the Palestine Question*. Austin, University of Texas Press, 1985; Morse, Chuck, *The Nazi Connection to Islamic Terrorism. Adolf Hitler and Haj Amin al-Husseini*. New York, iUniverse, 2003; Vermaat, Emerson, *Haj Amin al-Husseini. Nazi collaborator and model for today's Islamists*. Source: <http://www.militantislammonitor.org/article/id/3381>.

played a highly controversial role during World War II. King Farouk sympathised with the Axis powers, while Egypt's field of play was in effect defined by the British military presence reaching back over more than a hundred years. Although Prime Minister Ali Maher officially declared Egypt's opposition to the Axis powers in January 1945, it is still difficult to define whether Egypt belonged to the winning or the losing states upon the end of the war. As early as October 1933 a movement under the leadership of Ahmad Husayn and named *Young Egypt (Misr al-Fatat)* was established, which originally sympathised with the programme of Fascism and Nazi paraphernalia but later took a sharp turn towards leftist nationalism. After the turn the movement even changed its name: it first continued functioning as *Islamic Nationalist Party (al-Hizb al-Watani al-Islami)*, then later as the *Socialist Party of Egypt (Hizb Misr al-Ish-tiraki)*.²⁵ Two later presidents of Egypt belonged to the members of Ahmad Husayn's organisation. The leading figure of pan-Arabism, Nasser, was not ent-

husiastic of Hitler in the least. In contrast to Anwar Sadat, who spied for the Germans in the first half of the world war and wrote a letter of praise to Hitler in 1953(!),²⁶ Nasser was not taken with the youthful dynamism of Fascism; he was neither an active and professed supporter of the German national craze called Nazism, nor its fellow on his path, for that matter. In World War II, when the British first stopped and then defeated the armed forces of the Axis powers, Nasser did not participate in war-time activities either on the side of the Allied forces led by the British or Erwin Rommel's Afrikakorps. Due to his nationalistic views, the young Egyptian officer despising King Farouk's regime served at a Sudan garrison named Port Sudan, very far from Cairo. Nasser and his nationalist fellows who demanded autonomy for the nation supported anyone and any sort of ideology that rejected Western imperialist policy and made the slightest promise of liberation from foreign occupation and British military presence.

²⁵ On the transformations of the movement see: Jankowski, James, *Egypt's Young Rebels: 'Young Egypt,' 1933-1952*. Stanford, Hoover Institution Press, 1975.

²⁶ Lewis, Bernard, „*Treibt sie ins Meer!*“. *Die Geschichte des Antisemitismus*. Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Ullstein, 1989, 187; Morse, Chuck, *The Nazi Connection to Islamic Terrorism. Adolf Hitler and Haj Amin al-Husseini*. New York, iUniverse, 2003, 34.