



NAZI  
GERMANY

AND THE  
ARAB WORLD

Francis R. Nicosia



## Nazi Germany and the Arab World

This book considers the evolving strategic interests and foreign policy intent of the Third Reich toward the Arabic-speaking world, from Hitler's assumption of power in January 1933 to 1944, a year following the final Axis defeat in and expulsion from North Africa in May 1943. It does so within the context of two central, interconnected issues in the larger history of National Socialism and the Third Reich, namely Nazi geopolitical interests and ambitions and the regime's racial ideology and policy. This book defines the relatively limited geopolitical interests of Nazi Germany in the Middle East and North Africa within the context of its relationships with the other European great powers and its policies with regard to the Arabs and Jews who lived in those areas.

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32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

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[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107067127](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107067127)

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First published 2015

Printed in the United States of America

*A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Nicosia, Francis R., 1944–

Nazi Germany and the Arab world / Francis R. Nicosia.

pages cm

ISBN 978-1-107-06712-7 (Hardback)

1. Arab countries–Foreign relations–Germany. 2. Germany–Foreign relations–Arab countries. 3. National socialism and Islam. I. Title.

DS63.2.G4N53 2014

327.43017'492709043–dc23 2014026178

ISBN 978-1-107-06712-7 Hardback

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*For Joseph and Patrick*

*Die mohammedanisch-arabische Kulturperiode ist das Verbindungsglied zwischen der untergegangenen griechisch-römischen und der alten Kultur überhaupt und der seit dem Renaissancezeitalter aufgeblühten europäischen Kultur. Die letztere hätte ohne dieses Bindeglied schwerlich so bald ihre heutige Höhe erreicht.*

*(The era of Islamic-Arab culture represents the link between the fallen Greek-Roman and generally the culture of antiquity, and the European culture that has blossomed since the period of the Renaissance. Without this link, the latter would not have easily reached its high position of today.)*

August Bebel, *Die Mohammedanisch-Arabische Kulturperiode*, Herausgegeben und eingeleitet von Wolfgang G. Schwanitz (Berlin: Edition Ost, 1999), 169.

*Als völkischer Mann, der den Wert des Menschentums nach rassistischen Grundlagen abschätzt, darf ich schon aus der Erkenntnis der rassistischen Minderwertigkeit dieser sogenannten "unterdrückten Nationen" nicht das Schicksal des eigenen Volkes mit dem ihren verketten.*

*(As a folkish man who estimates the value of humanity on racial bases, I may not, simply because of my knowledge of their racial inferiority, link my own people's fate with that of these so-called "oppressed nations.")*

Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Jubiläumsausgabe anlässlich der Vollendung des 50. Lebensjahres des Führers (München: Zentralverlag der NSDAP/Frz. Eher Nachf., 1939), 655.

*Unsere Sender wiegeln die Araber auf. Jetzt wollen wir mal Oberst Lawrence spielen.*

*(Our radio stations are inciting the Arabs. Now we want to play Colonel Lawrence.)*

Joseph Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, Elke Fröhlich Hrsg., Teil I, Bd. 9, Bearbeitet von Hartmut Mehringer (Berlin: K.G. Sauer Verlag, 1995), 252.



# Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	page ix
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xiii
Introduction	I
1 Continuity and Departure: Imperial and Weimar Germany	18
<i>Imperial Germany and the First World War</i>	18
<i>The Weimar Years</i>	28
2 Hitler, Race, and the World Beyond Europe	46
<i>Race and the European Great Powers</i>	46
<i>Race and “Colonial Peoples”</i>	54
3 Germany and the Arab World, 1933–1937	62
<i>Hitler’s “Englandpolitik”</i>	62
<i>Arab Overtures, Nazi Responses</i>	70
<i>The Arab Revolt and German Arms</i>	79
<i>A Jewish State</i>	89
4 The Coming of War, 1938–1939	101
<i>Continuity and Departure in Hitler’s “Englandpolitik”</i>	101
<i>Germany, Italy, and the Middle East</i>	116
<i>Arms Exports</i>	127
5 From the Periphery to the Center, 1940–1941	135
<i>From the Periphery</i>	135
<i>To the Center</i>	154
6 The Axis and Arab Independence, 1941–1942	180
<i>Arab Leaders in Wartime Berlin</i>	180
<i>The Elusive Axis Declaration</i>	188

	<i>Anticipation of Victory: Fall 1942</i>	204
	<i>The Mufti and North Africa</i>	216
7	Collapse and Irrelevance, 1943–1944	222
	<i>North Africa, Continuity, and Collapse</i>	222
	<i>The Jewish Question, the Middle East, and Palestine</i>	239
	<i>Postscript: Handschar</i>	257
	Conclusions	265
	<i>Bibliography</i>	281
	<i>Index</i>	293

## Illustrations

1.1	Map: Ottoman Empire 1914	<i>page</i> 20
1.2	Map: North Africa 1914	21
1.3	Map: The Sykes-Picot Agreement 1916	24
1.4	Map: Anglo-French Mandates in the Fertile Crescent 1922	26
3.1	Fritz Grobba (no date). Courtesy Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Berlin.	77
3.2	Ernst von Weizsäcker (no date). Courtesy Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Berlin.	92
3.3	Map: Peel Partition Plan 1937	96
3.4	Werner-Otto von Hentig (no date). Courtesy Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Berlin.	97
4.1	Joachim von Ribbentrop (no date). Courtesy Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Berlin.	102
4.2	Ernst Woermann (no date). Courtesy Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Berlin.	109
4.3	Mussolini meets with Hitler in Munich (25 September 1937). Courtesy Bundesarchiv, Berlin.	117
5.1	Adolf Hitler meets with Francisco Franco at Hendaye (October 1940). Courtesy Bundesarchiv, Berlin.	143
5.2	Otto Abetz (no date). Courtesy Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Berlin.	153
5.3	Adolf Hitler meets with Henri Philippe Pétain at Montoire (October 1940). Courtesy Bundesarchiv, Berlin.	154
5.4	Erwin Rommel and Afrikakorps arrive in Tripoli (February 1941). Courtesy Bundesarchiv, Berlin.	156
5.5	Rudolph Rahn (no date). Courtesy Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Berlin.	174

- |     |  |     |
|-----|--|-----|
| 6.1 | Hitler receives the Mufti Amin al-Husayni in Berlin (November 1941). Courtesy Bundesarchiv, Berlin.  | 193 |
| 6.2 | The Mufti Amin al-Husayni and Rashid Ali al-Gaylani in Berlin on the first anniversary of the coup in Iraq (April 1942). Courtesy Yad Vashem, Jerusalem.                                 | 201 |
| 6.3 | Erwin Ettl (no date). Courtesy Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Berlin.  | 213 |
| 6.4 | Walter Schellenberg (September 1943). Courtesy Bundesarchiv, Berlin.   | 217 |
| 7.1 | Jews rounded up by the Germans in Tunis for forced labor, marching to the port of Bizaret (December 1942). Courtesy Bundesarchiv, Berlin, and Yad Vashem, Jerusalem.                     | 240 |
| 7.2 | Simon Brod, Jewish Agency for Palestine representative in Istanbul, and Jewish refugees from Transnistria (May 1944). Courtesy United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C. | 246 |
| 7.3 | Eberhard von Thadden (no date). Courtesy Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Berlin.  | 254 |
| 7.4 | Grand Mufti with Bosnian volunteers for Muslim Waffen-SS Division (November 1943). Courtesy Bundesarchiv, Berlin.  | 262 |

## Abbreviations

AA	Auswärtiges Amt (Foreign Office)
ADAP	Akten zur deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, 1918–1945
BA-MA	Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, Freiburg im Breisgau
BArch	Bundesarchiv, Berlin
DB	Deutsche Botschaft (German Embassy)
DG	Deutsche Gesandtschaft (German Embassy)
DGK	Deutsches General-Konsulat (German Consulate-General)
IfZ	Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich
NAL	National Archives, London
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist German Workers Party)
OKH	Oberkommando des Heeres (Supreme Command of the Army)
OKW	Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (Supreme Command of the Armed Forces)
PA	Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Berlin
RSHA	Reichssicherheitshauptamt (Reich Security Main Office)
SD	Sicherheitsdienst (Security Service) in the SS
USHMM	United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C.
WZO	World Zionist Organization
ZMO	Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin



## Acknowledgments

I wish to express my appreciation for the support of the scholars, archivists, librarians, and support staffs of the various research and archival institutions at which I was able to conduct the research for this book. These institutions, which include the Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts (German Foreign Office Archives) and the Bundesarchiv (Federal Archives) in Berlin, the Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (Federal Archives-Military Archives) in Freiburg im Breisgau, the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich, the National Archives at Kew Gardens in London, and the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland, were indispensable in the long process of preparing this study. I am particularly grateful to the librarians and support staff at the Bailey-Howe Library of the University of Vermont for their kind assistance, and to my former graduate student assistants Paul Blomerth, Elizabeth Barnes, Ethan Jennings, and Michelle Sigiel.

But these institutions and individuals would not have been in a position to help had it not been for the generous financial support I received for this project from several granting bodies in the United States and in Germany. I am indebted to the Council for the International Exchange of Scholars in Washington, D.C., and the Fulbright-Kommission in Berlin, for a sabbatical year of research in Berlin 2006–2007. The endowment for the Raul Hilberg Distinguished Professorship in Holocaust Studies at the University of Vermont, generously supported by the late Mr. Leonard Miller, provided financial support for my research at the archives in Freiburg im Breisgau, in Munich, and in London. I wish to thank Leonard Miller once again for his commitment to, and support for, Holocaust-related scholarship at the University of Vermont.

To friends and colleagues at all of these institutions, I am deeply grateful. I also wish to thank the readers of the project proposal and this manuscript for their helpful and constructive suggestions during the review process. Finally,

I am indebted to my wife, Ellen Oxfeld, an anthropologist and scholar, who provided me with useful perspectives and constructive suggestions during the process of manuscript revision.

For whatever may be positive about this study, all of these people deserve a large share of the credit; for any shortcomings, the responsibility must rest entirely with me.

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## Introduction

This book is a reexamination of the foreign policy of Hitler's Third Reich toward the Arabic-speaking world of North Africa, the Fertile Crescent, and the Arabian Peninsula before and during the Second World War. Although it touches briefly on the roles of the non-Arab states of Turkey and Iran in German geopolitical and military considerations during those years, its focus remains on the Arab lands, all of which remained in varying degrees under the influence or control of a European colonial power. Turkey, unlike the Arab states, was a fully sovereign and independent state, one toward which Hitler's regime pursued a consistent policy before and after 1939 based on the recognition and support for Turkey's territorial integrity, independence, and in particular its neutrality in a European war. Iran was more or less independent as well, at least until the Anglo-Soviet occupations of August 1941. It was neither an immediate object of competing European imperial ambition, nor in close proximity to German and Italian geopolitical interest and military reach in eastern Europe, the Mediterranean region, and parts of Africa.

The book's focus on the Arab world is presented within the framework of two central, interconnected issues in the larger history of National Socialism and the Third Reich, namely the geopolitical interests and ambitions of Hitler's National Socialist regime and its racial ideology and "world view." It seeks to define the geopolitical interests and policies of Nazi Germany in the Arab lands of the Middle East and North Africa, within the context of Hitler's primary ambitions in Europe, Germany's relationships with the other European powers in the Mediterranean area, and Arab nationalism. It also considers Nazi racial attitudes and policies toward the Arab population that lived in those regions, and more generally with "colonial peoples" living under some form of European control throughout the world at that time.

In recent years, events in the Middle East and beyond have generated a renewed interest among scholars and non-scholars alike in the relationship

between Hitler's Germany and the Arab lands of the Middle East and North Africa. This is especially true with regard to the Second World War and the Nazi persecution and mass murder of the Jews in Europe. Prior to the end of the last century, there were a few scholarly studies that appeared beginning in the 1960s that focused on the aims and policies of Nazi Germany in the Arab Middle East. Few, if any, provided much detail on the reactions of Arab leaders, intellectuals, and the general Arab population to National Socialism, Germany, and Nazi Jewish policy.<sup>1</sup> However, much of the more recent literature has begun to examine the responses of the Arab populations of the Middle East and North Africa to Hitler, National Socialism, German and European anti-Semitism, and the destruction of the Jews in Europe. Moreover, they consider the question of Arab responses to National Socialism and the Holocaust in Europe not only during the Second World War, but also in the turbulent decades in the Arab world following the end of the war. One might engage in conjecture and attribute the recent spike in interest in the topic of Arab and Islamic responses to Nazism and the Holocaust to a host of developments: the rapid growth of fundamentalist Islamic organizations and movements in the Middle East over the past several decades; the continuing Israeli-Palestinian conflict; the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran and elsewhere; the American wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; as well as the issue of terrorism and the so-called war on terror since the attacks of September 11, 2001.

Some of the recent literature tends to offer simplistic generalizations about the responses to Hitler, National Socialism, and Nazi anti-Semitism in a very large, complex, and highly diverse Arabic-speaking part of the world that stretches from the Atlantic coast of Morocco in the west to the Persian Gulf and Iraq's border with Iran in the east, and from the Syrian and Iraqi borders with Turkey in the north to the southern coast of the Arabian Peninsula. A few are works by scholars in the field of modern European and German history, the Third Reich, and the Holocaust. As such, these provide valuable new information on, analysis of, and insights into, German policy and propaganda

<sup>1</sup> On the question of German Middle East policy, there was some interest in the mid 1960s with the appearance of the following: Lukasz Hirsowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966); Heinz Tillmann, *Deutschlands Araberpolitik im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag für Wissenschaft, 1965); Robert Melka, "The Axis and the Arab Middle East, 1930–1945," Diss. University of Minnesota, 1966; Mohamed-Kamal el Dessouki, "Hitler und der Nahe Osten," Diss. Berlin, 1963; and Joseph Schechtman, *The Mufti and the Führer: The Rise and fall of Haj Amin el-Husseini* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1965). Several additional works on specific aspects of Nazi policy appeared during the three decades following the 1960s, among them: Bernd Schröder, *Deutschland und der Mittlere Osten im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Göttingen: Musterschmidt Verlag, 1975); Yair Hirschfeld, *Deutschland und Iran im Spielfeld der Mächte* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1980); Francis R. Nicosia, *The Third Reich and the Palestine Question* (Austin and London: University of Texas Press and I.B. Tauris, 1985); Uriel Dann (ed.), *The Great Powers and the Middle East, 1919–1939* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1988); and Edgar Flacker, "Fritz Grobba and Nazi Germany's Middle East Policy, 1933–1942," Diss. London, 1998.

toward the Arab Middle East and North Africa.<sup>2</sup> However, even they, not unlike many of the non-scholarly, often polemical, literature that has appeared since the World Trade Center attacks of September 11, 2001, at times imply the existence of a generally singular, uniform Arab world, with a more or less uniform reception of Hitler, National Socialism, and the persecution and mass murder of the Jews in Europe. They often assume the existence of an Arab world in the Fertile Crescent, the Arabian Peninsula, and North Africa that constituted a generally uniform and monolithic ethnic, cultural, political, and religious entity with a more or less singular world view. As such, they provide neither the necessary historical and cultural context of the modern Middle East, nor do they really utilize the important and diverse Arabic-language sources that historians and other scholars of the modern Middle East naturally have consulted on this important topic.

In his analysis of Nazi propaganda to the Middle East during the Second World War, Jeffrey Herf rightly concludes that the Nazi state and party, along with the German military, “. . . made strenuous efforts with the resources at their disposal to export the regime’s ideology in ways that they hoped would strike a nerve among Arabs and Muslims.”<sup>3</sup> He also points out that Allied and German intelligence services “. . . all found evidence that there were individuals and groups from which the Axis might have expected strong support.”<sup>4</sup> Just as scholars of the history of the Third Reich and the Second World War would hardly disagree with Herf’s first point, scholars of modern Middle Eastern history would generally concur with his second point. Moreover, Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Martin Cüppers present important information about, and insight into, Nazi plans and activities with regard to the Middle East during the Second World War. These include efforts by the Nazi regime to intensify hatred of the Jews among the Arab populations, as well as evidence for Nazi plans during the war to extend the “final solution,” the mass murder of the Jews in Europe, to the ancient Jewish communities in the Arab lands of North Africa and the Middle East.<sup>5</sup> As scholars of modern Europe and Germany, Mallmann and Cüppers, Herf, and a few others make important contributions to our knowledge and understanding of the Third Reich, and its attitudes and policies toward the Arab world.<sup>6</sup> Their focus on the handful of Arab exiles in wartime Berlin and Rome is indeed important for understanding German and

<sup>2</sup> See for example the studies by Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Martin Cüppers, *Halbmond und Hakenkreuz: Das Dritte Reich, die Araber und Palästina* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006); Klaus Gensicke, *Der Mufti von Jerusalem und die Nationalsozialisten: Eine politische Biographie Amin el-Husseinis* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2007); Jeffrey Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); and most recently Barry Rubin and Wolfgang Schwanzitz, *Nazis, Islamists, and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Herf, *Nazi Propaganda*, 263      <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Mallmann and Cüppers, *Halbmond und Hakenkreuz*, 137 ff.

<sup>6</sup> See also Gensicke, *Der Mufti von Jerusalem*, chap. 4.

Axis policy toward the Arab world during the war; this study also uses these individuals to this particular end. However, a focus on those Arab exiles in wartime Berlin alone does not provide an adequate lens for understanding how the diverse populations, organizations, and institutions in the Arab world reacted to National Socialism and the policies of the Third Reich in Europe.

Some of the recent literature at times attributes Arab motives and Arab violence against Jews in Palestine and elsewhere in the region during the years 1933–1945 to a historically-rooted, religiously- and culturally-based hatred of Jews. For example, Klaus Gensicke feels compelled to attribute the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem's particular hatred of the Jews to Arabs in general, with little analysis or context: "This fanatical extremism has become a tradition that remains as virulent as it was at the time of the 'great uprising' (1936–1939) and represents a failed policy of refusal to compromise, of irreconcilability, and of 'all or nothing.'" <sup>7</sup> Mallmann and Cüppers, moreover, speculate that the anti-Semitic potential of the Arabs as a whole during the summer of 1942, as Erwin Rommel seemed poised to achieve victory over the British in Egypt and eventually Palestine, was the same as that of the Lithuanians, the Latvians, and the Ukrainians a year earlier in Europe: "There is no reason, therefore, why the anti-Semitic potential of the Lithuanian, Latvian, or Ukrainian nationalists should have been greater than that of the Arabs as they awaited the German army." <sup>8</sup> In drawing conclusions about Nazi wartime propaganda to the Arab world, often a joint effort of the Nazi regime and Arab exiles in Berlin, Herf concludes: "Nazi Germany's Arabic-language propaganda during World War II was the product of a remarkable political and ideological synthesis that took place in wartime Berlin. . . . These materials displayed a synthesis of Nazism, Arab nationalism, and fundamentalist Islam." <sup>9</sup> While each of these three points may indeed possess some element of truth for some Arabs, they also infer general truths about Arabs, Arab history, Arab nationalism, and Arab responses to National Socialism. As such, they can be simplistic generalizations that are impossible to demonstrate in the absence of a necessary Middle Eastern historical context, familiarity with Arabic-language sources, and the fortunate reality that Nazi Germany was defeated in the Second World War.

Likewise, this study cannot consult what is no doubt a large and essential array of Arabic-language sources that would enable it to draw legitimate and, of necessity, nuanced conclusions about the reception of Nazi ideas and policies in the Arab world between 1933 and 1945. Therefore, rather than drawing such conclusions, this book will leave the question of Arab reception of, and responses to, National Socialist Germany to scholars of the Middle East who have undertaken this task. Moreover, some of the aforementioned recent

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>8</sup> Mallmann and Cüppers, *Halbmond und Hakenkreuz*, 164.

<sup>9</sup> Herf, *Nazi Propaganda*, 261.

scholarship tends to ignore or dismiss as a motivating force among Arabs at that time, early and mid-twentieth-century Muslim and Christian Arab resentment against western imperialism and domination of the region since the nineteenth century. Notwithstanding legitimate Zionist efforts to deal with centuries of anti-Semitism and persecution in Europe, as well as issues of Jewish identity and survival in the Diaspora, some tend to dismiss Palestinian Arab fears that Zionism, the Zionist movement, and the Jewish National Home, within the context of Arab resentment against continuing European imperialism in the region, ultimately sought a Jewish majority and state in Mandatory Palestine after the First World War.<sup>10</sup> Examples of Arab hatred and violence against Jews in Palestine and elsewhere in the region during the more than two decades following the First World War are undeniable. That many Arabs during those decades did in fact resent European imperialism in the region, and did fear and resent Zionism and Jewish immigration as serious obstacles to the achievement of Arab national self-determination in Palestine, is equally undeniable. That some may use the reality of European imperialism and fears of Zionism to explain – not to justify or defend – a large part of that hatred and violence is both reasonable and necessary if we are to fully understand this history. Of course, even a partial explanation such as this would conflict with claims that Arab animosity toward Jews was and remains a mirror image of the deeply ingrained, historical hatred and persecution of Jews in Europe.

The important topic of Arab responses to Hitler, National Socialism, and Nazi persecution and destruction of the Jews in Europe between 1933 and 1945 is something that this author will leave to historians and other scholars of the modern Middle East. They possess the expertise in the modern history of the Arab world, and are able to do the essential research in

<sup>10</sup> See for example Mallmann and Cüppers, *Halbmond und Hakenkreuz*, Chap. 1; and Herf, *Nazi Propaganda*, 261–266. While certainly not a replacement for Arabic-language primary sources, some Zionist sources can provide useful and important context to this issue. Chaim Weizmann's pronouncement at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 that the aim of Zionism was "to make Palestine as Jewish as England is English" sent an unambiguous message to the Arab majority in Palestine. See Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and Error: The Autobiography of Chaim Weizmann* (New York: Harper, 1949), 244. Vladimir Jabotinsky rejected any compromise with the Arabs over the absolute necessity of a Jewish majority and state in Palestine, noting that, as Walter Laqueur has written, "the Arabs loved their country [Palestine] as much as the Jews did. Instinctively, they understood Zionist aspirations very well, and their decision to resist them was only natural." See Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism* (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1972), 256. David Ben Gurion's 1938 statement "I support compulsory transfer. I don't see anything immoral in it," might have served to heighten Arab fears. See Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict* (New York: Vintage, 2001), 144. On the other hand, and to illustrate the degree of Arab rejectionism to which Mallmann and Cüppers refer, the call of some Zionists, especially Brit Shalom, during the interwar period for a binational state based on Jewish-Arab equality, was vehemently rejected by most Arab leaders, as it was by most Zionists. See Steven Aschheim, *Beyond the Border: The German-Jewish Legacy Abroad* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 6–44.

Arabic-language sources that are necessary in such an endeavor. In recent years, there has emerged a growing body of scholarship that includes monographs, collections of essays, and individual journal articles by scholars of the Middle East and Islam who examine the complexities and varieties of Arab responses to Hitler's Germany.<sup>11</sup> As is usually the case in scholarly discourse, there are substantive disagreements among them over various issues. However, their works seem to generally exhibit a common recognition of the considerable size, diversity, and complexity of the Arabic-speaking world, and of the consequent multiplicity and range of Arab attitudes and responses to Germany, National Socialism, Nazi anti-Semitism, and the persecution and mass murder of the Jews in Europe. These multiple responses, the natural result of such diversity, would preclude simple generalizations about the Arab world in the 1930s and 1940s. Moreover, some make use of this historical context in their analyses of the impact and legacy of those years on the turbulent developments in the region in the decades following 1945. Their knowledge and understanding of the modern history of the region, as well as their research in Arabic-language sources, provide a necessary context for the debates that arise from this very sensitive topic. They provide a perspective that those of us in the fields of modern European and German history, anti-Semitism, National Socialism, and the Holocaust are usually not in a position to adequately provide. In the end, they generally assume the existence of a large and diverse "Arab world," one that was certainly far larger and more diverse in its responses to Hitler and National Socialism than merely the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Rashid Ali al-Gaylani of Iraq, and other Arab exiles in wartime Berlin.

<sup>11</sup> See most recently Stefan Wild (ed.), *Die Welt des Islams*, International Journal for the Study of Modern Islam, Special Theme Issue: "Islamofascism"? 52, 3-4 (2012); and Omar Kamil, *Der Holocaust im arabischen Gedächtnis. Eine Diskursgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012). See also Götz Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon: The Ambivalence of the German Option, 1933-1945* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Gilbert Achcar, *The Arabs and the Holocaust: The Arab-Israeli War of Narratives* (New York: Henry Holt, 2009); Meir Litvak and Esther Webman, *From Empathy to Denial: Arab Responses to the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Peter Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism: Authoritarian, Totalitarian, and Pro-Fascist Inclinations, 1932-1941* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Israel Gershoni and Götz Nordbruch, *Sympathie und Schrecken. Begegnungen mit Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus in Ägypten 1922-1937* (Berlin: Schwarz, 2011); Gerhard Höpp, Peter Wien, and René Wildangel (eds.), *Blind für die Geschichte? Arabische Begegnungen mit dem Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: Hans Schiler Verlag, 2004). See also the essays by Ulrike Freitag and Israel Gershoni, Peter Wien, Nir Arielli, Jeffrey Herf, Anna Baldinetti, and Mustapha Kabha in the special edition of *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 37 (3), 2011, edited by Ulrike Freitag and Israel Gershoni. These essays are from the international workshop "Arab Responses to Fascism and Nazism, 1933-1945: Reappraisals and New Directions," which took place at Tel Aviv University and the Open University in Israel in May 2010. An older but very useful source on this question is Stefan Wild, "National Socialism in the Arab Near East Between 1933 and 1939," *Die Welt des Islams* 25 (1985): 126-173.

That some Arabs eagerly sought to make common cause with Germany in the decades following the First World War, regardless of the nature of its government, is certainly clear. It would seem the logical and inevitable outcome of a post-World War I settlement in the Middle East that clearly did not satisfy the goal of many Arabs for immediate national self-determination and independence from foreign rule. Winston Churchill met with a delegation of Muslim and Christian Arabs in Haifa during a visit to Palestine in March 1921, on the heels of Palestinian Arab unrest and violence in the immediate postwar years. With a postwar settlement in place that virtually ignored the expectations and demands of Arabs in general, it is not surprising that the atmosphere of this meeting was one of confrontation and recrimination. Arabs expressed anger over what they perceived as broken promises and betrayal by the Allies during and immediately following the First World War. By the time of Churchill's meeting with Arab leaders in Haifa, it had become clear that British and French control over much of the former Arab territories of the Ottoman Empire would be formalized with League of Nations mandates. These included a British mandate over Palestine, and a Jewish National Home that would be incorporated into the mandate. The expansion of Anglo-French imperial influence and control to include the entire Fertile Crescent, along with the creation of a Jewish National Home within Britain's Mandate for Palestine, would trump the attainment of Arab national self-determination and independence. The Arab delegation issued the following warning to Churchill that would be of significance in the decades that followed:

Today the Arabs' belief in England is not what it was. . . If England does not take up the cause of the Arabs, other powers will. From India, Mesopotamia, the Hedjaz and Palestine the cry goes up to England now. If she does not listen, then perhaps Russia will take up their call someday, or perhaps even Germany.<sup>12</sup>

This study is limited to an examination of the intent and the policy of the Third Reich with regard to the Arab lands of the Middle East and North Africa from Hitler's assumption of power in 1933 through most of the Second World War. It does so, in a sense, with an implicit reference to the warning contained in the last sentence of the statement by the Arab delegation to Churchill in Haifa in 1921. There are many references to and discussions of periodic Arab overtures for German support during the Nazi years. Although these overtures constitute an important component of this study, there is no attempt to offer an analysis of, or conclusions about, overall Arab attitudes and responses to National Socialism, the Nazi state, and its policies in Europe. This book does, however, assume the existence of a general frustration and anger among Arabs against a post-World War I settlement that effectively denied them the independence they had expected and believed to be rightfully theirs. There was

<sup>12</sup> Doreen Ingrams (ed.), *Palestine Papers, 1917-1922: Seeds of Conflict* (London: John Murray, 1972), 118.

indeed a fondness among Arabs for Germany that likely stemmed from the general conviction that Germany, alone among the European powers, had never harbored imperial ambitions in the Arab world. Based on that conviction, of course, many attempts by Arab leaders to solicit German support for overturning the post–World War I settlement in the Middle East would materialize during the Weimar and Nazi periods.<sup>13</sup> This sympathy for Germany also produced an important constant in Nazi Germany’s attitudes and policy toward the Arab world, namely the persistent refusal of Hitler’s government to unequivocally recognize and openly support Arab efforts to overturn the post–World War I status quo in the Middle East through the achievement of real independence from European control. This study is limited, therefore, to the substance of Nazi Germany’s ideological and strategic interests and policies in the Arab lands of the Middle East and North Africa, albeit beyond the platitudes and assertions contained in Nazi propaganda in the region during the Second World War.

Finally, this book considers the many important instances of requests that some Arab representatives made to Germany during the Weimar and Nazi periods for diplomatic and material support against British, French, Italian, and Spanish colonial rule in the region, and against Jewish immigration to the Jewish National Home in Palestine. Its focus is on German responses to those requests in order to understand the intent of German policy toward the Arab world, rather than on Arab attitudes toward Germany, National Socialism, and Nazi Jewish policy. These initiatives on the part of some Arabs appear regularly in the German diplomatic reports from the Middle East to Berlin, and naturally constitute an element in the relationship between Hitler’s Germany and various sectors of the Arab nationalist movement during those years. Some of the more obvious, numerous, and useful examples of Arab initiatives are those involving the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin al-Husayni, as well as Rashid Ali al-Gaylani of Iraq, and a few other representatives in the Arab lands or living in exile in wartime Berlin. The book draws conclusions only about the substance of Germany’s responses to those Arab initiatives within the context of German interests and policy in the Arab world; the larger meaning or significance of those Arab initiatives as part of a more general Arab reception of Germany, National Socialism, and Nazi Jewish policy is left to other scholars. The mostly German primary sources used in this study clearly provide an abundant documentary basis for drawing conclusions about the motivations

<sup>13</sup> This view is referred to time and again in the correspondence within the German Foreign Office in Berlin, and between it and German diplomatic missions in the Arab world during the Weimar and Nazi periods. See for instance Institut für Zeitgeschichte (hereafter IfZ): Nachlaß Werner-Otto von Hentig, ED 113/34, “Großarabien und die Lage in Syrien,” Aufzeichnung Werner-Otto von Hentig, 26. Februar 1941; and ED 113/6, “Der Orient in seiner politischen Entwicklung seit dem Weltkrieg,” n.d. Additional references to this view will be made in the chapters to follow.



and aims of Hitler's government; they do not necessarily do the same for Arab motivations and intent as a whole, beyond reflecting a clear Arab desire for self-determination and independence. While these sources do indeed provide important information for an understanding and evaluation of some of the motivations and ambitions of the Mufti and other Arab exiles in wartime Berlin, neither they nor the activities of German and Italian-based Arab exiles are used in isolation to draw larger conclusions about the Arab world as a whole during those years.

Scholars of the history of the Third Reich and the Second World War have long debated the larger question of Hitler's ultimate geopolitical aims and ambitions in Europe and the rest of the world. A major divide among them has been the extent to which Hitler and his Nazi state had developed specific ideas and ambitions for the world beyond the European continent, after an anticipated victory over the Soviet Union and the conquest of German "living space" (*Lebensraum*) in Europe.<sup>14</sup> Some have argued that Hitler's ultimate goals were "continental" in nature and scope, limited to Europe, while others have insisted that his goals extended beyond Europe, and thus were "global." Some of the earliest and most important historians of modern Germany and the Third Reich in the postwar period represented the "continental" interpretation. Scholars such as Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, Hugh Trevor-Roper, Alan Bullock, Axel Kuhn, Eberhard Jäckel, and others outlined Hitler's systematic plans for a war of conquest that was essentially limited to continental Europe and to its complete reorganization under the control of a Greater German Reich.<sup>15</sup> Others made the argument that Hitler's geopolitical aims and ambitions were ultimately global in nature. Scholars such as Andreas Hillgruber, Klaus Hildebrand, Jochen Thies, Gerhard Weinberg, and others argued that they evolved as the Second World War progressed, extending from the European continent to the world beyond.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> See Volker Berghahn's Foreward in the new English edition of Jochen Thies's *Hitler's Plans for Global Domination: Nazi Architecture & Ultimate War Aims* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), xii. Thies's original German edition is *Architekt der Weltherrschaft. Die Endziele Hitlers* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1976).

<sup>15</sup> See for example Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, *Nationalsozialistische Außenpolitik 1933-1938* (Frankfurt am Main: Alfred Metzner Verlag, 1968); Hugh Trevor-Roper, "Hitlers Kriegsziele," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 8 (1960): 121-133; Alan Bullock, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962); Axel Kuhn, *Hitlers Aussenpolitisches Program* (Stuttgart: Klett Verlag, 1970); Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitlers Weltanschauung. Entwurf einer Herrschaft* (Tübingen: Rainer Wunderlich Verlag Hermann Leins, 1969).

<sup>16</sup> See for example Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitlers Strategie. Politik und Kriegführung 1940-1941* (Frankfurt am Main: Bernhard Graefe Verlag für Wehrwesen, 1965), and "England's Place in Hitler's Plans for World Domination," *Journal of Contemporary History* 9 (1974): 5-22; Klaus Hildebrand, *Vom Reich zum Weltreich. Hitler, NSDAP und Kolonienfrage 1919-1945* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1969); Thies, *Architekt der Weltherrschaft*; Gerhard Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (New York: Cambridge

To a significant extent, this debate has been linked to the debates over the ultimate aims of Nazi anti-Semitism and race policy in Europe and beyond. Nazi racial ideology was always an inherent part of the geopolitical considerations of the Nazi state as it planned and waged war. There certainly has been general agreement on the central role of racial ideology in the development of Hitler's geopolitical plans for Europe from the early days of the National Socialist movement. The National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) and the Nazi state after 1933 often professed Germany's rightful pursuit of *Lebensraum* for the German people (*Volk*), within the context of a "new racial order" (*rassische Neuordnung*) in Europe. This new German living space would initially be centered in a "racially reorganized" Greater Germany in central Europe, but would eventually expand into the vast reaches of eastern Europe. It would involve the eventual elimination of Jews, Roma and Sinti, and ultimately most of the Slavic peoples, and would likely be followed by some sort of new, but undefined racial order at least in parts of the world beyond the European continent.<sup>17</sup> Of course, one can only speculate on the form that such a new world order outside of Europe would have taken. Moreover, scholarly debates over the Nazi decision-making process that ultimately led to the "final solution to the Jewish question in Europe," the decision in the fall of 1941 to systematically murder all of the Jews in Europe, of necessity involved the relationship between race theory and anti-Semitism on the one hand, and geopolitical calculations and timing with regard to Europe and the Soviet Union on the other. The final solution was clearly a central part of Nazi military and political efforts in the war for the conquest of living space in Europe. Scholars such as Saul Friedländer and Christopher Browning have largely put the debates surrounding the decision-making process and the final solution to rest with the recognition of some degree of improvisation in Nazi implementation of its racial ideology, within the context of foreign policy and war. Friedländer has concluded:

The Crimes committed by the Nazi regime were neither a mere outcome of some haphazard, involuntary, imperceptible, and chaotic onrush of unrelated events nor a predetermined enactment of a demonic script; they were the result of converging factors, of the interaction between intentions and contingencies, between discernible causes and

University Press, 1994). For German intentions in specific areas outside of continental Europe, see for example Norman J. W. Goda, *Tomorrow the World: Hitler, Northwest Africa, and the Path toward America* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1998); and Klaus Hildebrand, *Das Dritte Reich*, 7. Aufl. (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2009), 77–79.

<sup>17</sup> See, among others, Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 898 ff. In her recent book, Shelley Baranowski looks at the links between race and empire in modern German history, and contextualizes since the nineteenth century German imperialist ambitions in Eastern Europe, and even beyond, as embracing ethnic homogeneity over diversity, imperial enlargement over stasis, and "living space" as the route to the biological survival of the German Volk. See her *Nazi Empire: German Colonialism and Imperialism from Bismarck to Hitler* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

chance. General ideological objectives and tactical policy decisions enhanced one another and always remained open to more radical moves as circumstances changed.<sup>18</sup>

And Browning has exposed this tendency toward improvisation as circumstances changed, and its deadly consequences in the final solution, within the context of war, German conquest, and what he terms the “euphoria of seeming victory” in Europe by 1941.<sup>19</sup>

How did Hitler’s intentions and policies with regard to the Arab lands of North Africa and the Middle East after 1933 fit into the scenario of a two-phased strategy of a successful European-centered *Kontinentalpolitik*, followed by some sort of global or *Weltpolitik*? And how did Nazi racial ideology fit into such a strategy? To some extent, the few early studies of the Third Reich’s policies in the Middle East, written in the 1960s, did at least begin to address this question. The most significant by far was historian Lukasz Hirszowicz’s *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, a 1966 English translation from the original Polish that was first published in Warsaw in 1963. This book, along with an unpublished 1966 PhD dissertation by Robert Melka, offered the first comprehensive scholarly studies of Nazi aims and policy in the Middle East. Not surprisingly, these two otherwise valuable, groundbreaking studies tend to define the Middle East as largely inconsequential in Hitler’s geopolitical calculations, focused as Hitler was on the expansion of German living space, eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union. Moreover, Hirszowicz and Melka incorporate little if any information on, or analysis of, Nazi racial ideology, anti-Semitism, and Jewish policy as they might relate to the question of the Middle East in Hitler’s thinking before and after the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939. In the years since then, however, these issues have become an increasingly significant part of discussions about Nazi Germany and the Arab world, particularly given the close geographical proximity to Europe of North Africa and the Middle East, and the existence of significant Jewish populations in those regions.

Not until the 1980s and thereafter did Nazi racial ideology and anti-Semitism become somewhat more integrated into the scholarship on Nazi Germany’s strategic interests and policy in the Middle East before and after 1939. Among others, this author’s 1985 study of Nazi Germany’s relationship to the Palestine Question before the outbreak of war in Europe in September 1939 combines the issues of Germany’s strategic interests in the region and its relationship with Great Britain on the one hand, and Nazi Jewish policy, specifically the role of Zionism and Jewish emigration from Germany to Palestine before the Second World War, on the other. Mallmann and Cüppers’ 2006 book offers a reexamination of overall Nazi Middle East policy, with a

<sup>18</sup> Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution, 1933–1939* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 5.

<sup>19</sup> Christopher Browning, *The Path to Genocide: Essays on Launching the Final Solution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), xi.

focus on the war years that does include an analysis of anti-Semitism and Jewish policy as part of Nazi strategic thinking. The authors frame their analysis of German strategic interests and aims in the Middle East with clear reference to the role of anti-Semitism and persecution of the Jews as a central element both in the pursuit of German policy in North Africa and the Middle East, as well as in Arab responses to that policy.

Race was indeed part of Hitler's overall geopolitical calculations, including the pursuit of Nazi objectives in the Arabic-speaking lands before and during the Second World War. As was the case in Europe, those calculations and policies were subject to improvisation as political and military realities on the ground required. Even in the 1960s, Lukasz Hirszowicz concluded in his final chapter: "Nazi racism made itself constantly felt in Germany's relations with Arab nationalist leaders. . . A contemptuous attitude to the Arabs, aversion to their character and political behavior, disbelief in their state-forming capacity and their loyalty as allies are expressed by many statements of German leaders and officials."<sup>20</sup> Improvisation in the application of Nazi racial ideology, specifically in the regime's Jewish policy after 1933, also provides an important, interpretive context for any study of Hitler's aims and strategy in the Middle East. Indeed, a key component in Hitler's persecution of the Jews before 1941 was the encouragement of Jewish emigration from Germany and settlement in the Jewish National Home in Palestine.<sup>21</sup> This policy, in direct conflict with Arab national interests in Palestine and generally throughout the Middle East, was pursued by Hitler's regime before and even during the early part of the war. Hitler's government supported the continuation of British rule in Palestine over the objections of Palestine's Arab inhabitants. The adoption of the final solution in 1941, and the consequent termination of the policy of forcing Jewish emigration from Greater Germany and occupied Europe, seemed to remove this impediment to some form of potential wartime Arab-German understanding and cooperation against the western powers; but it did nothing to change Hitler's fundamental support for continued European imperial domination of the Middle East, and consequently, his general disinterest in the idea of Arab independence. Moreover, even during the Nazi mass murder of the Jews in wartime Europe, and Germany's concurrent and massive propaganda campaign aimed at rallying Arab support for the Axis, Berlin reluctantly agreed to the movement of small groups of Jews from occupied Europe to Palestine in exchange for German nationals held by the British, much to the consternation of the Mufti and his circle in wartime Berlin. Given the significant Jewish populations in the Arab world, their close proximity to Europe, Germany's wartime physical presence in the region, however brief, and the reality of a large and dominant Arab population, race and

<sup>20</sup> Hirszowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, 315.

<sup>21</sup> See Francis R. Nicosia, *Zionism and Anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

geopolitics were in the end inextricably linked in a somewhat improvised Nazi approach to the Arab lands of the Middle East and North Africa.

This book parts company from some of the assumptions in recent scholarly works about Arab enthusiasm for National Socialism and the Third Reich, based mainly on German assessments of Arab attitudes gleaned primarily from regular contact with Arab exiles in wartime Berlin. With its focus on German intent and policy in the region, this study takes a somewhat different position regarding the German side of the equation. It concludes that there was indeed no “synthesis” or “fusion” of German interests and intentions and those of Arab nationalists, Islamic fundamentalists, or the political and intellectual elites in the European-controlled Arab states in the Middle East and North Africa. This author’s 1980 essay in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* concludes that Nazi policy toward Arab nationalist aspirations in Palestine during the 1930s, prior to the outbreak of war in 1939, reflected an “ideological and strategic incompatibility” insofar as the Nazis and their specific interests and aims were concerned.<sup>22</sup> The goals of Nazi racial and foreign policies prior to 1939 had included a determination to force Jews to emigrate to Palestine and other overseas destinations, to avoid threatening Great Britain’s imperial position in the Middle East and elsewhere, to support Mussolini’s quest for a greater Italian presence in the Mediterranean area, and to answer Arab overtures of friendship and solidarity with Nazi Germany with responses that ranged from polite but noncommittal expressions of sympathy, to indifference, to outright rejection. During most of the war after 1940, Palestine ceased to be a central component of Nazi Jewish policy. Moreover, Nazi acceptance of, and support for, British imperial interests in the Arab world and beyond gave way to a policy of support more or less for the integrity of the French empire throughout the Mediterranean region, and its coexistence with Italian and Spanish colonial interests in the Arab world.

Notions of compatibility usually reflect some degree of shared intent, even in the absence of parity, in the mutual interests and goals of two or more parties. This study contends that there was clearly an absence of shared intent from the German side throughout the years of the Third Reich with regard to the achievement of Arab independence. It is not in a position to assess the conclusion drawn by Mallmann and Cüppers that, “Not in spite of, but because of their virulent anti-Semitism, sympathy for Hitler and the Germans increased among the Muslims of the Near and Middle East.”<sup>23</sup> However, it does maintain the characterization of the German-Arab relationship as one of incompatibility on both the ideological and strategic levels. In the end, Nazi Germany’s unambiguous and consistent refusal to accept and commit to

<sup>22</sup> Francis R. Nicosia, “Arab Nationalism and National Socialist Germany, 1933–1939: Ideological and Strategic Incompatibility,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12 (1980): 351–372.

<sup>23</sup> Mallmann and Cüppers, *Halbmond und Hakenkreuz*, 55.

Arab aspirations for full sovereignty and independence from European rule precluded any sort of Nazi-Arab compatibility or synthesis.<sup>24</sup>

With the outbreak of war in Europe and the decision two years later to systematically murder all of the Jews in Europe, German tactics with regard to the Arab world did change. However, tactics and intent are not the same thing. Given the need to defeat Britain and the United States in the region by all possible means, Arab hostility toward Britain and the Jews was recognized in Berlin as a potentially useful instrument in the Axis war effort, certainly insofar as Germany's wartime propaganda campaign was concerned. At least in terms of the popular message of Nazi propaganda, the interests of the Axis powers created a surface "compatibility" with the interests and aims of Arab nationalism, namely the defeat and end of the Anglo-French colonial rule over much of the Arab world. Of course, this was only superficially related to the substantive intent of German policy. Herf's conclusion that "Nazi Germany's Arabic-language propaganda during World War II was the product of a remarkable political and ideological synthesis that took place in wartime Berlin"<sup>25</sup> no doubt reflects what was in the minds of the Mufti and some other Arab notables living and working in exile in Berlin. Again, without making judgments about the Arab component of this "synthesis," and certainly not in terms of the entire Arab world beyond the limits of Berlin and Rome, this book contends that a Nazi component was simply absent. Hitler's regime did not intend to fight for or otherwise contribute to the Arab goal of national full sovereignty and independence, despite the inferences in its propaganda campaign toward the Arab world. Beyond seeking to influence Arab public opinion in general to support the Axis war effort in the region by contributing to Anglo-French difficulties in the Middle East and North Africa, there was no Nazi belief in or intent to equate the interests and objectives of the German Reich with those of an "Arab/Muslim world." Nazi propaganda in the Arab world remained simply that, propaganda, filled with the manipulative slogans and platitudes that usually form the substance of propaganda in time of war.

In chapter 12 of his "Second Book," dictated but not published in 1928, Hitler put forward eight "Principles of German Foreign Policy" that he deemed necessary for Germany's future given its current "hopeless military situation."<sup>26</sup> The eight principles at times bemoan Germany's state of

<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Mallmann and Cüppers in fact do stipulate that Nazi policy after 1933 was based on promoting Jewish emigration from Germany to Palestine, on reasonably friendly relations with Great Britain, and that, "After 1933, the foreign policy of the Third Reich was based above all on premises that were not in any way compatible with Arab interests." See *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>25</sup> Herf, *Nazi Propaganda*, 261.

<sup>26</sup> See Gerhard Weinberg (ed.), *Hitler's Second Book: The Unpublished Sequel to Mein Kampf by Adolf Hitler* (New York: Enigma Books, 2003), 153–154. See also the original German edition of Hitler's 1928 manuscript, edited by Gerhard Weinberg and published with the support of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich in 1961 as *Hitlers Zweites Buch. Ein Dokument aus dem Jahr 1928* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1961), 160.

disarmament and consequent military weakness following the First World War, as well as its relative isolation among the great powers. He alludes to the necessity of breaking up the coalition of powers against which Germany had fought in the previous war, and to the potential for alignment of future German interests with the interests of some of those former enemies. Of course, that wartime coalition had included the four other European great powers: Great Britain, France, Italy, and Russia. In point five, for instance, Hitler argues that Germany would be successful in the future only if it could persuade other states that had been in the victorious Allied coalition in the First World War to break away and form a new coalition with new goals that could not be realized through the League of Nations.<sup>27</sup> From that new coalition, Hitler would eliminate France as a possible future partner for the “new” Germany, although that position would change significantly following his victory over France in the summer of 1940 and his simultaneous failure to defeat Great Britain. Moreover, since Russia had in the previous decade become the communist Soviet Union, that left Great Britain and Italy, two key European powers in the Middle East and North Africa in the post-World War I period, as possible European partners on some level in future conflicts. After outlining Germany’s claims for *Lebensraum* in eastern Europe, Hitler is clear about the potential for accommodation with Italian and British interests when he notes: “. . .but the nature of such a foreign policy goal does not give reason for England and especially Italy to maintain the enmity of the Great War.”<sup>28</sup>

Hitler would also eliminate another potential partner in the Mediterranean region after Germany regained its standing as a great power, namely the Arabs of North Africa and the Middle East. Obviously, an alliance with the various Arab nationalist movements and leaders would be incompatible with his projected accommodations with Italy and England. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler did not conceal his admiration in racial terms for British rule over India, for example, and by extension a large part of Asia and Africa.<sup>29</sup> Hitler’s early racial views of peoples of non-European descent, including Arabs, will be considered in some detail in [Chapter 2](#).

In the end, of course, Hitler’s early calculations and tendencies with regard to future German strategic interests and foreign policy had to be adapted to the realities of a world that did not exactly fit his preconceived framework, ideological convictions, and desired timetables. The projected rapid defeat of the Soviet Union and the consequent absorption of a vast new living space in eastern Europe did not materialize. Great Britain did not accommodate itself to Hitler’s expansionist ambitions in Europe before the outbreak of war in September 1939, or his notions of Anglo-German racial kinship and shared interests in the world. Moreover, his illusions of a future global conflict after the

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.      <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>29</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Jubiläumsausgabe anlässlich der Vollendung des 50. Lebensjahres des Führers (München: Zentralverlag der NSDAP/Frz. Eher Nachf., 1939), 655.



war, which would require Germany and Britain to someday join forces against a common American enemy, would never find a receptive audience in London.<sup>30</sup> Finally, the course of the war in Europe and North Africa did not generate pro-Axis rebellions among the Arabs in the region against the British position, in spite of a persistent Arab animosity toward British and European rule. Indeed, the Arab world remained relatively quiet on the domestic front throughout the war. Of course, we are aware of all of this today. However, Hitler and his government certainly were not at the time, at least not before the winter and spring of 1943 when German and Axis forces experienced crushing defeats in the Soviet Union and in North Africa.

In the Middle East and North Africa during the war, Nazi propaganda tried to rouse the Arab populations against their imperial masters in London, in spite of the fact that the call for Arab unrest and rebellion against British authority was not uniformly or enthusiastically supported by the German state and military bureaucracy, or by Mussolini's government in Rome. In any case, it was a propaganda effort that proved to be a dismal failure. A central part of the appeal was to link Jews, Zionism, and the Jewish National Home in Palestine to an alleged British and American imperial agenda in the region. In the end, wartime Axis propaganda toward the Arabs was not unlike Anglo-French efforts to incite the Arab populations in the Fertile Crescent and the Arabian Peninsula against their Ottoman imperial overlords during the First World War. With promises of liberation and vague references to Arab national self-determination at the core of both Allied and Axis propaganda efforts in the two World Wars respectively, the question naturally arises about the real intent of those making such promises. The publication of the Allied "secret treaties" in late 1917, including the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement of May 1916, exposed those Anglo-French promises of 1915–1916 to Sharif Husayn of Mecca and the Arabs generally as deliberately misleading, and not meant to be kept once the Ottoman Empire was defeated. This study will address the similar questions with regard to German and Axis intentions in the Arab lands of North Africa and the Middle East before and during the Second World War.

It is important at this point to make a few brief comments about the rich and varied primary source material used in the preparation of this book. This is a study with a combined focus on the strategic, foreign, and Jewish policies of the Third Reich. As such, it is important to remember that the Middle East and North Africa constituted a region with a close geographical proximity to, and strategic importance for, Europe, a significant Jewish population, and of course a substantial population of non-European "colonial" Arabs. Given these realities, this book requires a combined consideration of all three facets

<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, see Andrew Buchanan, *America's Grand Strategy in the Mediterranean during World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014) for the most recent account of American strategic aims in the Mediterranean region during the Second World War.



of Nazi interest and policy. It naturally relies primarily on the main collections of three central German archives. The role of the German Foreign Office is, of course, paramount in any consideration of German policy in North Africa and the Middle East during the Third Reich. It was a matter of German foreign policy, primarily of German relations with other European governments, and to a lesser extent, with the governments of several “nominally independent” Arab states and with a few individuals and movements that aspired to constitute governments in future independent Arab states. Therefore, for the formulation and implementation of German foreign policy in the region, the records from the Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (the Political Archives of the German Foreign Office) in Berlin contain the files of the Reich foreign minister, as well as those of the offices of the state secretary and the under state secretary, the Middle East department, embassy and consular reports, and the papers of various individual civil servants and diplomats who dealt with the Arabic-speaking lands in the Middle East and North Africa. From the Bundesarchiv (Federal Archives) in Berlin, of course, SS and police files, particularly those related to Nazi Jewish policy and plans for Palestine during the 1930s and for the entire region during the war years, as well as state agencies including the Foreign, Interior, Economics, and Propaganda Ministries, and Nazi party offices, are particularly helpful. The rich collections of the Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (Federal Archives-Military Archives) in Freiburg im Breisgau possess the necessary military archival resources given Germany’s significant military presence in the region between 1941 and 1943. They also possess important records of German military intelligence for the war years. Additionally, the archival resources of Britain’s National Archives in Kew Gardens, London, contains much relevant information for this topic. The files of Colonial and Foreign Offices, as well as British intelligence files from the war years, are particularly useful in gauging the actual impact of German policy and propaganda within the region in general, but as well on British reactions and policy in particular, both before and after the outbreak of war in September 1939. Other archival resources, unpublished and published, provide useful additional information for this book. With Italy’s important role in German calculations regarding the entire southern and eastern Mediterranean region, before and particularly during the war years, the diaries and diplomatic papers of Mussolini’s son-in-law and foreign minister, Galeazzo Ciano proved useful, albeit somewhat peripheral resources for understanding German decision making and policy. Diaries, memoirs, and papers of the German government, military, and Nazi party officials, listed in the bibliography under published primary sources, were also helpful in the research for this study. In the end, however, it is the sheer volume and wealth of German archival materials that were absolutely essential for the substance of this book.

## Continuity and Departure: Imperial and Weimar Germany

### IMPERIAL GERMANY AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

There was a line of continuity in German policy toward the Middle East that extended from the Wilhelminian period through the Weimar years and through much of the Third Reich. It reflects fundamental decisions on the part of German governments during those years to more or less accept the political preferences of other European imperial powers as well as the Ottoman Empire in the region, and generally to defer to them by somehow aligning Germany's predominantly economic and cultural interests in the region to theirs. This is not to say that governments in Berlin were consistently supportive of the policies of each of those powers in the Arab world at all times. Nor does it mean that governments in Berlin never considered Germany an instrument for political change in the region, or a strategic factor in great power competition in the Middle East and North Africa. It is certainly not an argument that Germany saw its interests in the region as entirely peripheral or devoid of significant strategic meaning or self-interest. However, it does reflect a degree of aloofness and improvisation that was characteristic of German policy in the region from the 1880s through the Second World War. Successive German governments attempted to accommodate rapidly changing political and economic realities in the region to prevailing perceptions about Germany's primary interests and policies in Europe and other parts of the world. This usually required adapting German policy to the interests of those powers already in control of the various Arab lands in the region. As a result, there was often a lack of clear and consistent definition of general German interests and aims in the region, exacerbated in part by the intensification of the competing imperial interests of the other powers in the region.

Germany's late emergence as a unified European great power with global potential relegated it largely to the position of bystander in the geopolitics of

the Middle East until its wartime alliance with the Ottoman Empire during the First World War. The relationship between Germany and the Ottoman Empire during the years prior to 1914 has been a topic of interest and debate among historians of modern Germany since the 1960s. Using the framework of German interest in the so-called Eastern Question (*Orientalische Frage*) in the years before 1914, historians such as Fritz Fischer, Wolfgang Mommsen, Gregor Schöllgen, and some others have considered how the new German empire came to assign an essential significance to the East, specifically to southeastern Europe and the Middle East, in its effort to join the ranks of world empires and ultimately achieve a “place in the sun.”<sup>1</sup> The “Eastern Question” was a political term used in reference to a process that involved the steady decline of the Ottoman Empire throughout the nineteenth century and first decade of the twentieth century, and its final collapse in 1918. The “question” that was naturally generated by the Ottoman decline centered on what would fill the void in the East created by the Ottoman demise. The possibilities included the competing political and economic interests of the European great powers, Germany among them, and the efforts of the various nationalities in the East that sought self-determination and independence.

Of particular interest was the relationship between the Ottoman Empire and Germany, and the latter’s developing role as a factor in the Eastern Question following German unification in 1870. This is especially the case after the changeover from Bismarck’s supposedly Europe-centered foreign policy (*Europapolitik*) to a global foreign policy (*Weltpolitik*) of Kaiser Wilhelm II. Bismarck’s initial rejection of the latter was based primarily on his conviction that German foreign policy must always be focused primarily on its relations with Europe and North America.<sup>2</sup> However, this position did not entirely rule out support for some level of overseas colonial activity.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, his initial reluctance to acquire overseas colonies was somewhat compromised by periodic adjustments in German foreign policy coming on the heels of events and crises in 1879 and 1884, and between 1885 and 1888. These adjustments might be interpreted as Germany’s initial entry into the great power mix of the

<sup>1</sup> See for example Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht. Die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland 1914/1918*, 4. Aufl. (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1971); Wolfgang Mommsen, *Das Zeitalter des Imperialismus* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Bücherei, 1969); and Gregor Schöllgen, *Imperialismus und Gleichgewicht. Deutschland, England und die orientalische Frage 1871–1914* (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> See Wolfgang Schwanitz, “The German Middle Eastern Policy, 1871–1945,” in Wolfgang Schwanitz (ed.), *Germany and the Middle East, 1871–1945* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2004), 2–3.

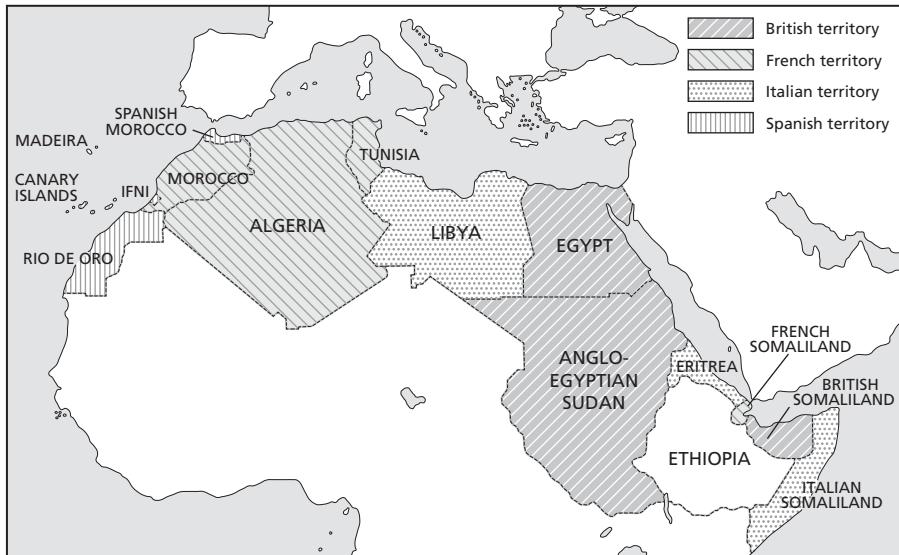
<sup>3</sup> For a brief analysis of Bismarck’s somewhat nuanced acceptance of limited German overseas colonial activity, see Sebastian Conrad, *German Colonialism: A Short History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 21–23.



MAP I.I. Ottoman Empire 1914

Eastern Question.<sup>4</sup> Yet, the German approach to the Eastern Question during the three decades before 1914 was ostensibly to seek peaceful economic

<sup>4</sup> Schöllgen, *Imperialismus und Gleichgewicht*, 30–31, 419–420. See also Konrad Canis, *Bismarcks Außenpolitik 1870 bis 1890. Aufstieg und Gefährdung* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004); Jehuda Wallach, "Bismarck and the 'Eastern Question' – A Re-Assessment," in Jehuda Wallach (ed.),



MAP 1.2. North Africa 1914

penetration of what remained of the Ottoman Empire, specifically Anatolia and the Arabic-speaking lands of the Fertile Crescent and the Arabian Peninsula, while avoiding a military alliance with Istanbul.<sup>5</sup>

Generally, the approaches of both Bismarck and Kaiser Wilhelm II to the Eastern Question were more or less the same, namely to maintain as far as possible the political status quo in the Arab lands of the Middle East and North Africa, and to forego the pursuit of German colonies in the region.<sup>6</sup> This would include German recognition of complete European control over Arab North Africa by Great Britain in Egypt and the Sudan, France in Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, Italy in Libya, and Spain in Spanish Morocco, Ifni, and Rio de Oro. In the end, however, it was Germany that rushed into an alliance with Istanbul in August 1914 because of its immediate strategic and military needs after the outbreak of war in Europe. Having finally driven England and Russia together in the pursuit of a *Weltpolitik* beyond North Africa and the Middle East, with the consequent need for a greater German naval force, the Kaiser's immediate

*Germany and the Middle East 1835–1939*. International Symposium April, 1975 (Tel Aviv: Nateev Printing and Publishing, 1975), 23–29; and Conrad, *German Colonialism*, 36–38.

<sup>5</sup> Schöllgen, *Imperialismus und Gleichgewicht*, 417–421. See also Alexander Will, *Kein Griff nach der Weltmacht. Geheime Dienste und Propaganda im deutsch-österreichisch-türkischen Bündnis 1914–1918* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2012), 13–15.

<sup>6</sup> Wolfgang Schwanitz, “The Jinnee and the Magic Bottle’: Fritz Grobba and German Middle Policy, 1900–1945,” in Wolfgang Schwanitz (ed.), *Germany and the Middle East, 1871–1945* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2004), 93.

wartime strategic interests required the adherence of the Ottoman Empire to the Central Powers. Strategically, of course, this was necessary to block Anglo-French access to southern Russia through the straits separating Europe and Anatolia. A similar strategic need to keep Turkey separated from its wartime opponents would confront Nazi Germany beginning in 1939, in that particular instance through the maintenance of strict Turkish neutrality.

In his classic study of the German-Ottoman alliance during the First World War, Ulrich Trumpener considers Imperial Germany's policy in the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East since the 1880s. He describes that policy as seeking to expand German economic and cultural interests, while stumbling into a doubtful wartime alliance that "...was not the culmination of carefully laid German plans but instead a diplomatic improvisation."<sup>7</sup> After 1888, Germany was generally regarded as the dominant foreign economic force in the Ottoman Empire, despite the fact that Great Britain was still Istanbul's largest trading partner and France its largest creditor. Germany's role in the expansion of the Anatolian Railway and in the exploitation of Mesopotamian oil and other natural resources, often in concert with Great Britain, coupled with its increasing assumption of Ottoman debt, reflected Germany's growing economic stake in the region.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, military relations between Berlin and Istanbul began to expand beginning in the 1880s with Germany's increasing involvement in the training and modernization of the Ottoman military.<sup>9</sup> Although the authorities in Berlin had had severe misgivings about an alliance with the crumbling Ottoman Empire, they concluded that Germany had little choice but to accept Ottoman military assistance in the eastern Mediterranean in 1914 as a means of blocking Allied supply access to Russia. Trumpener does assert that although the immediate military requirements of the war constituted the primary concern of the German government between 1914 and 1918, Berlin nevertheless soon aspired to increase German economic and political influence in the Ottoman Empire upon a successful conclusion of hostilities. The exact nature of those developing German ambitions in the region during the war is not clear; but it does not appear likely that they included concrete plans to expand German influence and power in the Arab world beyond the confines of the Ottoman Empire, more or less as it existed in 1914.

As a wartime ally of the Ottoman Empire, the German government could not promote or support Arab national self-determination and independence as means of expanding its influence and power in the region or of aiding the military fortunes of the Central Powers in the Middle East. Berlin did work

<sup>7</sup> Ulrich Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire, 1914–1918* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 366.

<sup>8</sup> See Kurt Grunwald, "Pénétration Pacifique – the Financial Vehicles of Germany's Drang nach dem Osten," in Jehuda Wallach (ed.), *Germany and the Middle East 1835–1939*. International Symposium April, 1975 (Tel Aviv: Nateev Printing and Publishing, 1975), 85–98.

<sup>9</sup> Schwanitz, "The German Middle East Policy," 5–6.

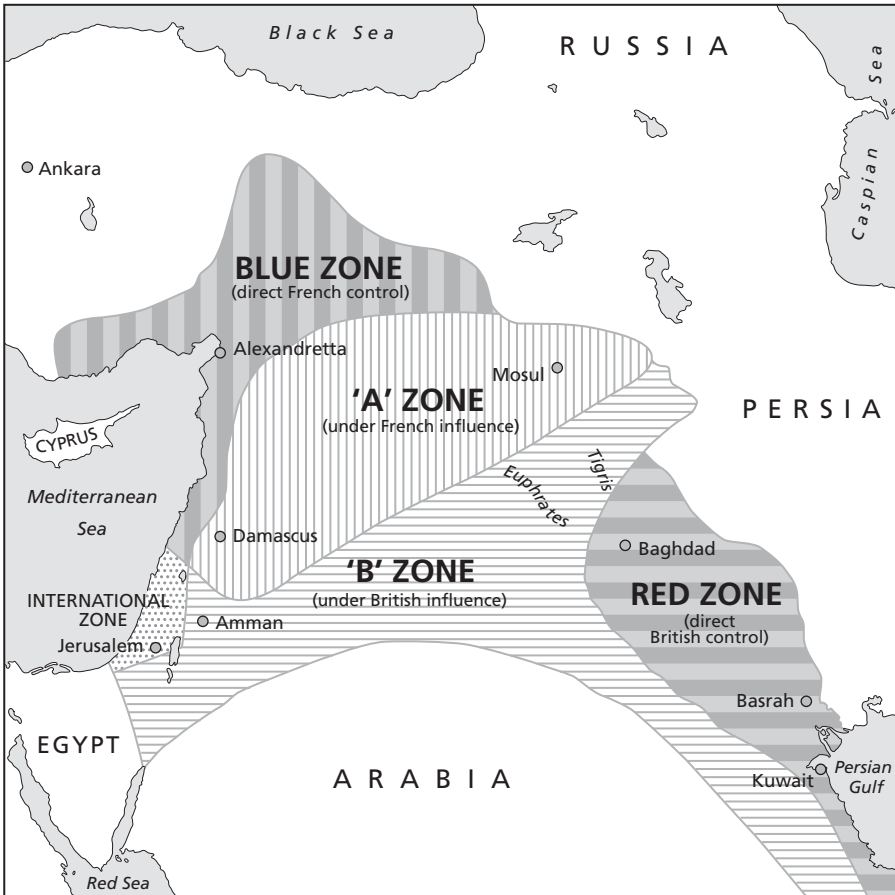
with the Ottomans and their wartime propaganda efforts in calling for  *jihad*  throughout the Islamic world against the Allies, a tactic that elicited little if any positive response from among the Muslim populations of west and south Asia. It was also a tactical approach that Hitler's regime would embrace in some form in its wartime propaganda in the Arab world during the Second World War.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, what would appear to have been a natural inclination on the part of the Kaiser's government to support the efforts of the Zionist movement in its quest for international recognition of and support for a Jewish National Homeland in Palestine was compromised by the same requirement to adhere to Ottoman opposition to any idea or movement for national autonomy within its greatly diminished multinational empire. This was the case whether it meant the small but increasingly influential, European-based World Zionist Organization (WZO) with its center in Berlin until 1914, or the still relatively small Jewish population in Palestine. In theory, a pro-Zionist policy was considered by many in Berlin, including the Kaiser, to be in the interest of Germany's domestic and foreign policies.<sup>11</sup> It might strengthen pro-German attitudes that already existed among the Jewish masses in eastern Europe, and thereby assist the war effort against the Russian Empire in the East. Moreover, it was believed that the establishment of an autonomous Jewish national homeland in the strategically important Fertile Crescent would naturally be sympathetic to German economic and cultural interests. It might also serve as a destination for Eastern European Jews who might otherwise settle in Germany, a factor that in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Germany appealed to prevailing anti-Semitic attitudes both inside and outside the state bureaucracy.

It was not until the final year of the war that Berlin felt it necessary to change course, and to push the Ottoman government to support Zionist efforts in Palestine. Following the perceived propaganda success of the British government's Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917, which committed the government of Great Britain to the establishment of a "Jewish National Home" in Palestine following the war, the German government persuaded the Ottoman sultan to issue a declaration on December 12, 1917 in support of Zionist efforts in Palestine. A similar declaration had been issued by Austria-Hungary on November 21 of that year, and the German government issued its own statement on January 5, 1918, which read:

With regard to Jewish efforts in Palestine, especially those of the Zionists, we support the declaration recently made by the Grand Vizier, Talaat Pasha, and in particular the intention of the Imperial Ottoman government, in keeping with their proven friendly

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 7–10. See also Thomas Hughes, "The German Mission to Afghanistan, 1915–1916," in Schwanitz (ed.), *Germany and the Middle East*, 25–64.

<sup>11</sup> Egmont Zechlin, *Die deutsche Politik und die Juden im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1969), 285–286, 291–292.



MAP 1.3. The Sykes-Picot Agreement 1916

disposition toward the Jews, to promote the flourishing Jewish settlements in Palestine by granting free immigration and settlement limited only by the absorptive capacity of the land, the establishment of local self-government in keeping with the laws of the land and the free development of their cultural individuality.<sup>12</sup>

Of course, periodic prewar and wartime Ottoman suppression of nationalist sentiments among Arabs, Ottoman Greeks, Armenians, and Jews precluded any German inclination to use those causes as weapons against the British. Indeed, Germany's foes in the war, Britain and France, had already publicly adopted the cause of "Arab independence" in Egypt, the Fertile Crescent, and the Arabian Peninsula as an Allied war aim in the Middle East by 1916 with the

<sup>12</sup> Reprinted in the Zionist newspaper in Germany, the *Jüdische Rundschau*, 2 März 1934.



so-called Arab revolt. This public position in Allied wartime propaganda, including the private promises made in 1915 on behalf of the British government by the British high commissioner in Egypt, Sir Henry McMahon, to Sharif Hussein in Mecca, did not reflect Allied intent. The “secret treaties” of the Allies in 1915 and 1916, specifically the Sykes-Picot Agreement of May 1916 between Britain and France, clearly demonstrated Anglo-French intentions to extend their imperial control over the Arab Fertile Crescent following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire. Postwar Arab cognizance of actual Anglo-French intentions in the Middle East during the First World War would not be entirely lost on the attitudes and reactions of some Arabs toward German and Axis propaganda in the Arab world during the Second World War.

With Germany’s defeat in 1918 and the various postwar settlements in Europe and the Middle East, the elements of German influence and power in the Middle East for the most part evaporated. Notwithstanding the severe political, economic, military, and diplomatic sanctions that crippled Germany’s ability to function as a European and world power following the war, all of the Arabic-speaking lands of North Africa and the Middle East were in varying degrees under the influence and control of Germany’s wartime foes, namely Great Britain, France, and Italy. The Arab states of North Africa were still under their prewar European colonial rulers: Morocco remained under French and Spanish control; Algeria and Tunisia were still under French rule; Libya was still ruled by Italy; and Egypt and the Sudan remained under the control of Great Britain, notwithstanding the nominal independence granted to Egypt by the British in 1922. In the Arab territories of the former Ottoman Empire, the British and French divided the Fertile Crescent initially into three new “states” for which London and Paris drew the boundaries, and over which they would exercise power: the new states of Iraq and Palestine came under British control, with the new status of mandates administered by Britain by authority of the League of Nations. The new state of Syria became a French-administered mandate. In principle, although with somewhat different border configurations, this result reflected the basic outlines of the secret Anglo-French Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, under which London and Paris had agreed to divide the Fertile Crescent among themselves in any postwar settlement. In 1921, Britain divided the Palestine Mandate into two British-administered League of Nations mandates, namely Palestine west of the Jordan River, and yet another new state, Transjordan, east of the Jordan river. A few years later, France divided its Syrian Mandate into two by carving the new French-controlled state of Lebanon out of the Syrian Mandate. In the Arabian Peninsula, much of the interior had been under indirect Ottoman influence before 1914. Britain retained its prewar control over the southern and eastern coasts, from the port of Aden in the southwest to Kuwait in the northeast. It also established some degree of influence within the now nominally independent central and western regions of the peninsula, including the Hijaz, which would



MAP 1.4. Anglo-French Mandates in the Fertile Crescent 1922

become part of a new kingdom controlled by the Saud family after 1925, and renamed the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932.

Although there remained much sympathy and support for Germany within the World Zionist Organization (WZO), and among the *Yishuv* in Palestine, a defeated Germany nevertheless lost much of its considerable prewar influence within the Zionist movement after 1918. The headquarters of the WZO, located in Berlin prior to 1914 and moved temporarily to Copenhagen during the war years, was relocated again to London after the war. The Jewish National Home in Palestine, promised by the British government in its Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917, had become a postwar reality and was formally incorporated into the new, British-administered Palestine Mandate under the authority of the League of Nations. As the German Zionist Richard Lichtheim observed in his memoir, many Zionists were inclined, some reluctantly, to look to Great Britain and away from Germany for the fulfillment of Zionist hopes: “We owed Germany very much, but the course of events in the war compelled Zionism to seek a connection with and help from the

Anglo-Saxon powers.”<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the very brief one-year German-Zionist understanding of sorts, centered on the Ottoman and German declarations of late 1917 and early 1918 in favor of formalizing Jewish settlement and institutions in a postwar Palestine, came to an abrupt end a year later with the end of the war. But it would reemerge very quickly within the context of some of the foreign policy directions pursued by the governments of the Weimar Republic.

Despite the Kaiser’s wartime alliance with the Ottoman Empire, the defeated Germany still enjoyed considerable sympathy among many Arab nationalist leaders and intellectuals. Germany’s prewar status among Arabs in general appears to have been positive, although not entirely above suspicion, and it persisted during and after the war.<sup>14</sup> This might have been due in part to the perception that Germany, unlike the other European powers, harbored no tangible imperial ambitions in the region that might compromise the Arab quest for national self-determination and independence. In September 1921, the German ambassador in London, Friedrich Stahmer, notified Berlin of his recent talks in London with the same Arab delegation that had met with Churchill in Haifa in March of that year. Stahmer’s conversations with the Arab delegation were not substantive in nature. They focused instead on the general wish of the Arabs and Germans to maintain friendly relations in the coming years. In his report to Berlin, Stahmer described the Arab view of past Arab-German relations in the following manner: “They have never had hostile feelings for Germany, having instead trusted Germany more than the other Great Powers because of their impression that, in the pursuit of its interests, Germany has never acted in a purely selfish manner, having instead respected the interests of the indigenous inhabitants.”<sup>15</sup> Stahmer’s meeting in London with the Arab delegation was the beginning of a succession of initiatives by various Arab nationalist leaders and individuals to enlist German diplomatic and material support against the post-World War I status quo in the Middle East, based as it was on Anglo-French and Italian dominance and control in North Africa and the Middle East, and the Jewish National Home in Palestine. These attempts to secure German support for Arab independence in any form are evident during the years of the Weimar Republic, and they continued even more through the Nazi years before and during the Second World War. The manner in which the governments in Berlin, particularly the National Socialists, responded to these initiatives, within the context of overall strategic and racial calculations, intent, and policy, constitutes the primary focus of this book.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Lichtheim, *Rückkehr. Lebenserinnerungen aus der Frühzeit des deutschen Zionismus* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1970), 367.

<sup>14</sup> See Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 2–3.

<sup>15</sup> Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes-Berlin (hereafter, PA): Pol.Abt.III, Politik 6-Palästina, Bd.1, DB-London an AA-Berlin, K.Nr. 69, 1. September 1921.

## THE WEIMAR YEARS

As was the case with the German government before 1914, the governments of the Weimar Republic consistently, if at times somewhat critically, supported the Anglo–French–Italian imperial positions and the new post–World War I status quo in the Middle East and North Africa. Of course, Weimar Germany was in no position, politically, economically, or militarily to challenge the new realities in the region after 1918. Even when Imperial Germany was in a position to do so, it had more or less accepted the dominant positions of neighboring European powers in the region. In a speech in Hannover in 1924, Gustav Stresemann observed: “In foreign policy we have hitherto pursued a narrow and limited course, and so perhaps we shall continue for a long while. We are going through all the tribulations that must attend the policy of an unarmed nation.”<sup>16</sup> Moreover, it is generally accepted that from 1924 on, Stresemann worked for rapprochement with Britain and France in an effort to revise peacefully most of the provisions of the Versailles settlement in Europe. These included a significant reduction in reparations to a manageable sum, the end of the Allied occupation and the evacuation of the Rhineland and the Saar, the protection of ethnic Germans in central and eastern Europe, a revision of postwar boundaries in the East that would include a return of Upper Silesia, the Corridor, and Danzig, and even the eventual union of Germany and Austria.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, his foreign policy approach was centered on the Locarno Treaty of 1925 as the only means for German retention of the Rhineland and its prewar western borders, as well as for the possible return of lands in the east that were lost to Poland. And the key to Stresemann’s Locarno strategy, and thus to the foreign policy of the Weimar Republic, was friendly relations with Great Britain. In a memorandum to Ambassador Stahmer in London on April 19, 1925, Stresemann noted: “The cooperation of England is an indispensable condition for a peaceful solution, and only such a solution is possible for us.”<sup>18</sup> Moreover, in a memorandum a year later to the minister of finance, Stresemann stressed that, in conjunction with postwar cooperation with Great Britain, Germany should also seek to rebuild its economic presence and interests in its former African colonies.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Eric Sutton (ed.), *Gustav Stresemann. His Diaries, Letters and Papers*, I (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1935), 317.

<sup>17</sup> See Stresemann’s letter to the Crown Prince from September 1925 in Sutton, *Gustav Stresemann*, II, 503–505.

<sup>18</sup> *Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik* (hereafter ADAP), Serie B, Bd. II–1, 363–376. See also Werner Weidenfeld, *Die Englandpolitik Gustav Stresemanns* (Mainz: v.Hase und Koehler Verlag, 1972), 94–95, 106–108, 128–130; and Hansjörg Eiff, “Die jüdische Heimstätte in Palästina in der Außenpolitik der Weimarer Republik,” *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 12 (2013): 1016.

<sup>19</sup> See ADAP: Serie B, Bd. I–1, 498–501.

If the postwar settlement in the Middle East confirmed an expanded Anglo-French colonial rule in the Arab world and the establishment of a Jewish National Home in the British Mandate for Palestine, it also meant the rejection of Arab national self-determination and independence. Arabs had to content themselves with a form of local self-government, perhaps as lip service to Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, in conformity with the new system of Anglo-French mandates under the jurisdiction of the League of Nations. As such, Weimar Germany's policies in the region reflected these realities, and remained centered on promoting primarily Germany's economic and cultural interests in the region. This required a consistent policy of support for the legitimacy of the mandates and, therefore, for the status quo. This approach is probably best summarized in the comprehensive report by *Legationsrat* Moritz Sobernheim of the German Foreign Office upon his return to Berlin from a two-month fact-finding trip to Palestine in March-April 1925.<sup>20</sup> His description of the situation in Palestine and the Fertile Crescent, of Germany's interests in the region, and his recommendations for the best way to preserve German interests there provide a good general summary of the foundations of German Middle East policy during the Weimar years.

In his report, Sobernheim tended to dismiss Arab claims in Palestine and elsewhere in the region, and to credit Jewish capital and labor for the rapid development of Palestine since the war.<sup>21</sup> He described the Arabs as lacking the capability and the will to develop the land, and as unjustified in their claims of oppression by outsiders. He asserted that Palestine constituted a dynamic, naturally friendly, and growing market for German exports, and a conduit for access to other markets in the region for German goods. He also stressed the necessity of rebuilding and expanding German cultural institutions and prestige in Palestine and the larger region. Germany's significant cultural influence in the Middle East before 1914, which had included relatively small German colonies, schools, hospitals, institutes, and orphanages, and had generated considerable prestige and good will among Jews, Arabs, and Turks, would have to be reestablished in the postwar period. Moreover, Sobernheim viewed German support for Zionism and the Jewish National Home in Palestine as central in German Middle East policy. Although relatively few German Jews had been attracted to Zionism before and after the First World War, those that were often occupied some of the highest professional, academic, and business positions within the *Yishuv*, the Jewish community

<sup>20</sup> PA: Botschaft Ankara. Pol.3-Palästina, 1924-1938, "Bericht über meine Reise nach Palästina im März und April 1925," III O 1269.

<sup>21</sup> Sobernheim had already filed a detailed report some four months earlier, in December 1924, in which he made the same assertion that Arab claims of being the victims of injustice in Palestine were groundless. See PA: Pol. Abt. III. Politik 5: Innere Politik, Parlaments- und Parteiwesen in Palästina, Bd. 1, Aufzeichnung von Sobernheim an Herrn V.L.R. von Richthofen, 8. Dezember 1924.

in Palestine. This nucleus of German Jews, combined with the larger numbers of Eastern European Jewish immigrants who generally retained their prewar sympathies for Germany in any case, its culture, language, and history, were seen by Sobernheim as agents of German economic and cultural interests and influence in Palestine and the rest of the Middle East. Sobernheim emphasized the central role of Great Britain in the pursuit of Germany's admittedly limited interests and objectives in the region, and he further identified the potential political significance of Palestine and the entire region for Germany in the future in the following manner: "For the aforementioned reasons, this part of the Near East may possess in a political, as well as a spiritual and economic, sense significant meaning for German policy."<sup>22</sup>

Sobernheim's report outlined policies that were for the most part already in place. In fact, in May 1922, the German Foreign Office had issued its first comprehensive statement on Palestine, German interests in the larger region, and the emerging conflict involving British imperial interests, Arab national ambitions, and the Zionist movement with its developing Jewish National Home.<sup>23</sup> The statement reviewed Britain's gains during the war and its consequent powerful position in the Middle East, as well as the negative consequences of its conflicting wartime promises to the Jews and the Arabs, and real and potential friction between Britain and France in the Fertile Crescent. The statement did not directly criticize or oppose the British position in Palestine or the larger Middle East; nor did it constitute a formal recognition of Anglo-French authority in the Fertile Crescent. Rather it presented those issues as a realistic and necessary backdrop to what it defined as Germany's growing economic interests and advantages in the area. It referred to Germany's favorable trade position and its rapidly rising exports to Palestine, a trend that would promote the export of goods such as machinery, heavy industrial products, and building materials that would be increasingly in demand in a developing Palestinian economy, stimulated by the flow of Jewish capital and immigration into the country. The memorandum signaled an active German policy in Palestine, and considered the Zionist movement and the developing Jewish National Home as the best vehicle for securing German economic interests in the region. In this sense, it concluded: "Friendly relations with the Jewish movement, as will doubtless be pursued by their leaders, could be of significance for Germany's economic and even political position."<sup>24</sup> Finally, the memorandum placed the postwar Palestine situation and, specifically, Arab opposition to Britain and France in general, within the larger context of rising anti-imperialism in the colonial world. It concluded

<sup>22</sup> PA: Botschaft Ankara. Pol.3-Palästina, 1924–1928, "Bericht über meine Reise nach Palästina im März und April 1925," III O 1269.

<sup>23</sup> PA: Gesandtschaft Bern, Palästina 1922–1937, "Aufzeichnung des AA über die Lage in Palästina," Nr. IIb 245, 8. Mai 1922.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

that Arab opposition to the British Mandate for Palestine was less about the rejection of Jewish immigration and the Jewish National Home than it was about the rejection of European imperial domination and the frustration of Arab ambitions for independence. Citing the rebellions throughout the Arab lands of the Middle East, the report concluded: "The unrest that has taken place in Palestine over the past few years stems particularly from the shock that has pervaded the entire Near East as a result of the war, which in the end has little to do with Zionism; for in Egypt and India, where there is no Zionism, this unrest has taken an even sharper form."<sup>25</sup>

Germany's entry into the League of Nations in October 1926 in a sense represented Berlin's formal recognition and acceptance of the postwar settlement in the Middle East. With its formal acceptance of the Covenant of the League of Nations, and specifically of the Anglo-French mandates, Germany had become treaty-bound to support the new status quo in the Middle East, something that it had already done *de facto* since the end of the war. This had been situated within the context of Germany's immediate postwar political, economic, and diplomatic isolation, which then gave way to the era of Locarno. The Locarno period was characterized by the gradual economic recovery of Germany and western Europe, and the beginning of some revisions of the Versailles Treaty in Europe that the German government had sought. It also included the political reintegration of Germany into Europe based on cooperation and friendly relations with the west, especially with Great Britain. Germany was accorded great-power status with a permanent seat on the League Council, and at its meeting on September 9, 1927, the council voted to increase the membership of the Permanent Mandates Commission from nine to ten with the appointment of Ludwig Kastl of Germany. Thus, with its seat on the Permanent Mandates Commission, Weimar Germany became more directly involved in the issues and conflicts inherent in the Anglo-French Mandates in the Fertile Crescent. That involvement amounted to the enforcement of Anglo-French control in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan, and Palestine, at least for as long as those territories remained official League of Nations mandates. It also reflected Germany's continuing support for the Jewish National Home within the Mandate for Palestine, something that the German government had formally signaled would be forthcoming at least as early as May 1922.

The documents also reveal that Weimar Germany's desire for a seat on the Permanent Mandates Commission was based in part on the hope of recovering former colonial territories in Africa. According to State Secretary Carl von Schubert in the spring of 1926, there had been mounting pressure from within the German bureaucracy for the return of Germany's former colonies. Schubert reported in a memorandum of April 14, 1926 that it was hard for the

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

government to contain that pressure given the strong sentiment both within state agencies and the general population for the return of the colonies, along with continuing indignation over their loss after the war. In that memorandum he also reported on discussions with the British ambassador in Berlin, Britain's unwillingness at that time to consider giving up any of its recently acquired colonial territories, and its fears that German pressure on the issue of colonies could damage German-British relations.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, for some time Stresemann himself had been convinced of the need for the return of at least some parts of Germany's former colonial empire in sub-Saharan Africa. However, in an address of November 4, 1925, Stresemann argued that it would be unwise for Germany to raise the issue of its former African colonies before it became a member of the League of Nations, at which time Berlin could then pursue its colonial aims from within, as a League member.<sup>27</sup> With this in mind, Stresemann pushed especially hard for the seat on the Permanent Mandates Commission, despite initial opposition from Britain, France, Belgium, and Japan, those wartime opponents that had reaped significant colonial gains at Germany's expense in the postwar settlements.<sup>28</sup> By the end of May 1926, a clear German strategy on the colonial question was apparent, one that was based on the return of Germany's former colonies in Africa and possibly the acquisition of the Portuguese colony of Angola in western Africa, all within the context of the following initiatives: German membership in the League of Nations and a seat on the Permanent Mandates Commission; efforts to influence public opinion in Britain, France, and the United States; the promotion of German economic interests in the existing European mandates and colonies; and the strengthening of the will of the German people to secure colonies overseas.<sup>29</sup>

The task of promoting a pro-Zionist German foreign policy in the Middle East, with full support for the Jewish National Home in Palestine, required among other things some degree of support from the Jewish community at home. However, since the beginnings of Zionism and the Zionist movement in Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century, the great majority of German Jews had been non-Zionist or even anti-Zionist, seeing Zionism as a serious threat to the considerable progress that Jews had made toward acceptance, integration, and assimilation in their native Germany. The often bitter prewar conflicts between the Zionist Federation for Germany (Zionistische Vereinigung für Deutschland) and the several larger non-Zionist or "assimilationist" Jewish organizations, mainly the Central Association

<sup>26</sup> ADAP: Serie B, Bd. I/1, Nr. 195.

<sup>27</sup> See PA: Büro St.S. X: Kolonialfragen (Mandatsgebiete), Bd. 1 (complete file).

<sup>28</sup> See PA: Büro des St.S. X: Kolonialfragen (Mandatsgebiete), Bd. 2, AA/Berlin an DB/London, DB/Paris, und DB/Brussel, IIIa 1.3305/27, 26. April 1927. See also Bundesarchiv (hereafter Barch): R43 I-162, Reichstagsrede Gustav Stresemanns, 23. Juni 1927.

<sup>29</sup> ADAP: Serie B, Bd. I/1, Nr. 230.



of German Citizens of the Jewish Faith (Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens), subsided during the war years in favor of an intense German patriotism and support for the German war effort on all sides. However, their struggles were renewed after the war with even greater intensity. Zionist success in building the Jewish National Home in Palestine, coupled with the conflicting phenomena of both greater progress for Jewish assimilation in the democratic culture of the Weimar Republic and increasing virulence and public tolerance of anti-Semitism and anti-Semitic movements, culminating in the successes of Hitler and the National Socialist party in the early 1930s, only served to heighten these conflicts. The German government wished to make its policy toward Palestine and the Middle East acceptable to its Jewish and non-Jewish citizens alike, and set out to enlist the support of prominent Jewish and non-Jewish political and cultural leaders.

As its main tool for promoting domestically German policy in Palestine and the Fertile Crescent, the government decided to constitute the German Pro-Palestine Committee (Deutsches Pro-Palästina Komitee) in December 1926. The committee was similar to its short-lived wartime predecessor, the German Committee for the Promotion of Jewish Settlement in Palestine (Deutsches Komitee zur Förderung der jüdischen Palästinasiedlung). The latter had been established in Berlin in May 1918 as part of the German government's efforts to neutralize the perceived propaganda benefits that Britain had reaped with the Balfour Declaration, and in conjunction with the new Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and German declarations in favor of Zionist efforts and objectives in Palestine. Like its earlier version, the Pro-Palestine Committee was made up of prominent Jewish and non-Jewish Germans of various political tendencies, brought together by the common conviction that Germany's strategic interests in Europe and the Middle East were best served by support for Zionism and the Jewish National Home in Palestine. Count Johann von Bernstorff became the first chairman of the organization in 1926. Von Bernstorff had been the wartime German ambassador to the United States and then to the Ottoman Empire, and had been instrumental in German efforts to persuade Istanbul to issue its declaration of support for the Zionist cause in late 1917.<sup>30</sup> Besides the usual arguments that Germany's political, economic, and cultural interests were best served by supporting Zionist efforts in

<sup>30</sup> Zechlin, *Die deutsche Politik*, 493 ff. See also Joseph Walk, "Das Deutsche Komitee Pro-Palästina, 1926–1933," *Bulletin des Leo Baeck Instituts* XV (1976): 162–193. Besides Johann von Bernstorff, prominent non-Jewish members of the Pro-Palestine Committee included Mayor Konrad Adenauer of Cologne, State Secretary in the Reich Chancellery Hermann Pünder, former Chancellor Josef Karl Wirth, Prussian Minister of Culture Carl Heinrich Becker, and Chancellor Hermann Müller, as well as Foreign Office notables such as Hartmann Freiherr von Richthofen and Curt Prüfer of the *Orient-Abteilung*, and State Secretary Carl von Schubert. Of course, Germany's representatives at the League of Nations and the Permanent Mandates Commission, Ludwig Kastl and Julius Ruppel, were also members, as were others. See Walk, "Das Deutsche Komitee Pro-Palästina," 168–178.

Palestine, von Bernstorff, the committee, and the German Foreign Office based their support for Zionism and the Jewish National Home on the legal and moral obligations that Germany had undertaken as a member of the League of Nations, the League Council, and the Permanent Mandates Commission. For example, von Bernstorff justified German policy in an October 1927 letter to Georg Mecklenburg of the non-Zionist Centralverein in the following manner: “Germany is a member of the League of Nations, and through this membership German foreign policy has assumed co-responsibility for the Palestine Mandate. The promotion of Jewish settlement in Palestine is, from the standpoint of German foreign policy, a welcome endeavor.”<sup>31</sup>

The German government pursued this clear and very active policy toward Palestine despite the battle of ideas raging within the German Jewish community between Zionists and “assimilationists.” The Foreign Office in Berlin and its Consulate General in Jerusalem were convinced that Jewish immigration and settlement in Palestine would play an important role in efforts to increase German exports to the Middle East, and thus contribute to the postwar German economic recovery. An undated economic report from the German Consulate General in Jerusalem, probably from some time in 1926, observed that new Jewish firms that had been opening up in Palestine since 1921 were inclined to order goods from German manufacturers, and that German trade with Palestine did best when Jewish immigration was highest. It linked a successful German trade policy with Zionist development and growth in the Jewish National Home, arguing that the Zionist movement and Jewish settlers in Palestine, regardless of their origin, were naturally pro-German, and that they especially needed the kinds of industrial products that Germany produced. The report concluded that, in contrast with the period before the war, when Palestine was a market only for simple and inexpensive goods, the postwar market there had changed dramatically: “The inflow of Jewish groups with greater intelligence, more refined and sophisticated needs, has slowly resulted in a change with regard to the quality of the needed products.”<sup>32</sup>

Arab nationalists in Palestine and throughout the Middle East turned increasingly to Germany for diplomatic and material support against the postwar settlement in the Middle East. As mentioned earlier, the September 1921 report of the German ambassador in London on his conversations with Arab leaders indicated that Germany had not lost the generally pro-German sentiments that had existed in the Arab world before 1914, despite Germany’s wartime alliance with the Ottomans. According to German diplomatic records, attempts were made by Syrian Arabs to obtain German support against the

<sup>31</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. III, Politik 2a-Palästina, Bd.1, Bernstorff an Mecklenburg, 3. Oktober 1927. Bernstorff reiterated in his memoirs that the Pro-Palestine Committee enjoyed the warm and consistent support of the German government. See J.H. Graf von Bernstorff, *Memoirs of Count Bernstorff* (New York: Random House, 1936), 331–332.

<sup>32</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. III-Wirtschaft, Palästina-Handel 11, Aufzeichnung des DGK/Jerusalem, (no date).

French in Syria and Lebanon. For instance, a representative of the Syrian Orthodox Church, on a visit to Germany in 1921, wanted to involve Germany in its dispute with the French mandatory authorities over alleged preferences shown to the Maronite Catholics. The representative suggested that it would give Germany “the opportunity to regain lost ground” in the region.<sup>33</sup> The German government immediately rejected these overtures, arguing that it would not serve German economic and cultural interests in Syria and throughout the region to even appear to question French authority in Syria. Other attempts to involve Germany in Syria were made in 1926 and 1927. Efforts by the Druse in Syria in 1926 for a declaration of sympathy from the German Red Cross for their treatment by French authorities were politely rebuffed in Berlin.<sup>34</sup> Syrian Arab nationalist Fawzi Bey approached the German consul general in Jerusalem, Erich Nord, with a proposal for closer relations between Syrian Arab nationalists and Germany, and a request for German weapons assistance for a Syrian uprising.<sup>35</sup> Nord immediately rejected the request, pointing out that the Treaty of Versailles prohibited Germany from manufacturing most weapons, as well as from exporting any weapons. Nord also mentioned that the Allied Control Commission in Germany strictly supervised the German military as well as German industries capable of manufacturing weapons. Moreover, even if German weapons had been available, their export to Syrian Arabs would have violated the spirit of Germany’s obligations as a soon-to-be member of the League of Nations and, later, the Permanent Mandates Commission.

The December 1924 memorandum, authored and circulated by Sobernheim in the German Foreign Office, already outlined Germany’s rejection of Arab requests for German support in the Palestine conflict. It argued that the Arabs had done nothing to develop the land in Palestine, and had therefore forfeited their rights to the Jews who were developing the land and making it prosper. With some irony, as was the case at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, Sobernheim and others in the German Foreign Office tended to dismiss the Arabs as not yet fit for self-government. This approach in Palestine reflected Germany’s economic interests in Palestine that Berlin felt were best served by the British Mandate and the Jewish National Home with a growing Jewish population, rather than by support for the Arab majority and for Arab nationalism and independence throughout the region.

Prior to the outbreak of renewed Arab violence in Palestine in August 1929, relative peace had prevailed since the earlier violence of the immediate postwar

<sup>33</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. III, Politik 2-Syrien, Bd. 1, Freistaat Bayern, Ministerium des Äussern, an AA/Berlin, Nr. 44928, 23. November 1921, and Aufzeichnung des Auswärtigen Amts, zu III.T. 1478, (o.D.).

<sup>34</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. III, Politik 2-Syrien, Bd. 2, Aufzeichnung des AA/Berlin (author unknown), III.O.673, 11. Januar 1926.

<sup>35</sup> PA: Geheim-Akten, 1920–1936, Politik 2-Syrien, DGK/Jerusalem an AA/Berlin, Jn 145/27, 24. Januar 1927.

period before 1922. During this generally peaceful interlude, Berlin had been free to pursue its aims in Palestine and in the wider region without the pressure that a crisis situation would generate, specifically pressure that might call for public policy statements on the issues. The German Foreign Office continued to cultivate friendly relations with the Mandatory powers Britain and France, to promote the Zionist cause in Palestine, and to reject Arab requests for diplomatic and material support against the Mandatory powers and the Jewish National Home. However, Berlin feared that the outbreak of unrest in 1929 might impede economic activity and expansion in Palestine, a particular concern of those in the Near East Department (Abteilung III before 1936, Abteilung VII thereafter) in the German Foreign Office. This was noted in an internal memorandum in December 1929, which stipulated that “Germany’s main interest is that order soon be restored in Palestine and that economic development be promoted.”<sup>36</sup> Moreover, in the public debates that ensued after the outbreak of violence, Germany, as a member of the Permanent Mandates Commission, was forced to define more precisely its position on the conflict between Arabs and Jews in Palestine. In so doing, Berlin could not avoid a discussion of Britain’s wartime and immediate postwar promises to both the Jews and the Arabs, promises that the Germans contended made future animosity and conflict virtually inevitable.

In conjunction with the international debates in late 1929 and 1930 over the violence in Palestine, events in Germany and Europe were beginning to influence German foreign policy as well. Stresemann died in October 1929, and his successors took a somewhat more independent, albeit not substantively different, approach in foreign policy. This followed some of the revisions of the Versailles Treaty, including the more favorable regulation of reparations embodied in the Young Plan, as well as the end of the Allied Control Commission in Berlin and the Anglo-French-Belgian occupation of the Rhineland by 1930. It is difficult to determine whether the dramatic electoral successes of the Right, especially the Nazis, beginning in September 1930, put pressure on the government to pursue a more independent foreign policy. Moreover, in Abteilung III of the German Foreign Office, Sobernheim was losing influence, and he soon retired. Middle East specialists such as Fritz Grobba came to exert more influence on German Middle East policy as a whole, pushing it in a direction that was somewhat more critical of Britain and France in the Middle East in general. Nevertheless, this slightly greater independence did not entail a change Germany’s fundamental support for the status quo, namely for the Anglo-French mandate system and for the Jewish National Home in Palestine. In meetings of the Permanent Mandates Commission in 1929, for example, the German delegation reiterated its full support for the Jewish National Home.

<sup>36</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. III, Politik 5-Palästina, Bd. 3, Aufzeichnung Ziemkes, A.O. 6577, 23. Dezember 1929. Kurt Ziemke was Legationsrat in the German Foreign Office in 1929.

This support remained constant even through the turmoil of the final years of the Weimar Republic. This continuity was perhaps best summed up in a January 1931 letter from State Secretary Bernhard von Bülow to the German Pro-Palestine Committee in the following manner: "The German government and the Foreign Office have repeatedly expressed their sympathy for the goals and efforts of your committee."<sup>37</sup>

Berlin's somewhat more independent position at the League of Nations by the end of the decade included a growing tendency to indirectly criticize Britain's conflicting wartime promises to the Jews and the Arabs in Palestine. Its argument was that those promises had been used as convenient propaganda tools in the war against Germany rather than as ideals honestly promoted for their moral worth. A month after a November 1929 meeting of the Permanent Mandates Commission regarding the situation in Palestine, Abteilung III of the German Foreign Office circulated a memorandum stipulating that Great Britain alone was responsible for the consequences of its policies, and that the British government had the responsibility to work out a solution without outside intervention: "Full responsibility for carrying out the provisions of the Mandate rests with England, which itself created the deplorable conditions in Palestine through its contradictory promises to Jews and Arabs. . . It is therefore in the first instance England's task to run the Mandate and to create peace in the land. It cannot be our task to relieve England of a part of the responsibility, and to somehow to seize the initiative."<sup>38</sup> This position did not mean that the German government was now opposed to the British position in the Arab world, or specifically to its mandate and the Jewish National Home in Palestine. Rather it seemed to reflect Berlin's lingering resentment over the postwar settlement by pointing to Britain's wartime strategy against Germany, a strategy that the Germans now implied embodied dishonest and contradictory promises to both the Jews and the Arabs.

Yet, without proposing a way to effectively eliminate the inherent contradictions in Britain's wartime promises, the German Foreign Office continued to argue that Britain alone bore responsibility for achieving reconciliation between Jews and Arabs in Palestine. For example, an internal memorandum of May 9, 1930 in Abteilung III in the German Foreign Office extended Germany's full support to the Shaw Commission, which the British government appointed in 1929 to come up with a solution to the recent violence and unrest in Palestine. The memorandum first repeated the view that Britain's primary motive in issuing the Balfour Declaration in 1917 had been to mobilize Jews around the world against Germany. It stated that Britain alone was in a position to rectify the situation: "As we have already said, we must leave it to England to find a

<sup>37</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. III, Politik 2a-Palästina, Bd. 2, AA/Berlin an das Pro-Palästina Komitee, III O 161, 16. Januar 1931.

<sup>38</sup> See PA: Pol.Abt. III, Politik 3-Länder (England), Bd. 2, Aufzeichnung des Auswärtigen Amts (author unknown), III O 6430, 30. Dezember 1929.

way out of the situation,” and then concluded: “A satisfactory solution would perhaps be possible, if Arabs and Jews should find themselves ready to reach an agreement with each other. It will be the task of the British government to promote and to produce such an understanding between both parties.”<sup>39</sup> Consul-General Nord in Jerusalem reiterated this position and tendered similar advice to Berlin during the summer of 1930.<sup>40</sup> A few months later, Grobba seemed to embody that slightly enhanced independence in German policy, which now included general expressions of sympathy for Arab frustrations. However, such expressions did not come at the expense of German support for Zionist interests or for the British position in Palestine and throughout the region. In an August 20 memorandum commenting on a recent report of the Permanent Mandates Commission to the League Council, Grobba observed: “From the German standpoint it is to be welcomed if the measures suggested by the Commission are successful in establishing peace in Palestine, and thereby secure a peaceful coexistence of the two peoples. Germany extends the same sympathy to both peoples.”<sup>41</sup>

Finally, the Foreign Office in Berlin was careful to avoid German involvement in the natural rivalries among the dominant European powers in the region, especially between Britain and France. For instance, the German consulate in Beirut reported to Berlin in March 1927 the fears of French Mandatory authorities that Britain was seeking to eliminate French control over Syria and establish a greater Arab empire under British protection.<sup>42</sup> It further reported that anti-English sentiments were prevalent among French civilian and military officials in Syria, that French authorities in Syria believed that Britain had instigated the anti-French uprising among the Syrian Arab population immediately following the war, and that France wanted German support at the League of Nations to uphold the legitimacy of French authority in Syria and Lebanon. Berlin’s

<sup>39</sup> See PA: Pol.Abt. III, Politik 5-Palästina, Bd. 3, Aufzeichnung Ziemkes zu III.O. 2110-30, 9. Mai 1930. In September 1929, the government in London appointed a royal commission under Sir Walter Shaw to investigate the recent violence in Palestine. It also sent a group under John Hope Simpson to Palestine to aid in the investigations. The result of all this was the Passfield White Paper in October 1930 which stipulated that there was nothing in the Balfour Declaration or in the League Mandate’s Jewish National Home that promised an independent Jewish state in Palestine. Nor had there been promises for an independent Arab state in Palestine. The White Paper further recommended limits on Jewish immigration and land purchases. Naturally, it contained nothing that might compromise the authority of the British Mandate in Palestine. The British government itself, following intense Jewish and Arab criticism, rejected the recommendations of the White Paper. See for example Christopher Sykes, *Crossroads to Israel, 1917–1948* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 111–20.

<sup>40</sup> See PA: Pol.Abt. III, Pol. 3-Länder (England), Bd. 2, DGK/Jerusalem an AA/Berlin, Nr. Polit. 23/30, III.O. 2373, 20. Mai 1930; and Pol.Abt. III, Politik 5-Palästina, Bd. 3, DGK/Jerusalem an AA/Berlin, Nr. Polit. 34/40, III.O. 2852, 21. Juni 1930.

<sup>41</sup> PA: Pol. Abt. III, Politik 5-Palästina, Bd. 3, Aufzeichnung des AA (Grobba), III O 3612, Vbd.2470, 20. August 1930.

<sup>42</sup> ADAP: Serie B, Bd. IV, Nr. 252.

reaction was to categorically reject as premature and unfounded such allegations about English intent in Syria. Its position remained that German interests in the Middle East were best served by avoiding involvement in great power rivalries and disputes in the region, and to reaffirm Germany's interest in maintaining the postwar status quo in the Middle East. In its April 20, 1927 response to the consulate in Beirut, with copies to German diplomatic missions in London, Paris, Rome, Constantinople, Cairo, Jerusalem, and Baghdad, the German Foreign Office concluded: "Nevertheless, it seems to us that the idea of providing France with active political support for the strengthening of its position in any form in Syria is not opportune, just as we naturally would never think of increasing French difficulties there. Our position with regard to the entire Mandate system is limited by the basic proposition, that we recognize and respect the situation that was established without our involvement."<sup>43</sup>

As its Imperial predecessor had done, Weimar Germany also pursued primarily economic and cultural interests in Egypt. Berlin recognized Britain's political and economic dominance, France's cultural advantages, and Italy's postwar push to establish a greater economic and cultural presence in Egypt. In May 1927, the German embassy in Cairo delivered a lengthy report to the Foreign Office in Berlin in which it reviewed Germany's position in Egypt in relation to the other European powers. The report identified advantages for Germany in the fact that, unlike Britain, France, and Italy, Germany did not have political interests there: "In contrast to these powers, Germany has no active political aims to pursue in Egypt or the neighboring countries. . ."<sup>44</sup> It observed further that Germany enjoyed popular sympathy, especially among educated Egyptians who generally held German culture and science in high esteem, and recognized Germany's "civilizing mission" in the world. The German ambassador, Eberhard von Stohrer, recommended efforts to promote German language instruction, an increase in German medical training and personnel in Egypt, more German teachers for Egyptian universities and trade schools, promotion of German music and art in Egypt, greater opportunities for Egyptian students to study in German schools and universities, film exchanges, and visits to Egypt by German sports teams.

In Palestine, there had been a German cultural presence since the middle of the nineteenth century, with the presence of several thousand Germans living in Christian colonies and institutions, Protestant and Catholic. The largest was the Temple Society (*Tempelgesellschaft*), a breakaway Lutheran community from Württemberg that had settled and built mainly agricultural colonies in Palestine since the late 1860s.<sup>45</sup> With the arrival of Jewish settlers, mostly from

<sup>43</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. III, Politik 2-Syrien, Bd. 1, AA/Berlin an die Deutschen Botschaften bzw. Konsulate in Paris, London, Rom, Konstantinople, Kairo, Jerusalem und Bagdad, zu III O 1455, 20. April 1927.

<sup>44</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. III, Politik 26-Ägypten, Bd.-, DG/Kairo an AA/Berlin, Nr. 308, 28. Mai 1927.

<sup>45</sup> See Alex Carmel, *Die Siedlungen der Württembergischen Templer in Palästina 1868-1918* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1973).



eastern Europe, in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, there was some demand for German language instruction in some of the new Jewish schools. The diplomatic reports from Jerusalem following the war seem to indicate that the German Christian communities had enjoyed generally good relations with Ottoman officials, as well as with the local Jewish and Arab communities before the war. After the war, Berlin worked with the British government for the satisfactory resettlement of almost nine hundred Palestinian Germans (*Palästina-Deutsche*) who had been interned in Egypt during the latter part of the war in the Middle East. Seeking to build on these relations, and to support German economic interests in the Palestine Mandate at the same time, the German Consulate-General undertook several cultural initiatives. Foremost among them were the promotion of German-language teaching in Jewish and Arab schools, the establishment of a chair in German language and literature at the new Hebrew University, the promotion of German tourism with the creation of tourist information centers in Palestine, and the promotion of cultural exchanges with the visit of German musicians, lecturers, and others.<sup>46</sup>

To emphasize the absence of German political interests in the region beyond its support for the status quo and any necessary peaceful, internationally recognized changes to that status quo, Germany rejected requests by Libyan and other Arab leaders for German diplomatic intervention in Libya. In the spring of 1931, for instance, unnamed Arabs complained to the German Consulate-General in Jerusalem, and to the Jerusalem consulates of other states, about Italian atrocities against the Arab population in Libya.<sup>47</sup> As was the case with earlier efforts to involve Germany in the French Mandate of Syria, mentioned earlier, the Foreign Office in Berlin was clear in its response to the Consulate-General in Jerusalem: “The Consulate-General is instructed in future cases to not accept the written petitions of groups from the Arab or the Jewish population...and to advise the relevant delegations to proceed via the Mandatory government and its diplomatic representative to the appropriate foreign government.”<sup>48</sup>

Moreover, examples of Weimar Germany’s support for peaceful, internationally recognized changes to the postwar status quo in the region include Britain’s agreement in 1930 to end the mandate over Iraq and to recognize Iraq’s nominal independence. Article 22 of the League Covenant stipulated that mandates would eventually become independent states with full rights as

<sup>46</sup> See for example PA: Pol.Abt. III, Politik 26-Palästina, Bd. 1, “Vorschläge für eine deutsche Kulturinstitution in Jerusalem,” Nachtrag zu den Memoranden vom Juni und November 1928, Hecker/Jerusalem an AA/Berlin, 31. Mai 1929; and DGK/Jerusalem an AA/Berlin, Nr.Kult. 1/30, III O 588, Deutsche Kulturpropaganda mit Beziehung auf den Bericht vom 9. April v.Js., Nr.Kult. 7/29, 8. Januar 1930.

<sup>47</sup> See for example PA: Pol.Abt. III, Politik 3-Länder, Bd. 1, DGK/Jerusalem an AA/Berlin, J.N. Polit. 31/31, 30. April 1931.

<sup>48</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. III, Politik 3-Länder, Bd. 1, AA/Berlin an DGK/Jerusalem, III O 01539/31, auf den Bericht vom 30. April d.J., 27. Mai 1931.



members of the League of Nations. Germany greeted Britain's decision to grant nominal independence to Iraq with full support. In 1931, as a member of the League Council, the German Foreign Office issued the following statement in support of Iraq's entry as an independent state into the League of Nations: "Germany has always supported the Iraqi wish to be freed from the shackles of the Mandate and to bring this to reality. Germany greets with sincere joy the fact that this Iraqi wish has been realized. . ."<sup>49</sup> On October 3, 1932, Iraq was formally admitted into the League of Nations as an independent state. Berlin also expressed its understanding and full acceptance of the reality that in Iraq, as well as perhaps later in Syria, Britain and France would retain certain political, economic, and military prerogatives when the mandates became independent states at some point in the future. This position was perfectly consistent with the fact that Germany had no political ambitions in the region. In Abteilung III, Grobba, who would soon be appointed as Germany's first ambassador to Iraq, circulated a memorandum in January 1932 which outlined this position quite clearly: "As opposed to Italy, we have no political interests in these Mandate territories, and we are of the opinion that our economic and cultural interests in these future independent states, states that will nevertheless still remain somewhat dependent on England and France, will be even more secure than was the case under the direct English and French administrative supervision in the Mandates."<sup>50</sup>

Berlin also accepted the formal alliance between Great Britain and Iraq that would accompany the latter's nominal independence. In Berlin, all of this was viewed as an opportunity to further promote German economic interests in the region, especially in the growing international efforts to exploit oil reserves in Iraq. Indeed, Germany's main interest in the exploitation of Iraq's oil resources was not so much for the oil itself as for its major role in supplying much of the industrial equipment needed for the petroleum industry in Iraq. This included oil drilling and pipeline equipment and materials, railway construction, as well as irrigation equipment for the development of some of the territories in the vicinity of Iraq's major oil fields.<sup>51</sup> In talks with King Faysal of the new Iraqi state in the summer of 1930, Grobba expressed Germany's complete

<sup>49</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. III, Politik 2-Irak, Bd.-, "Entwurf einer Ansprache des Herrn Reichsministers anlässlich der Aufnahme des Irak in den Völkerbund," III.O.3113, (no date).

<sup>50</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. III, Politik 2-Irak, Bd.-, Fritz Grobba, "66. Tagung des Völkerbundsrats: Punkt 8 der Tagesordnung," III.O. 4477/31, 16. Januar 1932. In May 1932, Curt Prüfer in Abteilung III in the Foreign Office in Berlin instructed the German delegation in Geneva to adopt the following position on Iraq's formal admission to the League of Nations: "Please continue to observe benevolent neutrality in the question of the Iraq Mandate." See PA: Pol.Abt. III, Politik 2-Irak, Bd.-, AA/Berlin (Prüfer) an Deutsche Delegation/Genf, zu III.O. 1510/32, 12. Mai 1932.

<sup>51</sup> See for example PA: Pol.Abt. III-Wirtschaft, Irak-Rohstoffe und Waren: Petroleum, Bd. 1, Aufzeichnung des AA, III R.26/31, 9. Januar 1931; and Pol.Abt. III-Wirtschaft, Irak-Wirtschaft 6: Wirtschaftliche Beziehungen zu Deutschland, DG/Bagdad an AA/Berlin, III O 4347, Nr. 688, 1. Dezember 1931.

understanding that the new Iraq would need the kind of security that a formal alliance with Great Britain would provide. Grobba told Faysal that the German government would support such an alliance “. . .so long as in the new alliance England would not be accorded a preferred economic position in Iraq, and that Germany would be treated equally with England and other powers and be allowed to compete economically.”<sup>52</sup> Faysal also mentioned to Grobba the problem of Iraq’s border dispute with Syria as it related to the oil-rich Mosul area in northern Iraq. Faysal asked Grobba for Germany’s support in the ongoing dispute. In a follow-up memorandum the next day, August 12, Grobba advised his superiors in Berlin in a manner that seemed to contradict the existing Weimar policy of adhering to a policy of strict neutrality in political issues and disputes in the region. He argued that German firms had long been interested in exploiting the oil resources in the Mosul area of northern Iraq, and that Germany’s position in the dispute should accommodate that of an independent Iraq. He concluded: “Since we are interested in the oil in this region, the king should be able to count on our sympathy in this question.”<sup>53</sup> Three days later, the Reich foreign minister approved Grobba’s suggestions and the content of his talks with King Faysal.<sup>54</sup> Grobba’s desire for a general expression of sympathy on a particular question was not tantamount to actual diplomatic intervention or support.

By the early 1930s, Weimar Germany’s primary goal of promoting Germany’s economic interests, particularly German exports, as well as its cultural interests in the Middle East, seem to have achieved a level with which the German Foreign Office was more or less satisfied. In the Palestine Mandate, for example, the diplomatic correspondence between Berlin and Jerusalem reflects a belief in a causal relationship between local Arab perceptions of German neutrality in Arab conflicts with British rule and with Jewish immigration and the Jewish National Home, and the growth of German imports. Reports from the Consulate-General to Berlin in the politically difficult years of 1929–1932, years of Arab unrest and subsequent international discussions about the future of Palestine, indicate German satisfaction with both Arab and Jewish attitudes toward Germany, and toward German economic activity. In the Consulate-General’s annual report for the year 1929, for example, Consul General Nord reported that even with the unrest of the previous year, which included an Arab boycott of Jewish businesses and a consequent drop in Jewish orders from Germany, Germany still remained second only to Great Britain in imports into Palestine. Nord attributed this position to the ongoing friendly attitude of both Arabs and Jews toward Germany, in spite of the difficult events

<sup>52</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. III, Politik 2-Irak, Bd.-, Aufzeichnung Grobbas, III.o. 3552/30, 11. August 1930.

<sup>53</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. III, Politik 2-Irak, Bd.-, Aufzeichnung Grobbas, III.o. 3588, 12. August 1930.

<sup>54</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. III, Politik 2-Irak, Bd.-, Aufzeichnung des RAM, zu III.o. 3588/30, 14. August 1930. This internal statement also called for securing expanded German concessions for air links into Iraq, as well as the opening of the Iraqi market to more imports of German trucks.

of the past year: "The attitude of the population in Palestine toward Germany has remained generally unchanged and friendly."<sup>55</sup> In fact, Berlin tried to improve Germany's trade position in Palestine through a League of Nations intervention between 1927 and 1931. It complained of deliberate British efforts to take advantage of its position as Mandatory power to favor British firms, all in violation of Article 18 of the Mandate Statutes that promise economic equality to all powers in Palestine. In November 1927, the German consul general in Jerusalem complained that the British Mandatory government tried to "...protect the outward appearance of equal access for all competitors..."<sup>56</sup> while usually favoring British firms, even in instances where German goods were less expensive. However, Germany's repeated attempts as a member of the Mandates Commission to obtain satisfaction apparently were unsuccessful.<sup>57</sup> By 1931, of course, an entirely different crisis, the world-wide depression, was the primary factor that negatively affected German exports to Palestine and elsewhere. Still, in its reports for the years 1930 and 1931, the German consul general concluded that in spite of the economic downturn and, by the end of 1931, the overall decline in its trade with Palestine, Germany had maintained its favorable trade position with Palestine.<sup>58</sup>

In the Arabian Peninsula, Germany was at first hesitant, then moved slowly but deliberately in positioning itself to pursue its economic interests after the Saud family's 1925 overthrow of the previous Hashemite ruler, Sharif Hussein. First calling itself the Kingdom of the Hijaz and the Nejd in 1925, the soon-to-be Kingdom of Saudi Arabia expressed an interest in importing German weapons, as well as automobiles, tires, and other industrial products, and assistance in building railway lines.<sup>59</sup> The German government carefully secured the approval of the British government in the establishment of friendly relations between Berlin and the Saudi monarchy. This led to the signing of a Treaty of Friendship between Germany and the Kingdom of the Hijaz and the Nejd on April 26, 1929, followed two years later by the opening

<sup>55</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. III, Sonderreferat W-Allgemeines, Bd. 3, DGK/Jerusalem an AA/Berlin, Jahresübersicht 1929, Nr.Polit. 2/30, III O 536, 23. Januar 1930. This report was virtually identical in substance to the annual report a year earlier, for 1928, before the unrest and consequent disruptions of the summer of 1929. See PA: Pol.Abt. III, Sonderreferat W-Allgemeines, Bd. 3, DGK/Jerusalem an AA/Berlin, Jahresübersicht 1928, Nr.Polit. 1-28, III O 498, 24. Januar 1929.

<sup>56</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. III-Wirtschaft, Palästina-Handel 11, Aufzeichnung des DGK/Jerusalem, (no date); and Wirtschaft, Palästina-Wirtschaft 7, Bd. 1, DGK/Jerusalem an AA/Berlin, JN 2386/27, 14. November 1927.

<sup>57</sup> See for example PA: Pol.Abt. III, Palästina-Wirtschaft 7, Bd. 1, DGK/Jerusalem an AA/Berlin, Nr.Haf. 9/28, 19.Dezember 1928; and AA/Berlin an Ministerialdirektor Ruppel/Berlin, Nr. III 01142, 14. März 1931.

<sup>58</sup> See PA: Pol.Abt. III, Sonderreferat W-Allgemeines, Bd. 3, DGK/Jerusalem an AA/ Berlin, Jahresübersicht 1930, Nr.Polit. 6-31, III O 406, 21. Januar 1931; and DGK/Jerusalem an AA/Berlin, Jahresübersicht 1931, Nr.Polit. 15-32, III O 679, 18. Februar 1932.

<sup>59</sup> Uwe Pfullmann, "German-Saudi Relations and Their Actors on the Arabian Peninsula, 1924-1939," in Schwanitz (ed.), *Germany and the Middle East*, 121-130.

of a German consulate in Jidda. Britain even approved the shipment of three thousand Polish rifles with ammunition from Hamburg to the Kingdom via German ships.<sup>60</sup>

With the defeat of the Central Powers in the First World War, the so called Eastern Question had disappeared from the diplomatic narrative among the Great Powers. The Ottoman Empire had finally collapsed, and the western powers, specifically Great Britain and France, had further extended their prewar penetration of the Arab world, from the lands of North Africa into the predominantly Arab Fertile Crescent. Unlike most of the nationalities of southeastern Europe, which had more or less achieved independent statehood by 1914, the Arab peoples of the Fertile Crescent and much of the Arabian Peninsula, not already under some form of British control before the war, came under various forms of Anglo-French rule, mostly in the form of the League of Nations Mandates at the end of the war. Imperial Germany's position on the Eastern Question, somewhat confused prior to 1914, nevertheless pursued German economic and cultural penetration of Ottoman lands while maintaining the Ottoman Empire's existence in the Fertile Crescent and Arabia in the face of British, French, and Italian imperial ambitions. In other words, Germany had generally favored maintaining the status quo in North Africa and the Middle East, satisfied with an expansion of German influence within existing political structures. As a defeated power, of course, Germany had no say in the creation of a new order in the Middle East following the war. The Allied victory enabled the extension of Anglo-French imperial interests and ambition into almost all of the remaining Ottoman-Arab territories of the Fertile Crescent and Arabia, as well as a successful effort by the Zionist movement to include the establishment of a Jewish National Home within the final peace settlement and Britain's League of Nations Mandate for Palestine.

With this context in mind, and the reality of Germany's weakness following its total collapse and defeat in 1918, the new German republic played no role in the creation of a new postwar order in the Middle East. With its main focus on Europe, and on obtaining revisions of at least some of the harsher provisions of the Versailles Treaty in Europe, the new Weimar Republic quietly pursued its rather modest economic and cultural agenda in the Arabic-speaking lands of North Africa and the Middle East. As was the case with Imperial Germany prior to the war, so too did the postwar Weimar Republic define its interests in the region primarily in economic and cultural terms; and, as before 1914, Berlin set out to promote those interests within the context, once again, of recognizing and working within the geopolitical status quo in the region. To the extent that German Middle East policy under the Kaiser and the Weimar Republic reflected common underlying strategic or political considerations, interests,

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 132–133.

and goals, these were to be found ultimately in Europe.<sup>61</sup> German support for the postwar status quo required its acceptance of, and support for, Anglo-French-Italian imperial domination and the establishment and development of the Jewish National Home in Palestine, even if Berlin's implied criticism of that status quo was always evident in its repeated assertions that Germany had nothing to do with its creation. This position also reflected a range of attitudes with regard to the Arab quest for national self-determination and independence after the First World War that ranged from general indifference to outright rejection. This range would also be evident in Hitler's strategic calculations and policy decisions toward Arab nationalism and the Middle East during the Third Reich.

<sup>61</sup> For instance, Gordon Craig's assessment more than half a century ago of Gustav Stresemann's approach to Anglo-French interests in the Middle East, and their direct impact on Germany's immediate needs in post-World War I Europe, seems to have stood the test of time. See his *From Bismarck to Adenauer: Aspects of German Statecraft* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1958), 74–75.

## Hitler, Race, and the World Beyond Europe

### RACE AND THE EUROPEAN GREAT POWERS

Hitler and the fledgling National Socialist party exhibited at a minimum a partly developed strategic and racially centered approach to foreign policy in the early years of the movement. The connection between a Nazi racial world view and early geopolitical fantasies about the conquest of new German “living space” in eastern Europe has long been established.<sup>1</sup> It resulted in a world war that ultimately involved the physical displacement and mass murder of millions of Jews, Roma, Slavs, and others in Europe. Indeed, Hitler publicly espoused the connection between race and geopolitics during the first half of the decade of the 1920s. By 1925, when he finished the second volume of *Mein Kampf*, race, war, a future new Germany’s relationship with the relevant European great powers and the United States, and the identification of targeted “racial” groups were for the most part set in his mind. In *Mein Kampf*, he wrote: “We have been chosen by fate, as witnesses of a catastrophe that will be the mightiest confirmation of the soundness of the *völkisch* theory.”<sup>2</sup> Hitler wrote this within the context of what he believed was a necessary war with the new Soviet Union, the conquest of German living space in eastern Europe and, in the process, the elimination of defined “racial” groups, primarily the Jews, from Poland to the Urals. This did not in any way preclude the extension of such an approach to foreign affairs globally, to the world beyond Europe, following the successful culmination of war for the conquest of German *Lebensraum* and the establishment of a “new racial order” (*rassische Neuordnung*) in Europe.

<sup>1</sup> See Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 44 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 651. See also Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889–1936 Hubris* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 79, 249–250.

Hitler was always aware of the relevance of the other European great powers, as well as the United States and Japan, to his developing plans for Germany in Europe and in the world beyond. Indeed, his many references to those powers in his early writings, certainly to the European powers and the United States, are indicative of a realization that his strategic and racial notions were naturally contingent on the role that those powers would play in the process. This is not to say that Hitler possessed a keen insight into, or solid understanding of, the world and its realities beyond the borders of the Reich. Indeed, it is likely that he knew little about the world outside of Europe, and that he generally cared even less. It does, however, reflect his thinking that the achievement of German aims would require a clear identification of friends and foes in the future wars that he believed would be necessary to achieve a new Germany's foreign policy aims in Europe and in the world beyond. Some of those potential friends and foes were imperial powers with a significant presence and established interests and ambitions in the Arabic-speaking lands of North Africa, the Fertile Crescent, and the Arabian Peninsula following the First World War. Therefore, Hitler's early strategic and foreign policy calculations were always based in part on the imperial interests and demands of Germany's potential allies in any future wars for the establishment of his desired new order in Europe and possibly beyond.<sup>3</sup> As Britain and Italy emerged early on as Hitler's logical choices to be the new Germany's future allies, the Reich's Middle East policy after 1933, specifically its views on Arab nationalism and independence, would have to accommodate first British, and then Italian, and after 1940, French and Spanish imperial interests in the region.<sup>4</sup>

Some four decades ago, Klaus Hildebrand argued that Hitler's early foreign policy calculations were plagued by an "authoritarian-led anarchy" that was characteristic of the fledgling NSDAP and its various positions on all issues.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, some of Hitler's earliest pronouncements on Germany's relationships with the other great powers reflected an effort to chart a course for a future new Germany in the lingering environment of immediate postwar anger, violence, and unrest. They seemed to demonstrate a state of confusion in his mind about the world beyond Germany, fueled in part by the chaos of those immediate postwar years. Some degree of certainty in his developing strategic and foreign policy inclinations would indeed emerge just a few years later, in both *Mein Kampf* and his "Second Book." However, his public statements between 1919 and 1921 betrayed a rather mixed assortment of ideas that generally rested on lingering popular resentment and harsh criticism of all of Germany's

<sup>3</sup> Hitler's virtual obsession with determining future German allies and enemies is evident, for example, in the second volume of his *Mein Kampf*. See Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, II, Chaps. 13 and 14.

<sup>4</sup> Josef Schröder, "Die Beziehungen der Achsenmächte zur arabischen Welt," *Zeitschrift für Politik* 18 (1971): 95.

<sup>5</sup> See Klaus Hildebrand, *The Foreign Policy of the Third Reich* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 12–23.

wartime foes, with particular emphasis on Russia, France, and Great Britain.<sup>6</sup> Even Italy, as one of the victorious Allies in 1918, was viewed negatively. Of course, the Jews were also targeted for their alleged international conspiracy and dominance over all of the powers that had been Germany's foes in the war.

In a speech to the local Munich branch (*Ortsgruppe*) of the NSDAP on December 10, 1919, with a view that would be significant and directly relevant more than twenty years later, Hitler singled out Great Britain and the United States as belonging to a "second echelon" of Germany's enemies. He stated: "Look at our enemies. We divide them into two groups: one includes our absolute opponents. England and America, the second group: nations, who as a result of their own unhappy situation or as a result of other circumstances have become our opponents."<sup>7</sup> In his speech at the Hofbräuhaus on April 17, 1920, Hitler again placed Germany's enemies in certain categories; this time he revealed a somewhat mixed attitude toward Great Britain and its global empire.<sup>8</sup> While he clearly placed France in the category of long-standing enemies, he seemed to relegate Great Britain and Russia into a category of great powers that only recently, and for a variety of reasons, had become Germany's enemies. Yet, at times, he would also assert that "international Jewry" had come to control both the British and Russian Empires, especially the former, making any sort of future accommodation impossible.<sup>9</sup> By the spring of 1920, his position on Britain mellowed somewhat, particularly as he increasingly inserted considerations of race into his strategic calculations for the future. This factor will be considered in the sections that follow.

Nevertheless, and in spite of his relatively early and positive assessment of the racial foundations of the British Empire, Hitler clearly was not yet committed to the idea of an Anglo-German accommodation in the immediate postwar years. However, several factors in 1922 and 1923 undoubtedly did contribute to both a hardening of his opposition to Russia and a softening of his immediate postwar animosity toward Great Britain.<sup>10</sup> His early outlook, influenced to some extent by Heinrich Claß and the *Alldeutsche Verband*, tended more in the direction of restoring a Wilhelminian approach to German

<sup>6</sup> See the excerpts from, and analysis of, the meetings of the NSDAP in Munich between December 1919 and December 1920 at which Hitler was the main speaker, in Reginald Phelps, "Hitler als Parteiredner im Jahre 1920," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 11 (1963): 274–330.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 290. See also the account of his speech of July 6, 1920 in the *Völkischer Beobachter*, July 11, 1920.

<sup>8</sup> Phelps, "Hitler als Parteiredner," 297–299.

<sup>9</sup> See Kuhn, *Hitlers ausßenpolitisches Programm*, 47–48, 64–65.

<sup>10</sup> See Günter Schubert, *Anfänge nationalsozialistischer Außenpolitik* (Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1963), 74–75, 133; Jäckel, *Hitlers Weltanschauung*, 35–36; Dietrich Aigner, *Das Ringen um England* (Munich: Bechtle Verlag, 1969), 34 ff; and Gerhard Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany: Diplomatic Revolution in Europe, 1933–1936* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 14–15. See also Kuhn, *Hitlers ausßenpolitisches Programm*, 57–58.



strategic interests and foreign policy aims.<sup>11</sup> This included a restoration and completion of the unity of the German *Volk* in central Europe, the right to overseas colonies as sources of raw materials, and the revision of the hated Versailles settlement. This approach, of course, would not bode well for friendly relations with Great Britain. However, the final triumph in 1922 of the Bolsheviks over their opponents in the Russian civil war appeared to Hitler and his fellow National Socialists to ensure the victory of “international Marxism” in Russia and, therefore, a triumph for the alleged international Jewish conspiracy. Another factor might have been Alfred Rosenberg’s increasing ideological influence on Hitler’s “world view” beginning in 1920, particularly with regard to casting Russia, Bolshevism, and the Jews as the single, monolithic enemy of the Reich. Any sort of future cooperation with Russia now seemed out of the question with the rise to power of an alleged Jewish-controlled Bolshevik regime in the new Soviet Union. Of course, the existence of France and Russia as Germany’s implacable foes would place Great Britain in a somewhat different light in Hitler’s evolving calculations.

A year later, with the crisis in the *Ruhrgebiet* over Germany’s default on its reparations payments, France and Belgium occupied the Ruhr area of Germany in spite of British objections. Hitler’s previous fears regarding the likely permanence of the prewar and wartime Anglo-French Entente gave way to a new recognition of the historical rivalry between Britain and France that predated the Anglo-French Entente of 1904. In April 1923, for example, Hitler stated: “For 140 years, England stood in bitter rivalry with France for hegemony. They have, despite their joint ‘war of theft’, remained to this moment old and bitter rivals.”<sup>12</sup> From this point on, one may observe in Hitler’s speeches and in writings such as *Mein Kampf* and later his “Second Book,” a not particularly subtle change in his assessment of Great Britain from that of a potential opponent of Germany to the status of a potential ally.

Regardless of the evolution of his early views on Germany’s future in relation to the other powers, it seems clear that from the early years of the Weimar Republic Hitler came to view both Italy and Great Britain possible, desirable, and even likely German partners in an otherwise uncertain future.<sup>13</sup> British and German diplomatic documents and other sources reveal that on many occasions just before and after his appointment as Reich Chancellor in 1933, Hitler would refer to his “early” conviction that Britain and Italy were Germany’s

<sup>11</sup> See especially Hitler’s speeches of November 26, 1919 and December 10, 1919 in Ernst Deuerlein, “Hitlers Eintritt in die Politik und die Reichswehr,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 7 (1959): 208–210. See also several of his speeches in 1920 in Phelps, “Hitler als Parteiredner,” 298, 314–316, 320, 329. See also Hildebrand, *Foreign Policy*, 18–22.

<sup>12</sup> Jäckel, *Hitlers Weltanschauung*, 35–36. See also Schubert, *Anfänge*, 74–75.

<sup>13</sup> See Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889–1936 Hubris*, 246.

natural allies for the future.<sup>14</sup> For instance, in a December 4, 1932 letter to Colonel Walter von Reichenau of the Reichswehr, Hitler wrote: “Therefore, based on these considerations, for the past twelve years I have steadfastly suggested closer ties to Italy on the one hand, and to England on the other, as the most desirable foreign policy goals for which to strive.”<sup>15</sup> His many speeches in the very early years of the Nazi movement indicate that Hitler was indeed positive about a future alliance with Italy. In the summer of 1920, two years before Mussolini’s march on Rome and the first step in his successful rise to power in Italy, Hitler was contemplating an important role for Italy in his geopolitical plans and foreign policy for a future National Socialist Germany. In Hitler’s calculations, the most important reality underlining his connection to Italy was his perception of an intractable imperial conflict between Italy and France in the Mediterranean area, particularly in North Africa. In a speech in Munich on July 6, 1920, for instance, Hitler defined Germany’s future relationship with Italy in terms of their common “enemy,” France. He asserted: “For us the enemy sits on the other side of the Rhine, not in Italy or some other place.”<sup>16</sup> And, in September 1920, Hitler argued: “The main demand is: eliminate the peace treaty! In this context, we must do our utmost primarily to exploit the conflicts between France and Italy so that we have Italy on our side.”<sup>17</sup> Those Italian-French conflicts were in the area of the Mediterranean Sea, especially in the French-controlled states of Tunisia and Algeria in North Africa, Syria, as well as Corsica and southeastern France.

Of course, despite being on the winning side in the First World War, Italy too was deeply dissatisfied with a peace settlement that fell considerably short of satisfying its wartime imperial ambitions. Italian dissatisfaction was a fact both before as well as after Mussolini’s rise to power in 1922. Again, the primary point of competition between France and Italy in the postwar years was in the Mediterranean area, which included Arab North Africa and the Fertile Crescent, where Hitler had no discernible foreign policy interests or ambitions at that time. This factor would be of considerable significance less than two decades later. Moreover, the ideological affinity between Italian Fascism and German National Socialism, in harmony with these geopolitical calculations, would also become a decisive factor in the realization of Hitler’s future alliance with Mussolini’s Italy.<sup>18</sup>

By 1923, Hitler had come to believe in a future accommodation between Germany and Great Britain as well. His very early distrust of the British, based

<sup>14</sup> See Kuhn, *Hitlers aussenpolitisches Programm*, 45–48. See also Kurt Luedecke, *I Knew Hitler* (New York: Scribners, 1937), 77.

<sup>15</sup> Thilo Vogelsang, “Hitlers Brief an Reichenau vom 4. Dezember 1932,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 7 (1959): 435.

<sup>16</sup> Phelps, “Hitler als Parteiredner,” 305. <sup>17</sup> Kuhn, *Hitlers aussenpolitisches Programm*, 42.

<sup>18</sup> See Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler’s Germany (1933–1936)*, 16–20; and Walter Werner Pese, “Hitler und Italien 1920–1926,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 3 (1955): 126.

as it was on the premise that England was still tied to France in a common postwar effort to enslave Germany, and that the British government was under the control of an alleged “international Jewry,” soon gave way to the idea of common Anglo-German strategic interests, as well as to fantasies about racial bonds and kinship between Germans and Anglo-Saxons. This also represented a shift in Hitler’s geopolitical thinking. On the one hand, he was moving toward replacing Imperial Germany’s pre-World War I tendency to simultaneously pursue a *Kontinentalpolitik* of dominance in Europe and a *Weltpolitik* of overseas colonial expansion with a “policy of one after the other” (*Politik des Nacheinanders*), in which the conquest of living space in eastern Europe would precede, but not necessarily exclude, the possibility of eventual overseas colonial acquisitions.<sup>19</sup> In 1924, Hitler apparently came to the conclusion that German expansion in eastern Europe would be most effectively pursued in alliance with Great Britain against Russia, a scenario that would mean foregoing global sea power and colonial expansion, at least for the time being.<sup>20</sup> With the publication of the complete *Mein Kampf* in July 1925, Hitler remarks in several places that German expansion in central and eastern Europe, and a consequent war with Russia, would require the friendship of Great Britain. For example, he writes: “If one wants territory in Europe, then this can happen for the most part only at Russia’s expense. . . . For such a policy, however, there would be only one ally in Europe: England. Only with England alone does one have the power, with the rear covered, to begin the new German thrust.”<sup>21</sup> He concludes that “No sacrifice is too great in winning over England.”<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, the role of France in Hitler’s strategic view shifted from that of Britain’s very real but temporary postwar accomplice in punishing Germany, to that of the deadly enemy of both Germany and the British Empire in Europe and the world. As was the case with Italy, France would also be the common denominator in drawing Britain and Germany together. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler writes “Any great power today that, like us, finds France’s domination of the continent un-bearable, is our natural ally.”<sup>23</sup> In a more direct way, Hitler tried to depict Britain as the main loser in Germany’s defeat in the war, and what he alleged were the negative consequences of French power in Europe as a result of its victory: “With the disintegration of Germany as a great power in continental Europe, only the enemies of England can be the victors.”<sup>24</sup> He goes to great lengths in his book to outline a common Anglo-German aversion to French power in Europe and the world, and in particular what he believed constituted potentially negative consequences for the British Empire. After reasserting that, regardless of who is in power, “. . . France is and remains the bitter enemy of the German people. . . ,”<sup>25</sup> he concludes that “. . . the

<sup>19</sup> See Josef Henke, *England in Hitlers politischem Kalkül 1935–1939* (Boppard am Rhein: Boldt, 1973), 20.

<sup>20</sup> See Jäckel, *Hitlers Weltanschauung*, 38. <sup>21</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 145.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 610, 611–615. <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 614.

military super power of France placed great pressure on the heart of the great British world empire.”<sup>26</sup> In particular, he goes to great lengths to identify the Ruhr crisis of 1923 as the main example of French perfidy and justification for a common Anglo-German interest in containing French power.<sup>27</sup>

In the case of both Italy and Great Britain, Hitler tended to emphasize the “power-political” (*machtpolitische*) incentives for drawing both countries into future accommodations or alliances with Germany. There were also the ideological factors that included Italy’s Fascism and the centrality of race in Nazi thinking; however, as important as they were, they nevertheless remained secondary in Hitler’s immediate calculations.<sup>28</sup> It does seem clear that by 1925 and the publication of the complete *Mein Kampf*, Hitler felt certain that Britain would not oppose his rationale for German ascendancy in Europe, specifically for the expansion of German *Lebensraum* in eastern Europe at the expense of the Soviet Union, so long as Germany did not then immediately follow with an aggressive *Weltpolitik*. Rejecting the logic that Britain would oppose German ascendancy in Europe alone, he reasoned that “England’s wish is and remains the prevention of the rapid ascendancy of a continental power to a significant world power, that is, the maintenance of a definite balance of power in the relationships of the European states with each other.”<sup>29</sup> However, for Hitler this did not at all preclude Germany’s pursuit of some form of *Weltpolitik* at some point in the future, after achieving German ambitions on the European continent. This was a scenario that he believed would then necessitate Anglo-German cooperation against the emerging world power and global ambitions of the United States.<sup>30</sup>

Any doubts about the relative importance of power-political and racial-ideological considerations in Hitler’s early strategic and foreign policy analysis in *Mein Kampf* seem to fade with their integration into his 1928 unpublished sequel. The manuscript, edited by Gerhard Weinberg, was first published by the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich in 1961 under the title *Hitlers zweites Buch. Ein Dokument aus dem Jahr 1928*. This version appeared in English translation in 2003 as *Hitler’s Second Book: The Unpublished Sequel to Mein Kampf*, also with Weinberg as editor. In his Introduction, Weinberg describes the content of the book as mainly about Hitler’s obsession with Germany’s struggle for *Lebensraum* in Europe as a question with combined geopolitical and racial content: “In history he sees only the struggle for *Lebensraum*, based on the rules of racial determinism. . . In the present and the future, Hitler sees and proclaims the fight against the Jews and for the acquisition of territory in the East. These were his primary ideas throughout his life.”<sup>31</sup> Of course, these ideas were not new in Hitler’s mind in 1928, as he had aired them for the most

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*    <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 672–675.

<sup>28</sup> See Schubert, *Anfänge nationalsozialistischer Aussenpolitik*, 81.

<sup>29</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 611.    <sup>30</sup> See Henke, *England in Hitlers politischem Kalkül*, 21–27.

<sup>31</sup> Weinberg, *Hitler’s Second Book*, xxi–xxii.

part just a few years earlier in *Mein Kampf*. Moreover, he also wrote in the “Second Book” that he had long advocated within the National Socialist movement “. . .the idea of an alliance between Germany, Italy, and England. . .”<sup>32</sup> But, as Weinberg observes, the very fact that not much that was new had emerged in Hitler’s thinking during the eight years between 1925 and his appointment as Reich Chancellor in 1933 is significant in itself. Indeed, his overall geopolitical and ideological aims remained more or less fixed in his mind and consistent in his long-term planning, even if the formulation and implementation of policies designed to ultimately achieve those aims required improvisation and timely adaptation to the realities on the ground.

In section 13 of the manuscript, designated by the editor as chapter 13 with the title “The Possible Goals,” (*Die möglichen Ziele*) Hitler outlines four possibilities that had already become evident in his thinking by the time of the publication of *Mein Kampf*. Besides pushing for a restoration of Germany’s 1914 borders, he also imagined that: “Germany decides to adopt a clear, farsighted policy of space. . .and. . .concentrates instead all of its strength on marking out a way of life for our people through the allocation of adequate *Lebensraum* for the next one hundred years. Because this space can lie only in the East, the obligation of a naval power takes a back seat. . .”<sup>33</sup> He reasons that a foreign policy that initially renounces global ambitions would preclude bringing Germany into conflict with Britain and Italy, although France would in any case remain Germany’s enemy: “. . .the nature of such a foreign policy goal does not give reason for England and especially Italy to maintain the enmity of the Great War.”<sup>34</sup>

Elsewhere in the manuscript, Hitler reasserts his conviction that a foreign policy based clearly and exclusively on the expansion of German *Lebensraum* in Europe alone, and on a rejection of the Kaiser’s prewar global ambitions, would remove any British doubts about the future benefits of an alliance with a new Germany. For instance, he writes: “If. . .Germany arrives at a fundamental political reorientation that. . .instead limits itself to continental goals, then there is no longer a logical basis for English hostility.”<sup>35</sup> Similarly, as he had done with regard to Germany’s future relationship with Great Britain, he devotes much of chapter 15 to his earlier rationalizations about future German-Italian cooperation and alliance. Here too he identifies France as Italy’s natural enemy. Indeed, until the final Allied expulsion of Axis troops from North Africa in May 1943, Hitler maintained the position he outlined in the “Second Book” that: “The natural area for Italian expansion is and remains the land bordering the Mediterranean Sea.”<sup>36</sup> After reiterating that France would never accept Italy becoming a dominant Mediterranean power, Hitler concluded: “What the Mediterranean Sea is for Italy, the eastern shore of the Baltic is for

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 158<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 172–173.<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 177–178.

Germany. Germany's mortal enemy in any further development... is France, which is likewise the mortal enemy of Italy."<sup>37</sup>

This study does not attempt to definitively determine which of the two, Great Britain or Italy, was dominant in Hitler's early foreign policy thinking or, for that matter, in his planning after 1933. It is sufficient here to note that each played an important role in the formulation of Nazi geopolitical considerations and foreign policy from the early years of the movement to the collapse of the Axis position in North Africa and of Mussolini's regime in the summer and fall of 1943. Indeed, a consequence of the rapidly changing circumstances on the ground before and especially after January 30, 1933 was the often improvisational nature of much of Nazi domestic and foreign policy. That is to say, the tendency to improvise in Nazi policy making did not necessarily mean the permanent sacrifice of core components of Nazi ideology and its ultimate goals. This was certainly true in the evolution of Jewish policy after 1933, as distinct from Nazi racial ideology; it was especially true in the evolution of Nazi foreign policy, particularly with regard to the Mediterranean area and the Middle East. Neither power-political requirements on the ground, nor the ideological foundations of National Socialism, were entirely absent from the regime's internal debates and considerations; rather, at any given time one or the other might take precedence in the formulation of policy. This will be evident in Hitler's approach to the Middle East in the early years of Nazi rule, as well as during the years before and after the outbreak of war in 1939.

#### RACE AND "COLONIAL PEOPLES"

A brief reference to Hitler's early recognition of race as a factor in his developing attitude toward Britain and its empire has already been made. A few examples of those references are instructive at this point. In his April 17, 1920 speech at the Hofbräuhaus, Hitler seemed to temper his resentment of the British with a positive recognition of the global British Empire. He ascribed its power, scope, and longevity to several factors, using an apparently racial context and framework. He marveled that as a small state with a relatively small population of its own, England had been able to establish its control over more than one-fifth of the earth's land surface. He attributed this primarily to the determination of the English people to maintain its racial purity in the colonies, and asserted that, "The Englishman has always understood that he must be master, and not brother."<sup>38</sup> By the time of the publication of *Mein Kampf* in 1925, Great Britain's racial value as a prospective German ally seemed as fixed in Hitler's mind as its strategic and political value. While recognizing the quality of England's superior armaments and its soldiers,

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>38</sup> Phelps, "Hitler als Parteiredner," 297.

Hitler referred to another factor in the survival of the British Empire: "...but the valuable blood of the entire nation comes to the fore..."<sup>39</sup>

By 1925, Hitler seemed to have developed a level of contempt for the colonial peoples of Africa and Asia, and their developing movements for self-determination and independence. From time to time, he dismissed these movements as pure fantasy. For instance, he wrote: "For the attempt through a 'League of the Oppressed Nations' to be able to disarm the all-powerful victors is not only laughable, but also pernicious."<sup>40</sup> It is unlikely that Hitler was alluding here to the futility of any German effort to achieve its aims peacefully through the League of Nations, or to the strength of the British Empire following the First World War; rather it is likely that he was dismissing the efforts of anticolonial movements throughout Asia and the Middle East to achieve independence from European colonial rule. In particular, he creates a racial framework in his approach to the question of Anglo-German friendship and cooperation that is utterly contemptuous of those independence movements against British imperial rule. He scorns as childish and incomprehensible statements in 1920 and 1921 by those in *völkisch* circles who, after listening to "Asian charlatans" (*asiatische Gaukler*), had argued that England was facing a collapse in India.<sup>41</sup> He reiterates that the English people were always aware of the absolute central importance of India in the British Empire, and that statements about the pending collapse of British rule in India are proof of the utter ignorance of some Germans with regard to Britain's ability to maintain its strength and control over its empire. He concluded:

England will lose India only if it falls victim to racial degeneration within its own administrative machinery...or if it is compelled to by the sword of a powerful enemy. Indian rebels will, however, never achieve this. We Germans have learned well enough how hard it is to force England. Entirely aside from the fact that as a German, I would, despite everything, still rather see India under English rule than under some other rule.<sup>42</sup>

On the same page in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler alludes to the futility of Egyptian efforts to achieve independence from Great Britain. He writes positively of the racial basis of British rule in Egypt since 1882, and then goes on to describe as equally pitiful the views expressed by some in the same *völkisch* circles in Germany that Egyptian unrest and demands for independence might be successful. He argues:

It is simply impossible for a coalition of cripples to defeat a powerful state determined, if need be, to shed its last drop of blood for its existence. As a *völkisch* man, who estimates the value of humanity according to racial principles, I may not, simply because of my knowledge of their racial inferiority, link my own nation's fate with that of these so-called 'oppressed nations.'<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 149.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 654.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 654–655.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 655.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*



Hitler's obvious focus on power-political relations among the European powers did not mean that he lost sight of the racial foundations of his emerging foreign policy. He seemed to stress race as the most significant component of the strength and worth of a people, even more important than the quantity and level of technology of modern weapons and the size and power of modern armies. He wrote: "Nothing is easier to replace than the loss of weapons, and every form of organization can be recreated or renewed. What is irreplaceable is the corrupted blood of a people – the destroyed inner quality."<sup>44</sup> After asserting that the intrinsic value of peoples is not the same, he noted: "The higher the racial worth of a people, the greater its overall value, [through] which in conflict and in the struggle with other peoples, it must then be mobilized for the benefit of its life."<sup>45</sup> In his "Second Book," Hitler ascribes the greatness of the Roman and British Empires to the combination of the highest genetic quality and clear political objectives; he then warns against the mixing of blood and the consequent decline of racial quality as a key component in the fall of world powers. In concluding his integration of power-political and racial-ideological principles, he laid out eight "Principles of German Foreign Policy" (*Grundsätze der deutschen Außenpolitik*), the seventh of which stipulated that "Germany should never hope to be able to make world history through alliances with peoples whose military worth is inferior – this being adequately identified through the fact of their previous defeat or their general racial significance."<sup>46</sup> This position is instructive for the later discussion of Nazi Germany's Middle East policy beginning in 1933.

Finally, it is important to note that Hitler's emphasis in his writings in the mid to late 1920s on German continental hegemony and the achievement of German living space in Europe as a foundation for Anglo-German cooperation in no way reflected a permanent rejection of the pursuit of *Weltpolitik*. This was clearly implied in *Mein Kampf*, mentioned earlier, when he referred to race as the ultimate logic of European domination of the colonial peoples of the world, as well as in speeches during the several years before his appointment as Reich Chancellor.<sup>47</sup> In his "Second Book," moreover, a specific "power-political" rationalization emerged in Hitler's thinking that would ostensibly permit Germany, with British approval, to move beyond its strictly continental position in Europe to one that would be more global in scope. When he wrote: "...wherever our success ends, it will only be the jump-off point for a new struggle,"<sup>48</sup> one might then apply Hitler's "logic" to sometime in the future when, having consolidated its hegemony in central and eastern Europe, Germany would then set out in the pursuit of some sort of *Weltpolitik*. As mentioned earlier, the key to this evolution from a *Kontinentalpolitik* to a

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.    <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 32–33.    <sup>46</sup> Weinberg, *Hitler's Second Book*, 154.

<sup>47</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 653–661. See also Thies, *Architekt*, 52–56.

<sup>48</sup> Goda, *Tomorrow the World: Hitler, Northwest Africa, and the Path toward America*, xvii.



*Weltpolitik*, in alliance with Great Britain, was likely in Hitler's view the emerging global power of the United States. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler had already alluded to an alleged American threat to the British Empire and by extension to Europe:

All the kinship connections, however, cannot prevent a certain feeling of envious concern in England for the growth of the American Union in all fields of international economic and power politics. A new mistress of the world seems to be growing out of the former colonial country, the child of the great mother. It is understandable if England today re-examines her former alliances in anxious disquiet...<sup>49</sup>

In his "Second Book," Hitler continued to raise the specter of the United States as a significant threat to Britain and its global empire, one that was every bit as dangerous as France and Russia. He referred to "...the significance of the menacing American hegemonic position..." and to a solution in which "...the only state that will be able to stand up to North America will be the state that has understood how...to raise the racial value of its people and bring it into the most practical national form for this purpose."<sup>50</sup> For Hitler, the implication here was that Germany's future strategic interests would indeed become global in nature, in part within a context of Anglo-German cooperation against a new, global threat from the United States: "If England itself remains true to its great international political aims, then its potential adversaries in Europe will be France and Russia, and in the rest of the world in the future especially the American union."<sup>51</sup>

Hitler's foreign policy inclinations were relatively fixed before January 30, 1933. Both power-political and racial-ideological considerations were not merely interchangeable. They were the two sides of a single coin that involved an initial, albeit temporary, renunciation of global interest and ambition in favor of an exclusively Europe-centered policy of expanded German domination and living space in eastern Europe at the expense of the new Soviet Union. It also identified France as an implacable enemy of the German people, and both Great Britain and Italy as Germany's future allies, based on the inherent strategic competition and conflict of British and Italian imperial interests with those of France. Furthermore, Hitler also identified the expanding ambitions of the United States as an emerging global power that would, ultimately, come into conflict with the interests of Britain, Germany, and indeed with all of Europe. Generally, this would amount to the maintenance of existing European empires with as yet undefined changes in the configuration of colonial boundaries that would likely benefit Italy and Great Britain. This would not necessarily mean the dismantling of the French empire, nor exclude an as yet undefined German colonial presence. A preliminary definition would soon be provided

<sup>49</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 633–634.

<sup>50</sup> Weinberg, *Hitler's Second Book*, 114–116.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

after Hitler's assumption of power by Nazi demands in 1936 for the return of at least some, if not all, of Germany's pre-1914 colonial empire in Africa.

This fusion of power politics and racial ideology in Hitler's thinking are clearly evident in his speech to the Düsseldorf Industrieklub on January 27, 1932, just one year before his appointment as Reich Chancellor. Speaking to an audience of industrialists, he stressed the importance of reestablishing and improving Germany's competitive position in world trade, within the larger context of his strategic calculations and his approach to a new German foreign policy as it had evolved in his mind since the earliest days of the NSDAP. Toward the end of this very long speech, he seemed to hint at the two phases of his approach to Germany's future foreign policy with the following remark: "It is wrong to say: world politics, the position in the world alone determined Germany's fate in the sixteenth century. No, our internal situation back then had helped to shape the picture of the world, under which we later so dearly suffered: the division of the world without Germany."<sup>52</sup> These words were uttered just after Hitler's lament in that speech that the religious wars between Protestants and Catholics in Germany had prevented the German *Volk* from assuming its rightful place in Europe and the world, as part of the domination of the world by the "white race." Thus, nation/race is posited here as a critical missing element in Germany's unfortunate past, and a matter of absolute necessity if Germany was to attain its rightful place in the world in the future. Indeed, in much of the speech, Hitler argued that a new Germany, grounded in principles and policies that would protect and enhance the racial purity of the German people, would have to play its part in the continued domination of the world by the "white race": "We have the so-called white race that, since the end of antiquity, has established its preeminent position in the world for the past thousand years."<sup>53</sup> With an audience consisting mainly of industrialists, Hitler insisted in the speech that the economic domination of the world by the "white race" was the natural consequence of its racial superiority, a superiority that enabled Europe and America to create a world economic system "...that is characterized by gigantic central factories in Europe and lately in America, and by huge export markets and sources of raw materials in the rest of the world."<sup>54</sup> He concluded his speech by differentiating himself from the current German government in terms of the best way to build a better future for Germany. As vitally important as his strategic and foreign policy ideas were in this speech, and had been since the early years of the movement, Hitler once again returned to domestic affairs and his fantasies about preserving a healthy *Volkskörper* (racial community) at home: "Therefore, contrary to the official government, I see the means to Germany's rebirth not in the primacy of

<sup>52</sup> Max Domarus (ed.), *Hitler. Reden und Proklamationen 1932–1945*, 4th Ed., Vol. I (Leonberg: Pammlinger & Partner Verlagsgesellschaft, 1973), 82.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 74–75.      <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

German foreign policy, but in the primacy of the rebirth of a healthy, national and strong German people.”<sup>55</sup>

There are many other examples of the centrality of race in Hitler’s racial view of the world, and generally the role of Nazi racial ideology in the strategic calculations and foreign policy of the Third Reich. This view, no doubt shared by most within the Nazi party hierarchy, was likewise generally shared in the educated and established elites in government, the universities, and the professions, in Germany as elsewhere, during the interwar years. It was a view of modern society and the world that, in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler actually accuses the bourgeoisie of not sharing, one that reflected his and the larger society’s race-based and Social Darwinist conviction that the “strong” must prevail over the “weak.”<sup>56</sup> In this context, according to Hitler, the so-called colonial peoples of the world naturally must be ruled by the “white” nations of Europe and North America. In *Mein Kampf*, he mocks the bourgeoisie for permitting the occasional person of African descent to become a lawyer, a teacher, a clergyman, or even an opera tenor, and, of course, explains this as the result of the manipulation of the Jew who seeks “. . .to construe from this a new proof of the correctness of his theory of the ‘equality of men’ which he intends to instill into the nations.”<sup>57</sup> He condemns the idea of trying to educate non-whites for responsible positions as a “. . .sin against reason. . .a criminal absurdity to train a born half ape until one believes a lawyer has been made of him. . .”<sup>58</sup> He then bemoans the fact that millions of proletarian members of the racially and culturally superior “white” race are condemned to the most menial labor “. . .while Hottentots and Zulu Kafirs are trained for intellectual vocations.”<sup>59</sup> Although Hitler did not make these observations within the context of European colonial empires, it would no doubt be applicable to his assessment of colonial peoples and their growing movements for independence in the world after the First World War.

Hitler’s ideas about the racial justification for European colonial empires were also evident in some of his statements during the years following his assumption of power in January 1933. For instance, in a public speech before a Nazi student rally in Munich in January 1936, Hitler made the following call for continued “white” domination of the world: “. . .and when we consider this peculiar historical picture today, then we can only comprehend it if we are determined to employ the eternal organizational drive of the white race, that is, this natural conviction that this white race has been ordained to govern, to lead and to rule the rest of the world.”<sup>60</sup> Other notables in the Nazi state after 1933 also referred time and again to the racial foundations of National Socialism’s

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>56</sup> Eberhard Jäckel and Axel Kuhn (eds.), *Hitler. Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen, 1905–1924* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags Anstalt, 1980), 887.

<sup>57</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 423. <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 424.

<sup>60</sup> BArch: NS/26–60, Rede Hitlers vor dem NS-Studentenbund in München am 26. Januar 1936.

view of the world beyond the confines of the European continent. For instance, Alfred Rosenberg spoke of European racial solidarity in the face of growing independence movements in Africa and Asia during the interwar years, while Joachim von Ribbentrop's promotion of an Anglo-German alliance during his term as German ambassador to London was often couched in notions of racial and Germanic kinship between Anglo-Saxons and Germans.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, as Germany's head of state, Hitler did receive political leaders and other personalities from non-Western states, many of which were still not free of European influence and control. As we shall see in the following chapters, several of these personalities were from the Arab world.

Hitler's racial view of the world and that of other Nazi officials during the Third Reich must also be considered within the context of Germany's wartime propaganda to the Arab world. It was a propaganda that trumpeted themes of common interests uniting the German and Arab peoples, and the need for close cooperation against their common enemies.<sup>62</sup> For example, on several occasions, German leaders seemed to place Amin al-Husayni, the pro-Axis Grand Mufti of Jerusalem who lived in exile in Berlin and Rome between 1941 and 1945, both racially apart from, as well as part of, the Arab people. They commented on his ostensible "Aryan" appearance, yet ascribed to him a "scheming intelligence." In July 1942, for example, Hitler commented on his one meeting with the Mufti eight months earlier that, "With his blonde hair and blue eyes, he gives the impression, despite his shrew-like face, of a man whose ancestors were more likely to have been Aryans, and who perhaps is descended from the best Roman blood. . . In sheer intelligence he almost comes close to the Japanese."<sup>63</sup> On April 26, 1944, almost a year after the total defeat of the Axis in North Africa, Joseph Goebbels remarked in his diary after a meeting with the Mufti, "This Grand Mufti makes a very good impression on me. One might almost believe that it is about his completely Nordic appearance."<sup>64</sup> Notwithstanding Germany's military collapse in the Middle East and North Africa in May 1943, followed by the surrender and developing Allied occupation of Italy in the fall, and the Wehrmacht's defeats and increasingly defensive posture on the Eastern Front, Goebbels still entertained al-Husayni's efforts to impress upon him the value of some 400 million Muslim Arabs to the German war effort and Germany's need to improve its propaganda toward the Arabs. On the following day, however, the only observation that Goebbels saw fit to write in his diary was: "The Führer has the same impression of the Grand Mufti

<sup>61</sup> See for example BArch:Sammlung Schumacher, 124, "Die kulturelle und politische Mission der vier europäischen Großmächte, Rede von Alfred Rosenberg, 30. Oktober 1937; Aigner, *Das Ringen um England*, 13.

<sup>62</sup> See Gensicke, *Der Mufti von Jerusalem*, 62–63.

<sup>63</sup> See Hitler's comment of July 2, 1942 in Henry Picker (ed.), *Hitlers Tischgespräche im Führerhauptquartier. Hitler, wie er wirklich war* (Stuttgart: Seewald Verlag, 1983), 403–404.

<sup>64</sup> Fröhlich, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, Teil II, Bd. 12, 188–189.

of Jerusalem as I have. He considers him to be a descendant of the crusaders, and he also looks like one.”<sup>65</sup>

It is not within the scope of this study to consider race and geopolitics in the Nazi quest for German *Lebensraum* in eastern Europe, and its application within the context of the German invasion of the Soviet Union and Hitler's quest for a racial new order (*rassische Neuordnung*) in Europe. This would include mass murder of the Jews, the Roma and Sinti, and, ultimately perhaps, the Slavic peoples of eastern Europe. However, it should be remembered that North Africa and the Middle East represented a large area, in very close geographic proximity to Europe, one in which German troops were for a brief time militarily engaged and even more briefly on the verge of what appeared in 1942 to be a military victory. Therefore, Germany was theoretically in a position to apply National Socialist racial principles to the populations living in the region, a significant minority of whom were Jews, and the overwhelming majority of whom were Arabs. It is also clear that, had the Axis won the war, Germany ultimately would have included the Jews in the Arab world in the “final solution,” the physical annihilation of the Jews that had become a central element in its war in Europe. It is, of course, unlikely that the same fate would have befallen the Arabs. However, given the absence of defined German colonial ambitions in the Middle East and North Africa, and the reality of Italian, French, and continuing British imperial interests in the Arabic-speaking world, it is equally unlikely that Hitler would have supported Arab independence and the termination of European colonial rule in any meaningful way. It is certainly true that one can find almost anything when reading Hitler's *Mein Kampf* or his “Second Book,” including the many references cited earlier to his belief in the “racial” inferiority of the colonial peoples of the world, as well as to the desirability of European or “white” hegemony in the world. Indeed, this view of the world was evident in Hitler's indecision over the British military campaign against the short-lived pro-Axis al-Gaylani regime in Iraq in May 1941. Goebbels notes in his diary entry for May 9, 1941: “The Führer rightly does not expect much fighting ability from the Arabs. They don't possess the nerves and the intelligence to use modern weapons.”<sup>66</sup> The centrality of Nazi racial ideology has been overwhelmingly acknowledged and accepted in explanations of Nazi policy in Germany and the rest of occupied Europe during the Second World War, with the connections often made to statements and actions by Hitler and other Nazi officials before and after 1933. One must assume, therefore, that had the Axis powers been militarily successful in the Mediterranean area during the war, those earlier references to race and to colonial peoples in North Africa and the Middle East, that is, to Arabs, would have likewise played an important role at some point and in some manner in the formulation and implementation of German and Axis policy.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>66</sup> Fröhlich, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, Teil I, Bd. 9, 301.

## Germany and the Arab World, 1933–1937

### HITLER'S "ENGLANDPOLITIK"

When Hitler became Germany's new Reich Chancellor on January 30, 1933, he possessed some basic outline of a foreign policy that he had articulated in his speeches and writings beginning in the early 1920s. It had evolved into a more comprehensive and ambitious program than the very limited goal of revising the Versailles Treaty, as demanded in the National Socialist Party Program of February 1920.<sup>1</sup> Hitler's approach represented a combination of some of the trends in early Nazi thinking with regard to a future German foreign policy. Some emphasized the restoration of Germany's prewar borders and its colonial empire, by war if necessary. This approach was advocated by people such as Ritter von Epp, Hermann Göring, and a few others. Some, such as Alfred Rosenberg and Walter Darré, demanded a *Blut und Boden* (Blood and Soil) approach that seemed to reject the pursuit of overseas colonies in favor of a large continental empire in central and eastern Europe, one that would come at the expense of Russia, but possibly in alliance with Great Britain.<sup>2</sup> Hitler's earlier thinking for the most part reflected the first tendency, one in which he demanded the restoration of Germany's prewar boundaries and at least some of its former colonial empire, with the unity of the German *Volk* in one "Greater Germany" in central Europe. Initially, there was little evidence of notions of *Lebensraum* in eastern Europe in his geopolitical calculations. Given the outcome of the First World War and the content of the Versailles Treaty, part of Hitler's early approach of necessity included hostility toward both France and Britain as Germany's *Erbfeinde*, enemies that he believed were determined to deny Germany its rightful claims.<sup>3</sup> In 1921, for instance, Hitler also

<sup>1</sup> Kuhn, *Hitlers aussenpolitisches Programm*, 11–12.      <sup>2</sup> See Hildebrand, *Foreign Policy*, 12–13.

<sup>3</sup> See Phelps, "Hitler als Parteiredner," 290, 297–298, 308.

concluded that Britain had come under the control of “world Jewry.”<sup>4</sup> His position on Great Britain and its role in Germany’s future geopolitical and foreign policy calculations would have to change as he gravitated to the much more ambitious undertaking of expanding German living space into eastern Europe. He now concluded that this would ultimately mean war against France and the new Soviet Union, a reality that would place Britain in a new and very different position than had been the case in his earlier geopolitical outlook.

It is difficult to discern precisely at which point in the early years of the Nazi movement Hitler’s attitude toward Britain began to change. In his brief article “Why did an 8th November have to come?” (*Warum mußte ein 8. November kommen?*), published in the monthly journal *Deutschlands Erneuerung* in Munich in 1924, Hitler referred to the possible benefits of an Anglo-German alliance.<sup>5</sup> In 1932, in a letter to Reichswehr General Walter von Reichenau, he wrote that he had favored an alliance with Great Britain for twelve years.<sup>6</sup> Of course, Alfred Rosenberg’s influence on Hitler, of some importance in the early years of the movement, was a likely factor, particularly with regard to Rosenberg’s conviction that Germany’s future lay in the conquest of *Lebensraum* in the East, the destruction of “Jewish-inspired” Bolshevism, and the consequent advisability of future alliances with Italy and Great Britain.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, as mentioned in the previous chapter, external events, particularly the Bolshevik victory in the Russian civil war in 1922, and the Ruhr crisis of 1923 in which Britain did not support France’s Ruhr occupation, likely made a significant impression on Hitler. In any case, these realities, along with the consequences of Mussolini’s march on Rome in 1922, encouraged Hitler to see both England and Italy as Germany’s possible allies against France and Russia in Europe. He also began to assume that British and Italian colonial and other rivalries with France would lead to the same result. All of this seemed to be set in Hitler’s mind by the publication of the second volume of *Mein Kampf* in 1925.<sup>8</sup> If one adds to this the racial content of Hitler’s developing attitude toward Britain, the British Empire, and the colonial peoples of Asia and Africa, as briefly outlined in the previous chapter, the role of Great Britain in the geopolitical calculations and foreign policy of a new Germany

<sup>4</sup> See *Völkischer Beobachter*, 29. Mai 1921.

<sup>5</sup> See Wolfgang Horn, “Ein unbekannter Aufsatz Hitlers aus dem Frühjahr 1924,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 16 (1968), 280–294.

<sup>6</sup> See Vogelsang, “Hitlers Brief an Reichenau,” 435. See again Luedecke, *I Knew Hitler*, 77.

<sup>7</sup> See Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Zukunftsweg einer deutschen Aussenpolitik* (München: Verlag Franz Eher Nachf., 1927), 20–21, 55. See also Ernst Piper, *Alfred Rosenberg. Hitlers Chefideologe* (München: Karl Blessing Verlag, 2005), 155, 163–164; Kuhn, *Hitlers aussenpolitisches Programm*, 57–58; and Schubert, *Anfänge nationalsozialistischer Aussenpolitik*, 133.

<sup>8</sup> See Jäckel, *Hitler’s Weltanschauung*, 35–36; Schubert, *Anfänge nationalsozialistischer Aussenpolitik*, 58 ff., 74–75; Kuhn, *Hitlers aussenpolitisches Programm*, 269.

under National Socialism was more or less set by the time Hitler assumed power on January 30, 1933.

With the enactment of the Enabling Law of March 24, 1933, Hitler was on his way to securing dictatorial power. He presided over a cabinet meeting on April 7 during which Germany's current and future foreign policy was on the agenda, and at which it was agreed by all that while a future understanding with France was not possible, good relations with both Britain and Italy were essential.<sup>9</sup> To secure an understanding with Britain, Hitler understood that, at least for the time being, he would have to forsake demands for the return of German colonies in Africa and the Pacific, as well as any inclination to build a large global navy as part of any future German rearmament program. This decision was reflected in the Anglo-German Naval Pact of June 18, 1935. It was an agreement that seemed to indicate Hitler's determination at the time to pursue a foreign policy based in part on some sort of accommodation, perhaps even a formal alliance, with Great Britain. Indeed, in an interview with the *Daily Telegraph* in May 1933, Hitler expressed his disinterest in overseas colonial ambitions in favor of German "interests" in eastern Europe: "The idea of overseas German expansion, as it existed before the war, has been given up. Germany should not seek to enter into a naval competition with England. The German destiny does not depend on colonies or dominions, but on its eastern borders."<sup>10</sup> In those early years, at least until 1935, Hitler tended to frame his pitch to the British government in terms of Germany's rejection of colonial acquisitions and global naval power, which was another way of signaling its public recognition and acceptance of the integrity and security of the British Empire throughout the world.

After two years of avoiding mention of German colonial claims, Hitler's government began to send signals in 1935 that at some point it would seek the return of at least some of Germany's former colonies. In March 1935, British Foreign Secretary Sir John Simon and Anthony Eden met with Hitler in Berlin. Without specifically mentioning eastern Europe or overseas colonies, Hitler described Germany's insufficient economic living space in central Europe, and the necessity of rectifying the situation in order to avoid future conflict.<sup>11</sup> But Hitler also emphasized the community of interests between Great Britain and Germany, and his hope that a special relationship between the two would be established immediately. It does not appear that he was moving away from the goal of an eventual alliance with Britain. He was, however, increasingly under pressure from some in his government, including Hjalmar Schacht, who advocated the return of some of Germany's former colonies for

<sup>9</sup> BArch: R/43-II, 1399, Ministerbesprechung über die aussenpolitische Lage am 7. April 1933.

<sup>10</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, May 5, 1933. Some of Hitler's comments to the interviewer can be found in the original German in Domarus, *Hitler*, Bd. 1, 265.

<sup>11</sup> ADAP: Serie C, Bd. III/2, Nr. 555. See also The Right Hon. Earl of Avon, *The Eden Memoirs. Facing the Dictators* (London: Cassell, 1962), 132–138.



its perceived economic benefit.<sup>12</sup> The push for colonial revisions became openly apparent in 1936 and 1937. In his speech of March 7, 1936, after the reoccupation of the Rhineland, as well as at the *Reichsparteitag* in September of that year, Hitler called for the return of former German colonies because of the Reich's need for more sources of food and raw materials.<sup>13</sup> In his recently uncovered diary, Alfred Rosenberg describes Hitler's position on colonies in September 1936 in the following way: "The Führer stressed that the colonial question is not one of prestige, but rather a purely economic one."<sup>14</sup> Yet, Hitler continued to stress the necessity of friendly relations with Great Britain and the desirability of an Anglo-German partnership. This seems evident in his guidelines for the pursuit of German colonial policy, sent to Ritter von Epp, the head of the Kolonialpolitisches Amt (Colonial Policy Office) of the National Socialist party, on November 25, 1935. Hitler cautioned: "...that the scale of the propaganda from all participating offices for our colonial goals be compatible with the direction of foreign policy."<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Hitler's appointment of Joachim von Ribbentrop, long an advocate for some form of Anglo-German accommodation, as German ambassador to London in 1936 was another indication of his continuing hopes for an understanding of some sort with the British government.<sup>16</sup> Rosenberg, the head of the Aussenpolitisches Amt der NSDAP, one of several foreign policy agencies within the Nazi party, had long been committed to an Anglo-German alliance. Except perhaps for the return of a former colony or two as sources for raw materials, Rosenberg and the APA argued that Germany should concentrate on eastern Europe and generally refrain from pursuing a *Weltpolitik* of any sort beyond the European continent. Rosenberg believed that, for both racial and strategic reasons, Great Britain was Germany's natural ally.<sup>17</sup>

At that cabinet meeting of April 7, 1933, Reich Foreign Minister von Neurath joined the chorus of those who doubted the possibility of a future understanding with France, and who advocated close relations with Great Britain. Von Neurath also raised doubts about German relations with

<sup>12</sup> BArch: R/43-I, 627, Schacht an Ritter von Epp, 19. März 1935.

<sup>13</sup> See Hildebrand, *Foreign Policy*, 39–43; and BArch: R/43-II, 991a, VIII. Reichsparteitag Nürnberg, 9. September 1936.

<sup>14</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (hereafter USHMM): The Alfred Rosenberg Diary, 17. September 1936, 69.

<sup>15</sup> BArch: R/43-I, 627, Der Staatssekretär und Chef der Reichskanzlei an den Reichsstatthalter in Bayern, Herrn Gen. Ritter von Epp, 25. November 1935.

<sup>16</sup> In his memoirs, Ribbentrop claimed that before he left to assume his post as German ambassador in London, Hitler gave him the following instructions: "Bring me the English alliance." See Joachim von Ribbentrop, *Zwischen London und Moskau. Erinnerungen und letzte Aufzeichnungen* (Leoni am Starnbergersee: Druffel Verlag, 1953), 93. See also Henke, *England in Hitlers politischem Kalkül*, 56.

<sup>17</sup> See Alfred Rosenberg, *Das Politische Tagebuch Alfred Rosenbergs aus den Jahren 1934–1935 und 1939–1940* (Göttingen: Musterschmidt Verlag, 1956), 4, 17, 20, 138–140. See also Jacobson, *Nationalsozialistische Aussenpolitik*, 45 ff.

Italy, a relevant question given the potential conflicts between Italian and British imperial interests in the Mediterranean area, Northeastern Africa, and even in the Red Sea and the Arabian Peninsula. As indicated in the previous chapter, Hitler was quite clear in both *Mein Kampf* and the “Second Book” that Britain and Italy were natural partners for a future National Socialist Germany. He had assumed that neither had conflicts with Germany, and that both were, like Germany, the natural enemies of France. He also assumed that Britain and Italy could themselves be natural allies with competing, but not necessarily conflicting, imperial interests. Echoing Hitler’s long-standing interest in an Italian-German alliance, von Neurath asserted the need for close cooperation with Italy; but, at the same time, he also stressed points of potential conflict between Berlin and Rome, especially in Austria.<sup>18</sup> The question arose, therefore, about the relative worth of Britain and Italy to Germany, especially given conflicting imperial interests between London and Rome in the Mediterranean and Red Sea regions, as well as the initial areas of concern in German-Italian relations after 1933. Indeed, conflicting British and Italian imperial interests were evident to Hitler with the crisis over Ethiopia in 1935.

Hitler’s overtures to Great Britain between 1933 and 1936 were not matched by similar efforts with regard to Italy.<sup>19</sup> There is some evidence that Hitler might have opted for the British over the Italians had London been more amenable to his gestures, even with Anglo-Italian differences and the potential for conflict in the Mediterranean and in northeastern Africa. Exchanges between the Foreign Office in Berlin and the German Embassy in Rome shortly after Hitler’s appointment as Reich Chancellor indicate that both recommended cooperation and friendly relations with Italy, but the avoidance of any sort of formal alliance.<sup>20</sup> At that early stage, the Foreign Office in Berlin felt that Germany was in a weak position vis-à-vis France, and that Italy would not be able to help Germany in case of hostilities on its western border. German-Italian tension over Austria in 1934, and the international crisis over Ethiopia in 1935, also shed some light on the relative worth of Britain and Italy in Hitler’s eyes during the first two years of the Third Reich. For instance, at the time of Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, Hitler’s adjutant, Fritz Wiedemann, claimed that Hitler predicted Italy would fail should Britain decide to militarily resist the invasion. According to Wiedemann, Hitler observed: “If I had a choice between Mussolini and the English, then of course I would go with the English. As much as Mussolini is more ideologically compatible with me, I know the English from the First World War. They are

<sup>18</sup> BArch: R/43-II, 1399, Ministerbesprechung über die aussenpolitische Lage am 7. April 1933.

<sup>19</sup> See Jens Petersen, *Hitler-Mussolini. Die Entstehung der Achse Berlin-Rom 1933–1936* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1973), 61 ff.

<sup>20</sup> See PA: Geheim Akten 1920–1936, Italien Pol. 2, Bd. 3, AA/Berlin (Köpke) an DB/Rom (v. Hassell), 20. Februar 1933; and DB/Rom (v. Hassell) an AA/Berlin (Köpke), 6. März 1933.

hardy chaps.”<sup>21</sup> Albert Speer also claims in his memoirs that Hitler preferred the British over the Italians if given the choice.<sup>22</sup> In the end, of course, London, while amenable to Anglo-German friendship and cooperation, was not willing to enter into any sort of formal accommodation or alliance with Hitler’s Germany. This would leave Hitler with little choice but to proceed with Italy alone. Nevertheless, he did not give up hope that one day Germany and Great Britain would come to some sort of understanding, perhaps even an alliance. In December 1937, State Secretary Ernst von Weizsäcker characterized German policy toward England within the context of the previous two years, especially with the recently concluded Rome-Berlin Axis in mind. He reasoned: “Under no circumstances can the line between Berlin and London be allowed to break. . . . But in the end, time will work for an improvement in German-English relations. Therefore, the Rome-Berlin Axis for the moment is useful and tactically expedient. . . . The Foreign Office will take advantage of every opportunity to promote German-English relations.”<sup>23</sup>

Hitler’s assumptions that Britain might support Nazi ambitions for continental hegemony and acquiesce in his regime’s police state terror and persecution of the Jews in Germany beginning in 1933 were obviously naïve and unrealistic.<sup>24</sup> Yet, before and even at times during the war, Hitler refused to accept that London would never acquiesce in significant changes in Europe through some sort of bilateral Anglo-German accommodation, as opposed to working through the framework of multilateral agreements and collective security. Indeed, the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935 turned out not to be the important step toward a much closer arrangement that Hitler had hoped it would be, and would never translate into British support for his plans to redraw the map of central and eastern Europe. In the fall of 1934, the German embassy in London delivered a list of impediments to improved Anglo-German relations to the Foreign Office in Berlin. Among other things, the report cited the events of June 30, 1934, recent violence in Austria, fears of German rearmament, persecution of the Jews, and political repression in general.<sup>25</sup> Yet, the only gestures that Hitler seemed prepared to offer the British

<sup>21</sup> See Fritz Wiedemann, *Der Mann der Feldherr Werden Wollte: Erlebnisse und Erfahrungen des Vorgesetzten Hitlers im Ersten Weltkrieg und seinen späteren persönlichen Adjutanten* (Velbert/Kettwig: Blick und Bild Verlag, 1964), 151.

<sup>22</sup> Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 71–72. See also Henke, *England in Hitlers politischem Kalkül*, 42–43. Speer claims that it was England’s decision not to resist the Italians in Ethiopia that convinced Hitler to reassess his strategies toward Italy and Britain, and to proceed with the Rome-Berlin Axis in 1936.

<sup>23</sup> PA: Dienststelle Ribbentrop, Vertrauliche Berichte 1935–1939, Teil I, Vortragsnotiz, Dezember 1937.

<sup>24</sup> For an account of the generally negative reaction to Nazi domestic policies in British political circles as well as in British society in general, see Oswald Hauser, *England und das Dritte Reich*, Bd. 1 (Stuttgart: Seewald Verlag, 1972), 261–265.

<sup>25</sup> See BArch: R/43-II, 1433, DB/London an AA/Berlin, A.3234, 12. September 1934.

were his repeated guarantees for the integrity and security of the British Empire, and the renunciation of contacts between his government and the Fascist movement in Britain. German rearmament, the expansion of German *Lebensraum* in Europe, authoritarianism and police state politics, and the separation, dispossession, and expulsion of the Jews from Germany remained at the core of National Socialist ideology and Nazi state policy beginning in 1933.

In late 1936, von Ribbentrop reported to Hitler that in spite of his efforts, Britain would not enter into a formal alliance with Germany.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, Britain's apparent acquiescence in the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, as well as in Italian and German intervention in the Spanish civil war, probably convinced Hitler that an active Anglo-German alliance, while still highly desirable, might not be necessary at that moment for Germany to move forward with its aims in Europe. An approach "without England" seems clear in Hitler's "Denkschrift zum Vierjahresplan," drawn up some time in August 1936. In it, Hitler reaffirmed Germany's need for *Lebensraum* in eastern Europe, and that the German economy and army must be ready for war within four years. He referred briefly to Italy and Japan as reliable friends of Germany, but made no mention at all of Great Britain.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, Hitler continued to make alliance overtures to the British in 1936 and 1937, but to no avail. By the end of 1937, he seemed to be resigned to achieving his aims in Europe without some sort of Anglo-German understanding, and perhaps even in spite of the possibility of British resistance. This was apparent at the infamous Reichskanzlei meeting of November 5, 1937, at which he once again outlined his regime's plans for possible war and the expansion of German *Lebensraum* in the East, and specifically the necessary initial steps with regard to Austria and Czechoslovakia.<sup>28</sup> For the first time since the early 1920s, he placed England in the same category as France, labeling both as *Haßgegner* (hateful opponents) who opposed a stronger Germany in the middle of Europe and overseas. Hitler also seemed to conclude that Britain would never agree to the return of Germany's former colonies, and even fantasized that the British would in fact be incapable of defending their far-flung empire in future wars. He concluded that Britain and France possessed neither the will nor the capacity to intervene in Germany's upcoming moves in central Europe and in its future conquests in the East. On the other hand, the minutes of the meeting reveal no inclination on Hitler's part to actually enter a war against Great Britain or to compromise in any way British imperial interests and security. It is likely that he had come to the conclusion that Germany must prepare to achieve its aims in Europe

<sup>26</sup> Henke, *England in Hitlers politischem Kalkül*, 77–78. Klaus Hildebrand characterized Ribbentrop's efforts in London as "the final clarification regarding Great Britain." See Hildebrand, *Vom Reich zum Weltreich*, 491–511.

<sup>27</sup> See Wilhelm Treue, "Hitlers Denkschrift zum Vierjahresplan," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 3 (1955), 204–210.

<sup>28</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. I, Nr. 19.

without England, and indeed, in the face of British opposition, after which London might then be brought into an accommodation with Germany through a *fait accompli*.

Discussions with soon-to-be British Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax at Berchtesgaden later in November 1937 revealed just how far apart the British and German governments were in bilateral Anglo-German relations in general, and in the specific issues inherent in Nazi ambitions in Europe.<sup>29</sup> Halifax's willingness to consider peaceful changes in Austria and Czechoslovakia was a far cry from Hitler's notion of an Anglo-German partnership that included British acceptance of German hegemony in Europe. On the matter of returning some of Germany's former colonies, Halifax was unwilling to promise much beyond the possibility of establishing one or two new German colonies somewhere in Africa or Asia. Halifax did observe later that Hitler expressed his total disinterest in colonial compensation in North Africa and the Mediterranean, due to existing and competing British, French, and Italian interests in the region.<sup>30</sup> This was perhaps indicative of Germany's relative disinterest, past and future, in the Arabic-speaking lands of North Africa and the Middle East.

None of this meant that Hitler's view of Great Britain and the British Empire had fundamentally changed or that he no longer desired Anglo-German collaboration or thought it necessary for the future. It did mean that Hitler was resolved to achieve his goals, at a minimum in Europe, in spite of British objections, after which Germany would be in a better position to make common cause with the British Empire in world affairs. It is also clear that none of the goals espoused by his regime with regard to Europe and beyond were intended to come at the expense of the security of the British Empire, at least in terms of Hitler's understanding of British imperial interests at that time. It is true that he publicly expressed his frustration and bitterness toward Britain following its declaration of war on Germany in the fall of 1939.<sup>31</sup> Yet even as late as the summer of 1940, when a German victory in Europe seemed a virtual certainty, Hitler continued to believe in the power and survivability of the British Empire. At a meeting with Mussolini in Munich in June 1940, as Germany's military victory over France was at hand, Hitler asserted that the British Empire must be preserved as a central element in the world balance of power. In his diary entry for June 18 and June 19, 1940, Italian Foreign Minister Count Galeazzo Ciano observed: "But Hitler makes many reservations on the desirability of demolishing the British Empire, which

<sup>29</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. I, Nr. 31.

<sup>30</sup> See Earl of Halifax, *Fullness of Days* (London: Collins, 1957), 187–188.

<sup>31</sup> For example, Hitler's November 8, 1939 speech at the Bürgerbräukeller in Munich amounted to a "tirade of hate" against Britain in general, and against Churchill in particular. See Piper, *Alfred Rosenberg*, 312. For more on the disappointment and resentment toward Britain in Hitler's government in 1939, see also USHMM: The Alfred Rosenberg Diary, 22 and 25 August 1939, 273, 275, and 3 December 1939, 337.

he considers, even today, to be an important factor in world equilibrium.”<sup>32</sup> At a meeting one month later, Hitler asserted: “If we defeat England militarily, the British Empire will collapse. But Germany has no interest in that outcome. With German blood, we would accomplish something the only beneficiaries of which would be Japan, America, and others.”<sup>33</sup>

Hitler’s placement of both Great Britain and Italy at the center of his geopolitical calculations during the approximately decade and a half between the publication of *Mein Kampf* in 1925 and the early years of the Second World War played a decisive role in his attitudes and policy toward the Arab world and its quest for independence from European imperial domination. Power politics and racial ideology would preclude for the most part any meaningful German diplomatic and material support for Arab national self-determination and independence from the European imperial powers between 1933 and the end of the Second World War. Notwithstanding the obvious wartime necessity for intense Nazi propaganda toward the Arab world between 1940 and 1945, propaganda that stressed Arab/Islamic/Axis solidarity against Bolshevism, the Anglo-Saxon powers, and the Jews, it is highly unlikely that an Axis victory would have resulted in the real sovereignty and independence for the Arab lands of the Middle East and North Africa.

#### ARAB OVERTURES, NAZI RESPONSES

In their study of the Third Reich, the Arabs, and Palestine, Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Martin Cüppers consider how the Arab populations throughout the Middle East and North Africa responded to National Socialism, Hitler’s regime, and its Jewish policy in Germany after 1933. They assert that: “Muslims from all countries in the general region, in particular from Palestine, consistently sought an alliance with Nazi Germany, which had for some time avoided playing the Arab card.”<sup>34</sup> The existence of significant pro-German and pro-Nazi sympathies in the Arab lands after 1933 represented in part a continuation of a general sympathy and even enthusiasm for Germany in the Arab lands after 1918. It was an attitude that in some ways saw Germany as a fellow victim of the settlements that followed the First World War, and that considered Germany historically as the only European great power that had not coveted Arab territory. Moreover, Mallmann and Cüppers characterize the Nazi regime’s attitude toward Arab nationalist movements and goals and toward Arab overtures for German assistance in their efforts to achieve independence from Britain, France, and Italy, as rather indifferent before 1939. However, they also conclude that, from the beginning

<sup>32</sup> Hugh Gibson (ed.), *The Ciano Diaries 1939–1943* (Safety Harbor: Simon Publications, 2001), 265.

<sup>33</sup> Hillgruber, *Hitlers Strategie*, 155.

<sup>34</sup> Mallmann and Cüppers, *Halbmond und Hakenkreuz*, 55.

of its rule in Germany, Hitler's regime viewed Arabs and Muslims as Germany's natural and future allies.<sup>35</sup>

This study departs from the conclusions of Mallmann and Cüppers on this latter point. It is true, as they suggest, that Hitler's approach to the Arab world evolved from one of relative distance before 1938 to one of closer engagement thereafter, one that further intensified during the war years. However, their tendency to see a fairly positive Nazi strategic and ideological assessment of the Arabs before the war, possibly as Germany's future allies, is highly questionable. To the contrary, this study sees Hitler's move toward the Arabs, beginning in the late 1930s and intensifying during the war, as largely superficial, and decidedly negative with regard to Arab ambitions. It points to the regime's tendency to improvise when the facts on the ground necessitated an unwelcome and temporary move in a particular direction, and to do so primarily in the regime's wartime propaganda to the Arab world. In the end, therefore, this study argues that the Arab-Nazi relationship between 1933 and the end of the Second World War, from the perspective of Hitler and his Nazi state, was and remained "ideologically and strategically incompatible."<sup>36</sup>

Given their the frustration, resentment, and hostility toward the post-World War I settlement in the Middle East, many Arab leaders and intellectuals greeted the new regime in Germany with enthusiasm early in 1933.<sup>37</sup> As observed in [Chapter 1](#), some Arab leaders had informed German officials in the immediate post-World War I years that Germany, unlike Great Britain, France, and Italy, was never an object of suspicion and hostility in the Arab world given the general perception among Arabs that Germany had never had colonial ambitions in the region. There were also some Arabs who sought to identify themselves with National Socialism, particularly with the Nazi movement's perceived discipline, order, national solidarity, strength, and political success. That some identified as well with Nazi hatred and persecution of the Jews in Germany was likely a reflection of their bitter opposition to the Jewish National Home and Jewish immigration into Palestine as well. All of this tended to promote the hope among some Arabs that Germany, as a "neutral bystander" in the postwar Middle East, might be a potential source of active support against the western powers and the Jewish National Home. The nationalist fervor of the Nazis, and their determination to eliminate the postwar settlement in Europe held considerable appeal for some Arabs who considered the mandate system a cover for an extended European imperial

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>36</sup> See Francis R. Nicosia, "Arab Nationalism and National Socialist Germany, 1933–1939: Ideological and Strategic Incompatibility," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12 (1980): 351–372.

<sup>37</sup> See for example the report of the German Consul-General in Jerusalem in March 1933 in PA: Pol.Abt.III, Politik 2-Palastina, Bd.I, DGK/Jerusalem an AA/Berlin, Nr.Polit. 3/33, 20. März 1933.



presence, and the implementation of the Balfour Declaration in the form of the Jewish National Home as part of the injustice of the postwar settlement in the Middle East. It is doubtful that the majority of Arabs really understood the comprehensive nature of National Socialism's racial world view, beyond its specific anti-Semitism and persecution of the Jews in Germany. Nor is it likely that most understood that the Nazi state would not be inclined to undermine European colonial rule over the Arab world.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, and with regard to the question of Palestine, many at least initially seemed to ignore the reality that the new Germany they admired so much was to a large degree responsible for the dramatic increase in the Jewish immigration into Palestine after 1933, a process that they adamantly opposed.

In Palestine, the views of the Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin al-Husayni, were conveyed to Berlin by Heinrich Wolff, appointed as the German consul general in Jerusalem in November 1932, in a Telegram on March 31, 1933. The Mufti left little doubt about his disdain for democracy and for the Jews at this relatively early stage, and about his eagerness to establish some sort of common ground between Arab and German national interests. As was his tendency throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the Mufti claimed to speak for all Arabs and Muslims in his talks with Wolff. After his meeting with the Mufti, Wolff reported to Berlin: "Today the Mufti told me that Muslims inside and outside of Palestine greet the new regime in Germany, and hope for the spread of Fascist and anti-democratic state authority to other lands. Current Jewish influence on the economy and on politics is damaging, and must be resisted..."<sup>39</sup> Wolff again met with the Mufti and other Palestinian notables almost a month later at Nebi Musa, in the mountains near the Dead Sea. After proclaiming their sympathy and admiration for the new Germany, the Mufti and his colleagues expressed their approval of Hitler's anti-Jewish policies, requesting only that the German government make every effort to prevent German Jews from reaching Palestine.<sup>40</sup> That there was some awareness among Arabs that the Germany to which they looked to for assistance was in fact a major cause of increased Jewish immigration into Palestine was not lost on the German Consul General in Jerusalem in his report to Berlin in October 1933: "The point of view can also move to the forefront, that the Arabs will begin to assign guilt to Germany for their unhappiness when they say that it is the Reich government that sends the Jews to this land."<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> See Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, 7–8.

<sup>39</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. III, Politik 2-Palästina, Bd. I, DGK/Jerusalem an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr.5, 31. März 1933.

<sup>40</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. IV-Kultur-Minderheiten, Nr.14, Bd. I, DGK/Jerusalem an AA/ Berlin, Nr.Polit. 24/33, 20. April 1933.

<sup>41</sup> PA: Botschaft Rom, Politik 3-Palastina, Bd.I, DGK/Jerusalem an AA/Berlin, Nr.Unr. 2/33, 30. Oktober 1933. In his annual review for the year 1933, Consul-General Wolfe nevertheless dismissed the Arabs as generally unable to recognize that Nazi Jewish policy was partially responsible for the rapid increase in Jewish immigration in Palestine in 1933. See PA: Botschaft



The generally positive responses to the Nazi assumption of power in Germany could be found in other Arab countries as well, according to reports reaching the Foreign Office and other government ministries in Berlin. The German Consulate in Beirut reported that it received letters of admiration for Hitler and support for the new Germany from various Arab leaders in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. Some suggested direct cooperation. One such proposal, from Sheik Rahhal Scheiban of Baalbeck in a letter to Adolf Hitler in July 1934, suggested: "I am ready, as I wrote to you earlier, to place at your disposal 100 riders with horses as soon as I receive a nod from you. . . We are always ready to stand at your service at the first nod that you give."<sup>42</sup> In the spring of 1934, Goebbels' Propaganda Ministry alerted the Foreign Office in Berlin that it had received reports from its sources throughout the Middle East that, "In all countries in the East I could happily ascertain that all the people, with the exception of the Jews, are following the developments in the new Germany with great sympathy and happiness."<sup>43</sup> The report goes on to describe the particular appeal of Fascism to the youth of the region who were in the process of trying to form anti-English and anti-French movements and organizations, and that everywhere people wished for a leader comparable to Adolf Hitler. It also mentioned that more people were reading German newspapers and suggested that appropriate propaganda in the region would be very useful for Germany. By the summer of 1935, however, the German Consul in Jaffa, Timotheus Wurst, attempted to describe the basis for Arab enthusiasm for the new Germany. In an attempt to provide a realistic context for understanding Arab enthusiasm for the Nazi state, Wurst wrote that, "Many of the local young Arabs sympathize with the Führer and Reich Chancellor, and the Nazi party, but that for the most part they have vague notions at best about the real meaning of Adolf Hitler and the goals of the NSDAP."<sup>44</sup> Wurst observed that this pro-German sympathy was often based on the Nazi persecution of the Jews in Germany, which in Palestine was of particular significance, and that others, especially those in nationalist movements, were more attracted to the idea of building movements in the Middle East that would be similar to the NSDAP and would enjoy similar success. That "success," of course, could only be achieved within the context of Arab states achieving independence from European colonial rule. Wurst also mentioned that his consulate had been regularly approached with requests for German advice and support for building such movements in the Arab world.

Rom, Politik 3-Palastina, Bd.1, DGK/Jerusalem an AA/Berlin, Nr.Polit. 3/34, "Politische Übersicht über das Jahr 1933," 15. Januar 1934. In spite of this, Wolf recorded that Arab leaders in Palestine accorded Hitler and the new Germany considerable enthusiasm and support.

<sup>42</sup> PA: Pol.Abt.III, Politik 2-Palästina, Bd.2, Der St.S. in der Reichskanzlei an AA/Berlin, RK.6878, 2. August 1934.

<sup>43</sup> PA: Pol.Abt.III, Politik 2-Palästina, Bd.2, Promi an AA/Berlin, VII/7074/16.3.34, 10. April 1934. The author of this report in the Propaganda Ministry is not known.

<sup>44</sup> PA: Pol.Abt.III, Politik 26-Palästina, Bd. I, DK/Jaffa an AA/Berlin, J.N. 4043/35, 14. August 1935.

Wurst was not the only German diplomat in the region to receive such requests. Similar manifestations of friendship and enthusiasm for Nazi Germany were followed by attempts to secure German material support for the Arab cause in Palestine and elsewhere in the Middle East. Some Arabs solicited money and weapons from Germany for use against Britain, France, and the Jewish National Home in Palestine. Pro-German tendencies, especially the mandate territories of Palestine, Syria and the former Mandate of Iraq, remained strong and consistent throughout the 1930s, and during the years of the Second World War. By no means does this mean that sympathy among Arabs for Hitler, National Socialism, and the events in Germany after 1933 was characteristic of all or even most Arabs and their organizations and institutions in the region. It merely confirms that these attitudes and activities existed among some Arabs. It also signifies that the German government was confronted with that reality as it attempted to formulate and implement its foreign policy in the region.

In Jerusalem, Consul General Wolff was rather contemptuous of the Arabs and their efforts to secure German financial and military assistance against the French in Syria in the summer of 1933. With regard to these requests, he reported to Berlin: “Of the behavior of the Arabs, one can only say that it is always the same thing. . . . In such circumstances I always think about a conversation between the famous Lawrence from the war and Dr. Arlossoroff who, before he was murdered not long ago, told me that Lawrence once talked to him about the Arabs as follows: ‘I don’t know how one can take the Arabs seriously. I know them well. It is not worth the effort.’”<sup>45</sup> Wolff exhibited a similar attitude in response to Arab requests in June 1934 for German diplomatic support for the Arab cause in Palestine and elsewhere in the region. In early July, he reported to Berlin that he answered these requests in his usual way, namely that Germany was not in a position to provide financial or arms support, but that the Reich, as always, extended “. . . to the Arabs and their interests great sympathy and moral support. . . .”<sup>46</sup> In the same report to Berlin, Wolff cautioned that, “Probably everyone who has the opportunity to observe Arab politics must in time become always more skeptical.”<sup>47</sup>

Wolff was, to be sure, a diplomat who had been very sympathetic to Jewish immigration into Palestine and the initial establishment and subsequent development of the Jewish National Home.<sup>48</sup> But his indifference to Arab nationalism and national self-determination, and his views on German interests

<sup>45</sup> PA: HaPol Abt., Handakten Clodius-Palastina, DGK/Jerusalem an AA/Berlin, Nr.Polit.III/33, 25. August 1933.

<sup>46</sup> PA: Pol.Abt.III, Politik 11, Bd.I, DGK/Jerusalem an AA/Berlin, Nr.Polit. 55/34, “Politisches Programm des Emirs für seine Besprechungen in London,” 7. Juli 1934.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> See Francis R. Nicosia and Christopher Browning, “Ambivalenz und Paradox bei der Durchsetzung der NS-Judenpolitik. Heinrich Wolff und Wilhelm Melchers,” in *Widerstand und Auswärtiges Amt. Diplomaten gegen Hitler*, Jan Erik Schulte und Michael Wala, eds. (München: Siedler Verlag, 2013), 199–209.

in the Middle East in general, reflected the positions of his superiors in the German Foreign Office in Berlin during the 1930s. An interesting example of official German indifference to the Arab cause during this period occurred during the visit to Berlin of Amir Schekib Arslan in November 1934. Arslan lived in Geneva and was the editor of the newspaper *La Nation Arabe*, which was published there. A strong Arab nationalist, he was a leading spokesperson in Europe for the cause of Arab independence. Arslan, a Syrian, was especially hostile to France and French colonial rule in Syria and Lebanon, as well as in North Africa. He wanted to use Franco-German and Franco-Italian friction to win over both Germany and, rather naively, Italy for the cause of Arab independence. Arslan went to Berlin in the fall of 1934 hoping to see Hitler. However, he was unable to get past Curt Prüfer of the Near East Department in the German Foreign Office. During his talks with Prüfer, Arslan suggested that Germany would eventually have to align itself with the Arab world, and noted that Syria, Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, as countries under French colonial rule, would be Germany's natural allies. In response, Prüfer warned Arslan that the kind of collaboration he was proposing could involve Germany in a war for which it was neither inclined nor prepared. In his report to his superiors regarding his conversation with Arslan, submitted on November 7, 1934, Prüfer drew on Germany's experience in the Middle East in the First World War. He counseled:

"Germany cannot in an emergency support the Arabs with money or weapons. . . The experience of the war has demonstrated that in spite of our alliance with the leading Islamic power and in spite of our already existing intensive propaganda in Islamic lands before the war, we did not succeed in igniting the so-called 'holy war' among Muslims and especially among Arabs. I do not believe that it would serve any practical purpose to take up the Amir's suggestions."<sup>49</sup>

Prüfer's report was approved by Foreign Minister von Neurath, who agreed with Prüfer's suggestion that Arslan be denied an audience with high government officials and with Hitler. The Reich Chancellery in turn concurred with the views of both von Neurath and Prüfer.

During the 1930s, much of the initiative in the movement for national self-determination for all Arabs came from Syria and Palestine. Since Egypt and Iraq had been granted nominal independence by England in 1922/1936, and 1930 respectively, and the territory in the Arabian peninsula that officially became the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932 had managed to retain some degree of independence after the First World War, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Transjordan were the only Arab states east of Egypt still under the direct colonial authority of the mandatory powers, namely France and Great Britain. Moreover, the monarchies in Iraq and Egypt remained subject to considerable

<sup>49</sup> PA: Geheim Akten 1920–1936, Syrien-Pol.2, Aufzeichnung Prüfers, III o 4210,7. November 1934. See also Pol.Abt.III-Jüdische Angelegenheiten, Jüd.Pol. I, Bd. 13, AA/Berlin an DK/Genf, III o/3856, 26. Oktober 1933.

British influence, and were quite dependent on direct British financial, political, and military support. The nationalist movements in Syria, Palestine, and elsewhere against the continued existence of any level of French and British domination over the Arab world in whatever form were also part of a larger Pan-Arab nationalism that continued to manifest itself and to grow during the interwar period. Indeed, most of the state borders in the Arabic-speaking lands of North Africa and the Middle East had only relatively recently been drawn by European powers, while the memory of a unified Arab and Islamic past from the days of the Arab Caliphates was no doubt still alive. Nevertheless, during the years following the First World War, Arab nationalist movements and their leaders were not able to agree on the substance and conditions of Arab unity. Yet, the movement for Arab independence during the interwar period continued to demonstrate the existence of popular notions of Pan-Arab unity as a possible basis for ending European control in its various forms, and for an end to Zionist efforts to build a Jewish National Home and an independent Jewish state in Palestine.<sup>50</sup>

In early February 1935, a group of Syrian and Palestinian representatives of the Pan-Arab Committee, established in Baghdad almost two years earlier, approached Fritz Grobba, the German ambassador to Iraq, and proposed mutual cooperation between Germany and an ill-defined Pan-Arab nationalist movement.<sup>51</sup> They proposed cooperative efforts in propaganda, diplomatic support and, possibly later, some unspecified “active support”<sup>52</sup> (*aktive Unterstützung*). Grobba made the usual expressions of German sympathy for Arab efforts to achieve unity and independence, but rejected any form of direct German support for the Arab movement. Furthermore, he received the following instructions from his superiors in the Foreign Office in Berlin on February 12, 1935: “Please avoid any connection with this group or its emissaries. We want nothing to do with these efforts.”<sup>53</sup> Syrian nationalists had made similar overtures to German Consul General Ferdinand Seiler in Beirut since 1933 for German support against the French Mandate. Seiler responded

<sup>50</sup> See Fritz Grobba, *Männer und Mächte im Orient. 25 Jahre diplomatischer Tätigkeit im Orient* (Göttingen: Musterschmidt Verlag, 1967), 96–104.

<sup>51</sup> Fritz Grobba, a German diplomat and specialist in Middle East affairs, was ambassador to Iraq from 1932 to 1939, when the outbreak of war resulted in Iraq’s break in diplomatic relations with Germany. In February 1939, he also assumed concurrently the post of German ambassador to Saudi Arabia. He played an important role in the German Foreign Office’s Middle East policy during the Second World War. He was generally considered to be the German diplomat with the most knowledge of and familiarity with the languages, culture, and political conditions in the region during the Nazi period. See Wolfgang Schwanitz, “The Jinnee and the Magic Bottle,” 87–117; and Francis R. Nicosia, “Fritz Grobba and the Middle East Policy of the Third Reich,” in: Edward Ingram (ed.), *National and International Politics in the Middle East. Essays in Honour of Elie Kedouri* (London: Frank Cass, 1986), 206–228.

<sup>52</sup> PA: Pol.Abt.III, Pol.4-Pan-Arab. Bund, DG/Bagdad an AA/Berlin, III o 574, 2. Februar 1935.

<sup>53</sup> PA: Pol.Abt.III, Pol.4-Pan-Arab. Bund, AA/Berlin and DG/Bagdad, Telegramm Nr.2, 12.Februar 1935.



PHOTO 3.1. Fritz Grobba (no date).  
Courtesy Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Berlin.

to these overtures in a similar manner two months later. For instance, in a report to Berlin in April 1935, Seiler warned that the political situation in Syria was ripe for a new round of violence and rebellion against French rule, and that French authorities in Syria had become very suspicious and fearful of German intentions. Popular enthusiasm for Germany had probably led French authorities to suspect German intervention where there was none. Seiler's advice to Berlin was the same as Grobba's, namely that: "We must make every effort to avoid anything that might suggest we are taking advantage of the situation and that we want to make common cause with the pan-Islamic Nationalists."<sup>54</sup>

German officials in the Middle East and in Berlin were also confronted with Arab attempts to establish political organizations and movements based on Italian Fascist or German National Socialist models. In Baghdad and Jerusalem in 1933, Grobba and Wolff were approached by individuals with plans to organize National Socialist parties and movements in Iraq and Palestine, respectively.<sup>55</sup> Besides Hitler's anti-Jewish policies, Nazi authoritarian methods

<sup>54</sup> PA: Pol.Abt.III, Politik 2-Syrien, Bd.I, DGK/Beirut an AA/Berlin, 1/J.N.978, 12. April 1935.

<sup>55</sup> In Palestine, the correspondent of the newspaper *Al'Abram*, Joseph Francis, represented a group of Palestinian Arabs interested in establishing such a party and made this suggestion to Wolff in Jerusalem in April. In Iraq, Abdul Ghaffur el-Bedri, publisher of the newspaper *Istiqlal*, and a group of his supporters made similar overtures to Grobba in Baghdad in August of that year. See

and organization as well as the military trappings of German National Socialism apparently appealed to some Arab nationalists. In his report to Berlin on this matter, Wolff noted his opposition to any German encouragement or support for an Arab Nazi Party in Palestine, lest British authorities suspect German interference in the internal affairs of the Palestine Mandate. He noted: “Through a thoughtless indiscretion, the trust of the Mandate government in me... could be placed in considerable danger...”<sup>56</sup> In Berlin, the Foreign Office strongly opposed any effort to involve Germany in the creation of Arab National Socialist movements or parties in Palestine or elsewhere in the region. The Near East Department in the German Foreign Office made this very clear in early July, in a memorandum to Wolff in Jerusalem. It fully endorsed Wolff’s arguments against any German involvement in the organization of National Socialist parties or other political organizations and movements in Palestine or elsewhere in the region. The memo further reasoned that the allegedly notorious political unreliability of the Arabs would expose such a connection that would become known throughout the Middle East, as well as in France and Great Britain, and that the resulting negative consequences would be serious. It concluded:

Our work in the Middle East to this point, since the end of the war, has had as its goal Germany’s economic and cultural expansion through complete political neutrality. A change in this position through the interference of our representatives in the domestic affairs of these countries would result not only in economic setbacks, but, given the preminent power positions of Britain and France in the Middle East, also in severe negative consequences for Germany’s policy in Europe.<sup>57</sup>

Nor were Arabs permitted to have contact with or join the small NSDAP organizations that had been established within overseas German communities (*Auslandsdeutsche*) living and working in some of the Arab states. In response to these questions, Ernst Bohle of the Auslandsorganisation der NSDAP issued a directive in June 1934 that membership in the NSDAP overseas was to be denied to foreigners. Again, both Nazi party agencies as well as state agencies wished to avoid any suspicion that Germany was meddling in the internal affairs of the states in the region: “Foreigners may not be admitted into the National Socialist German Workers Party, as the AO of the NSDAP wishes to avoid the impression that it interferes in the internal affairs of foreign states.”<sup>58</sup>

PA: Pol.Abt. III, Politik 2-Palästina, Bd.I, Joseph Francis/Jaffa an DGK/Jerusalem, 13. April 1933; and Referat-Deutschland, P05 NE adh7, DG/Bagdad an AA/Berlin, Nr.1130, 10. August 1933.

<sup>56</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. III, Politik 2-Palastina, Bd.I, DGK/Jerusalem an AA/Berlin, Nr.Polit.74/33, 27. Juni 1933.

<sup>57</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. III, Politik 2-Palastina, Bd.I, Aufzeichnung der Abteilung III, zu III o 2362, 7. Juli 1933. See also Pol.Abt. III, Politik 2-Palastina, Bd.I, AA/Berlin an DGK/Jerusalem, zu III o 2362, 31. Juli 1933.

<sup>58</sup> PA: Inland II A/B, 82-03; AO der NSDAP an AA/Berlin, Nr. 82-02 1/6, 1. Juni 1934. According to Albert Speer, Hitler opposed the general idea of exporting National Socialism to other countries lest it strengthen their own nationalism and compromise Germany’s ability to deal

## THE ARAB REVOLT AND GERMAN ARMS

The Arab uprising and general strike that began in Palestine in April 1936 was intended to force the British government to end the Palestine Mandate, Jewish immigration into Palestine, and land sales to Jews. Arabs in Palestine had also demanded the establishment of an independent state in Palestine which, at that time, would have meant a state with a large Arab majority. In November 1935, an Arab delegation, headed by the Mufti of Jerusalem, had formally submitted these demands to the British High Commissioner in Palestine; the revolt, beginning in April 1936, was in response to London's refusal to grant Arab demands.<sup>59</sup> To some extent, neighboring Arab states were drawn into the conflict, as "Committees for the Defense of Palestine" were formed in Amman, Baghdad, Beirut, and Damascus to recruit volunteers from those states to join the revolt in Palestine. The new German consul general in Jerusalem, Walter Döhle, observed that the immediate cause of the revolt and general strike was the significant increase in Jewish immigration into Palestine, in part a result of Nazi persecution of the Jews in Germany since Hitler's assumption of power in January 1933.<sup>60</sup> The Jewish population in Palestine, about 60,000 at the end of the First World War, would approach 400,000 by the end of 1936, or approximately 30 percent of the Palestinian population.<sup>61</sup> Fears of eventual minority status in a Jewish state, coupled with ongoing resentment over continued British rule, contributed to the Arab uprising and general strike in 1936. This occurred at precisely the same time that German Jews, facing an increasingly desperate situation in Germany, were in ever-greater need of destinations to which they could immigrate and find safety. That the British had granted nominal independence to Egypt in 1922 and 1936, and nominal independence to Iraq in 1930, along with some measure of autonomy to Transjordan in 1928, likely added to the pressure in Palestine. Moreover, in 1936, France declared its intention to terminate its mandates over Syria and Lebanon, and to grant some measure of self-government to those states. However, none of this would substantially diminish the dominant Anglo-French political, economic, and military presence in the region. By 1936, with the conflicting aims of Arab

with them at a later date. For some parts of Europe and the rest of the world, racial ideology likely played a part as well. See: Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, 122.

<sup>59</sup> See for example Tom Segev, *One Palestine Complete: Jews and Arabs under the British Mandate* (New York: Owl Books, 2001), 366–374.

<sup>60</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. VII, Politik 5-Palästina, Bd. 1, DGK/Jerusalem an AA/Berlin, Nr. Polit. 26/36, 30. Juni 1936. Walter Döhle was appointed to replace Heinrich Wolff as German Consul-General in Jerusalem in the fall of 1935.

<sup>61</sup> See Esco Foundation for Palestine Inc., *Palestine: A Study of Jewish, Arab and British Policies*, II (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947), 665. See also *A Survey of Palestine. Prepared in December 1945 and January 1946 for the Information of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry*, Vol. I (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1946), 141. This three-volume British government survey was reprinted by the Institute for Palestine Studies, Washington, D.C., in 1991.



and Jewish national ambitions in Palestine, the prospects for Palestinian Arab independence in any form seemed increasingly remote.

The German government generally greeted the Arab revolt in Palestine with disinterest. Some mild criticism of British policy appeared in the Nazi press, apparently no more negative than much of the commentary had been in Weimar Germany regarding Britain's conflicting wartime promises to Arabs and Jews. In the spring and summer of 1936, the British embassy in Berlin reported that the press in Germany had generally refrained from taking an anti-British and pro-Arab position. The British ambassador in Berlin, Eric Phipps, described the coverage of the revolt in several Nazi newspapers in a report to London in May of that year.<sup>62</sup> Phipps noted that the intent of German press coverage of the Palestine revolt and unrest in other parts of the Arab world was to contrast those disorders with the peace and stability that prevailed in the new Germany. As was the case during the Weimar years, the German press tended to demand that Britain do everything necessary in Palestine to somehow reconcile Arabs and Jews, but without any specific suggestions that it be done by satisfying either Arab or Jewish claims. In June 1936, Alfred Rosenberg did write an article in the *Völkischer Beobachter* that was critical of what he described as one-sided British support for the Jews in Palestine, to the detriment of the Arab population.<sup>63</sup> He argued that greater British sensitivity to Arab demands would not compromise London's responsibilities under the Balfour Declaration that was in any case, according to Rosenberg, the basis for a Jewish National Home, and not a Jewish state, in Palestine. Rosenberg's argument reflected the views and policy of Hitler's regime with regard to Palestine, and the role of Zionism and Palestine in Nazi Jewish policy between 1933 and 1941.<sup>64</sup> During the 1930s, Berlin's determination to dispossess and then expel the Jews from Greater Germany as quickly as possible was also based on promoting significant Jewish immigration into Palestine. Yet, it also reflected the seeming contradiction between Nazi ideology and policy, namely that under no circumstances should an independent Jewish state ever be permitted to come into existence, in Palestine or anywhere else. However, since an independent Arab Palestine would surely mean the end of Jewish immigration and the Jewish National Home in Palestine, the only practical solution from the

<sup>62</sup> National Archives/London (hereafter NAL): FO371, 20020-E3048, British Embassy/Berlin to Foreign Office/London, Telegramme No. 127, May 27, 1936. The German newspapers that Phipps described included *Der Angriff*, the *Berliner Tageblatt*, the *Börsen Zeitung*, and the *Deutsche Diplomatisch-Politische Korrespondenz*.

<sup>63</sup> *Völkischer Beobachter*, 4. Juni 1936. In a note from Berlin to Anthony Eden on June 4, Ambassador Phipps commented favorably on the substance of Rosenberg's piece. See NAL: FO371, 20020-E3327, British Embassy/Berlin to Foreign Office/London, June 4, 1936. An additional report along the same lines by Phipps on the reaction of the German press to the unrest and violence in Palestine can be found in FO371, 20028-E6609, British Embassy/Berlin to Foreign Office/London, October 15, 1936.

<sup>64</sup> See Nicosia, *Zionism and Anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany*, particularly chapters 3 and 4.



perspective of Nazi interests and policy at that time was the continuation, in some form, of British rule in Palestine. This view was also entirely compatible with Hitler's *Englandpolitik* during the prewar years.

The Arab revolt in Palestine prompted some Arab leaders, particularly in states that were recently granted nominal independence such as Iraq and Egypt, to seek German arms for their own defensive purposes, or for use in other parts of the Arab world, including in Palestine. The terms of independence for Iraq and Egypt provided for continued British military installations, influence in Egyptian and Iraqi foreign policies, as well as certain restrictions on the purchase of arms from other countries. Arab attempts to secure German weapons for the insurgents in Palestine were generally met with caution, at least until 1938, as German policy continued to adhere to a policy of political non-involvement in Palestine and in Arab affairs in general. For example, in December 1936, Fauzi Kaoukji, a Syrian Arab and former officer in the Ottoman army who was leading Arab rebels in the Palestinian uprising, submitted a request for weapons assistance to the German Embassy in Baghdad.<sup>65</sup> Fritz Grobba responded with the usual German expressions of sympathy for Arab efforts to achieve self-determination in Palestine. Grobba reported to Berlin: "I explained to him that we wished to maintain good relations with Great Britain, and that in spite of our sympathy for the Arabs, we could not support an uprising against England."<sup>66</sup> Grobba was also visited in Baghdad by members of the Mufti's Higher Committee in January 1937. They were in search of German financial and weapons support at a time when the Peel Commission, in the midst of a truce in Palestine since October of the previous year, pursued its efforts to find a solution to the conflict. With most observers expecting the Peel Commission to recommend an independent Jewish state in some part of Mandatory Palestine, the Mufti's representatives presented their case to Grobba in terms of Germany's interest in an independent Arab state, and its well-known opposition to an independent Jewish state in Palestine. In a telegram to Berlin, Grobba described his response to the Arab delegation as follows: "I responded that Germany, with full appreciation for the Arab point of view, wants good relations with England and therefore cannot support a struggle against England."<sup>67</sup> On the same day, the Foreign Office in Berlin sent a return telegram to Grobba expressing its approval of the position he had been

<sup>65</sup> For more on Fauzi Kaoukji and his role in the revolt, see Iwo Jorda, *Araber Aufstand. Erlebnisse und Dokumente aus Palästina* (Vienna: Wilhelmbraumüller, 1943), 261 f.

<sup>66</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. VII, Po.5-Palästina, Bd. 1, DG/Bagdad an AA/Berlin, Nr. 3121, 17. Dezember 1936. Earlier that year, Grobba reported receiving requests for German weapons, made to him in Baghdad by Syrian Arabs for use in the revolt in Palestine. See PA: Botschaft Rom, Pol.3, Palästina 1920–1939, DG/Bagdad an AA/Berlin, Nr. 1335, 30. Mai 1936.

<sup>67</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. VII, Politik 2-Palästina, Bd. 1, DG-Bagdad an AA-Berlin, Pol. VII 116–37, Telegramm, 5. Januar 1937. Although sympathetic to the Arab cause in Palestine, Grobba was also a firm supporter of Hitler's policy of accommodation with Britain. While he shared the Nazi regime's complete opposition to an independent Jewish state in Palestine, he was also mindful of

taking in his meetings with Arab notables since the revolt in Palestine began: “In general, the position that you have expressed to Fauzi Kaoukji is shared here. We cannot interfere in the current dispute. Any sort of official German support cannot, therefore, be approved.”<sup>68</sup>

In the original text of that telegram, with its instructions to Grobba in Baghdad, the word “official” (*amtlich*) is underlined. This might raise suspicions that some form of “unofficial” German support, perhaps in the form of money and/or weapons might have been under consideration in Berlin by 1937. However, there does not appear to be any evidence of this in the archival sources. Again, it was generally assumed that the Peel Commission would recommend the establishment of nominally independent Jewish and Arab states in Palestine in some form. It is also clear that the Nazi regime was, for its own ideological and other reasons, vehemently opposed to the creation of a Jewish state. We also know that by 1937, with rearmament well under way, Hitler’s regime would soon begin to plan for the consolidation of a Greater Germany in central Europe at the expense of Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. These potentially unilateral revisions of the post–World War I settlement in Europe would, of course, run the risk of a new war in Europe, a risk that Hitler was certainly aware of when he set the process in motion at his Reich Chancellery meeting on November 5, 1937. In order to mitigate this reality, Germany might indeed welcome unrest overseas in the British and French empires in order to distract London and Paris from developments in Europe, and thereby diminish their resolve to resist Hitler’s moves. This apparent alteration in German policy will be considered in some detail in the next chapter.

In keeping with its formal rearmament plans announced earlier in the year, followed by the Anglo-German Naval Agreement in June, the Nazi regime decreed the Law for the Export and Import of War Materials (*Gesetz über Aus- und Einfuhr von Kriegsgeräte*) on November 6, 1935.<sup>69</sup> The new law replaced several previous laws from the Weimar years that had prohibited the import and export of weapons by Germany. Paragraph 3 of the new law provided for the punishment of anyone caught exporting weapons outside of established procedures, stipulating that all arms transactions be handled by the appropriate state agency, namely the office of the Reich Kommissar for Export and Import Allowance (Reichkommissar für Aus- und Einfuhrbewilligung). Although Hitler’s regime would now allow itself to export weapons, it was not clear that there would be much to export in the short

the central role of Zionism and Palestine in the regime’s efforts to force Jewish emigration from Germany. See Grobba, *Männer und Mächte*, 106.

<sup>68</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. VII, Politik 2-Palästina, Bd. 1, AA-Berlin an DG-Bagdad, zu Pol. VII 116, Telegramme, 5. Januar 1937.

<sup>69</sup> See *Reichsgesetzblatt*, 1935, Teil I, 1337. The law was signed by Hitler, Blomberg, von Bülow, and Schacht.

term due to Germany's own considerable rearmament requirements. On the other hand, as was the case with other German industries during the economic recovery from the depression, the arms industry too was eager to tap into export markets abroad. A consortium of German firms was established in 1936 for the purpose of cooperating with the government in promoting German arms sales abroad. Known as the Reich Industry Consortium: Export Group for Armaments (Reichsgruppe Industrie: Ausfuhrgemeinschaft für Kriegsgerät), this consortium was made up of some of Germany's leading weapons manufacturers. It reflected the government's interest in selling German weapons overseas in support of its effort to increase overall German exports, and thus earn much-needed foreign currency. The consortium defined its task as the promotion of arms exports as the occasions arose in order to achieve the best possible economic return for Germany, namely in the form of foreign currency.<sup>70</sup> For this reason, and the fact that it was still subject to a high degree of Anglo-French control, the Arab Middle East and North Africa was not likely in any case to be a major market for German arms exports before the war.

In one of its earliest weapons transactions under the November 1935 law, the German government authorized Mauser-Werke in Oberndorf to export to Yemen various small arms, including more than 700 machine guns and more than a thousand machine pistols by the end of 1936.<sup>71</sup> In late 1936, representatives from Rheinmetall-Borsig of Berlin and Otto Wolff of Cologne traveled to Iraq where they received an order for arms worth RM 5 Million from the Iraqi government for various weapons. According to Fritz Grobba, the request was made to Germany because Britain had refused to sell the Iraqi government the weapons it desired, mainly due to London's own rearmament program that had precluded the export of weapons that its own forces required.<sup>72</sup> As a result, Grobba reported in March 1937 that, according to the government in Baghdad, Britain had given Iraq permission to fill its weapons needs elsewhere. He stated that the Iraqi government's main motive in its effort to purchase arms was to counter armed and rebellious tribes inside Iraq, to maintain national unity and national defense against its potential enemy in Iran, which was also engaged

<sup>70</sup> PA: Handelspolitische Abteilung, Kriegsgerät (Geheim): Handel mit Kriegsgerät, Allgemeines, Bd. 3, Reichsgruppe Industrie: Ausfuhrgemeinschaft für Kriegsgerät, Nr. B-4, Jahresbericht für 1937. Germany usually demanded full payment in foreign currency or in raw materials. See for example PA: Handelspolitische Abteilung, Kriegsgerät (Geheim): Handel mit Kriegsgerät, Allgemeines, Bd. 3, Bericht der Handelspolitische Abteilung vom 25. Januar 1938.

<sup>71</sup> BArch: R901, 68470, Reichskommissar für Aus- und Einfuhrbewilligung, an AA/Berlin, RK. 40439/37, 21. Juni 1937. This report to the German Foreign Office in Berlin stated that between November 1935 and June 1937, a total of 37,361 small arms had been exported from Germany to all countries. The report did not, however, discuss the age or quality of the weapons. With full-scale German rearmament under way, it is possible that those exports involved mostly older weapons, perhaps many from the previous war.

<sup>72</sup> Grobba, *Männer und Mächte*, 157–158, 167.

in its own armaments program.<sup>73</sup> The firm Friedrich Krupp reported in March 1937 that the Iraqi government wished to purchase arms from Krupp worth up to RM 10 Million. Krupp informed the Foreign Office in Berlin that it had no intention of selling arms to Iraq if the British government opposed to such a transaction.<sup>74</sup> In any case, the Reich Ministry for War informed the Foreign Office in April that most of the Iraqi order with Krupp likely would not be filled due to production problems, not the least of which was a problem that Germany shared with Britain: “With other weapons...our situation is similar to the situation in England, namely that in view of our own armaments needs, deliveries will hardly be possible.”<sup>75</sup>

The Reich Ministry of Economics naturally seemed to be the most enthusiastic about concluding weapons agreements with Iraq and other countries in the Middle East in 1937. Its interests in the matter were purely economic, centered as they were on promoting German exports and securing payment in foreign currency. In reference to the discussions that the German firms Krupp and Otto Wolff were having with the Iraqi government in the spring of 1937, the Economics Ministry informed the Foreign Office of its full support for the export of weapons to Iraq so long as the following standard applied: “Both transactions should be pursued with the goal of payment in currency as soon as possible.”<sup>76</sup> The Economics Ministry further emphasized its purely economic interests in weapons sales to Iraq when, after recognizing the political hesitations expressed by Grobba in Baghdad, it encouraged the Foreign Office’s view that it “. . . would be prepared to dismiss these hesitations if the new business is considered economically desirable, that, in view of the currency situation, an economically favorable outcome might be hoped for from these transactions. . .”<sup>77</sup>

It is difficult to know with certainty the quantity, variety, and source of the weapons used by Arab insurgents in Palestine between the outbreak of the revolt in April 1936 and the beginning of the Second World War. In July 1937, Grobba reported from Baghdad that Britain’s hitherto neutral attitude regarding Iraqi freedom to purchase weapons wherever it pleased was

<sup>73</sup> PA: Handelspolitische Abteilung, Kriegsgerät (Geheim): Handel mit Irak m, Bd. 1, Pol. 1, 1579, DG/Bagdad an AA/Berlin, Nr. 679, 20. März 1937. In June 1937, Italy approached the Iraqi government with offers to sell arms to and provide training for the Iraqi military. Grobba reported that Iraqi leaders had confided to him their preference for dealing with Germany. PA: Handelspolitische Abteilung, Kriegsgerät: Handel mit Irak (Geheim), Bd. 2, Pol. 1, 2923, DG/Bagdad an AA/Berlin, Nr. 1304, 1. Juni 1937.

<sup>74</sup> See PA: Handelspolitische Abteilung, Kriegsgerät: Handel mit Irak (Geheim), Bd. 1, Pol. 1, 1241, Friedrich Krupp AG an AA/Berlin, Nr. 32532/Pba/Va, 8. März 1937.

<sup>75</sup> PA: Handelspolitische Abteilung, Kriegsgerät: Handel mit Irak (Geheim), Bd. 1, Reichskriegsministerium an AA/Berlin, Pol. 1, 1793, 3. April 1937.

<sup>76</sup> PA: Handelspolitische Abteilung, Kriegsgerät (Geheim): Handel mit Irak, Bd. 1, Pol. 1, 2684g, RWM/Berlin an AA/Berlin, II 301/37g, 29. Mai 1937.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

changing. He explained that Baghdad's recent weapons transactions with Italy, coupled with Iraqi support for the Arab revolt in Palestine, had caused Britain to reassess its approach to Iraqi arms procurement.<sup>78</sup> It would seem that neighboring Arab countries, Iraq among them, would have been likely sources of, or conduits for, arms intended for Palestine.

In June 1936, British authorities in Palestine reported to London that significant sums of money had been collected by the Mufti's Central Relief Committee, primarily in Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria.<sup>79</sup> In July, Consul General Döhle in Jerusalem advised Berlin that small arms were entering Palestine from Transjordan, notwithstanding Amir Abdullah's efforts to mediate a truce between Arab rebels and the British.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, in October of that year, Grobba reported from Baghdad that he had information to the effect that Belgian and English weapons, originally bought by the Ethiopian government for use against Italy, had been diverted to Saudi Arabia and then transferred to Palestine via Transjordan.<sup>81</sup> From London, the German Embassy reported to Berlin in June that the British government, in a long debate in the House of Commons, had indicated its suspicions that the weapons used by Arab insurgents in Palestine were of Italian and Russian origin.<sup>82</sup> That the British government strongly suspected Mussolini's regime of interfering in Palestine seems clear in a July 28, 1936 memorandum in the Colonial Office, as well as in a later conversation between Eric Drummond, the British ambassador in Rome, and the Italian Foreign Minister, Count Ciano, on October 7 of that year.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, by 1938, French intelligence was certain that Italian financial support was behind the Arab revolt in Palestine.<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, Fritz Grobba reported to Berlin in December 1936 that his contact in Baghdad, Fauzi Kaoukji, had indicated that while Italy had offered him arms assistance for Palestine, Arab distrust

<sup>78</sup> PA: Handelspolitische Abteilung, Kriegsgerät (Geheim): Handel mit Irak, Bd. 2, Pol. 1, 37078, DG/Bagdad an AA/Berlin, Nr. 1717, 15. Juli 1937. Grobba also reported that Iraqi leaders were constantly trying to impress him with Iraq's importance in the Islamic world and its future worth as a friend of Germany.

<sup>79</sup> NAL: FO371, 20021-E4329, Report of the Deputy Inspector General in Palestine, 8 June 1936.

<sup>80</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. VII, Politik 5-Palästina, Bd. 1, DGK/Jerusalem an AA/Berlin, Nr. Polit. 34/36, 12. Juli 1936.

<sup>81</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. VII, Politik 5-Irak, Bd. 1, DG/Bagdad an AA/Berlin, Nr. 2569, 3. Oktober 1936.

<sup>82</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. II, Politik 3-England, Bd. 1, DB/London an AA/Berlin, A. 2539, 22. Juni 1936. On several occasions, Döhle in Jerusalem and Grobba in Baghdad expressed the opinion that Russia was the main source of weapons for the Arabs, a suspicion that they maintained was shared by British authorities in Palestine. See also PA: Pol.Abt. VII, Politik 5-Palästina, Bd. 1, DGK/Jerusalem an AA/Berlin, Nr.Polit. 6/37, 17. Februar 1937.

<sup>83</sup> See NAL: FO371, 20022-E4858, Colonial Office, London, July 28, 1936; and Malcolm Muggeridge (ed.), *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers* (London: Odhams Press Ltd., 1948), 51. Ciano denied Drummond's suggestion.

<sup>84</sup> NAL: FO371, 21887-E3046, British Embassy/Rome to Foreign Office/London, May 21, 1938.

of Italy had forced him to reject it.<sup>85</sup> Finally, although Ciano had denied British allegations in 1936 that his government was providing aid to Palestinian rebels, he admitted to Hermann Göring in discussions two years later in Rome that Italy had indeed provided financial aid to the Palestinian Arab revolt. In a meeting between Mussolini and Göring on April 18, 1938, in which he also participated, Ciano noted that Italy had been providing money for the Palestinian revolt, but not weapons.<sup>86</sup> With Italian money, Ciano alleged, the Arabs had been able to purchase weapons through Greek middlemen, and smuggle them into Palestine via Syria. Direct weapons shipments from Italy were, according to Ciano, too dangerous.

On the issue of weapons exports to the Middle East, Germany appears to have been more sensitive than Italy to British interests in the region, at least prior to 1938. At each stage of German-Iraqi discussions regarding the purchase of German weapons in 1936 and 1937, the German side was always mindful of British policy. Yet, there was uncertainty and a consequent lack of clarity in Germany's weapons export policy to the Middle East before 1938, as seems clear in an exchange between Grobba in Baghdad and the Foreign Office in Berlin in June and July 1937. Grobba concluded that Germany's previous policy of refusing to export weapons to Iraq without Britain's prior agreement seemed no longer relevant since Iraq had apparently purchased some war planes from Italy over British objections. Yet, he also observed that Berlin's previous reluctance to enter into sales agreements with Iraq due to concerns over Iraq's ability to pay for German weapons with foreign currency was all the more sensible given British reluctance to approve German weapons sales to Baghdad in any case. In June 1937, after describing Iraqi arms requests from Germany, Grobba observed that, "The British know or suspect all of this, and are naturally not pleased."<sup>87</sup> In his discussions with British representatives in Baghdad a month later, Grobba noted: "England is bothered by any large German business in Iraq, and tries to prevent it."<sup>88</sup> Grobba also observed that Britain wanted to prevent Iraq from ever being able to defend itself without some form of English help, and he concluded that if Iraq did not receive weapons from Germany, it would find them elsewhere. Thus, it appeared that Grobba wanted to promote German influence and a much larger German

<sup>85</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. VII, Politik 5-Palästina, Bd. 1, DG/Bagdad an AA/Berlin, Nr. 3121, 17. Dezember 1936.

<sup>86</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. VI, Nr. 211. Two years later, Ciano again informed Göring that Italy had been supplying the Mufti with funds for several years for the purchase of weapons. See PA: Botschaft Rom-Geheim Akten, 44/1, DB/Rom an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 1677, 14. September 1940.

<sup>87</sup> PA: Büro des Chefs der Auslandsorganisation, Irak 1937–1941, Bd. 92, DG/Bagdad an Chef der AO im AA/Berlin, EWB/RO, 19. Juni 1937.

<sup>88</sup> PA: Handelspolitische Abteilung, Kriegsgerät (Geheim): Handel mit Irak, Bd. 2, DG/Bagdad an AA/Berlin, Nr. 1823, Betr. Deutsche Waffenlieferungen für Irak, 24. Juli 1937.

presence in Iraq, but to do it in such a way that London would not view it as a threat to its imperial interests in the region.

In spite of some reluctance within the Foreign Office in Berlin,<sup>89</sup> the first German-Iraqi arms agreement was finally signed between the Iraq government and the firm Rheinmetall-Borsig AG on December 9, 1937.<sup>90</sup> Representatives from Rheinmetall-Borsig had already visited London in October seeking British approval for the transaction with Iraq, as well as for possible German arms sales to Egypt and Iran.<sup>91</sup> Although in principle opposed to German arms exports to Iraq and Egypt because of the terms of its treaties with those two states, Britain indicated a willingness to go along with German sales to Iraq and Egypt of arms that Britain itself was not in a position to supply. The December 9 agreement involved defensive equipment, specifically Iraq's purchase of 18 anti-aircraft guns with equipment and ammunition. The Iraqi prime minister told Grobba that Iraq wished to purchase more weapons from Germany that it was unable to buy from the British; indeed, Rheinmetall-Borsig informed the German government a week and a half later that it had been assured by the government in Baghdad that, "According to the English-Iraqi treaty, the Iraqi government was free to procure war materials from other sources."<sup>92</sup>

Germany and Iraq concluded two additional arms transactions in late 1938, both of which involved largely defensive weapons such as anti-aircraft pieces with ammunition.<sup>93</sup> Caution was also very much the rule for Germany with regard to other possible weapons markets in the Arab world in the 1930s. In June, and again in August 1937, the German Embassy in Cairo reported to Berlin that the Egyptian Ministry of War expressed an interest in buying arms from countries other than Britain, and that Germany was one of those countries. The reports also noted that the Egyptian government would do so only with the approval of the British government, and that therefore the only way to proceed was through London.<sup>94</sup> In August 1937, the Dresdner Bank office in Cairo sent the same message to its superiors in Berlin, namely that German arms producers could sell to Egypt only with London's approval.<sup>95</sup> But by late

<sup>89</sup> See for example PA: Handelspolitische Abteilung, Kriegsgerät (Geheim): Handel mit Irak, Bd. 2, Aufzeichnung zur Randnotiz auf dem Bericht des Deutschen Gesandten in Bagdad vom 24. Juli 1937, Nr. 1823, 29. Juli 1937; and Pol. Abt. VII, Politik 2-Palästina, Bd. 1, DG-Bagdad an AA-Berlin, Nr. 2633, 9. November 1937.

<sup>90</sup> PA: Handelspolitische Abteilung, Kriegsgerät (Geheim): Handel mit Irak, Bd. 2, DG/Bagdad an AA/Berlin, Nr. 2921, W4548, 12. Dezember 1937.

<sup>91</sup> See NAL: FO371/20911-J4567, Secret Papers 1937, War Office Memorandum, October 1937.

<sup>92</sup> PA: Handelspolitische Abteilung, Kriegsgerät (Geheim): Handel mit Irak, Bd. 2, zu II 891/378, Rheinmetall-Borsig AG an RWM/Berlin, 22. Dezember 1937.

<sup>93</sup> See for example PA: Handelspolitische Abteilung, Kriegsgerät (Geheim): Handel mit Kriegsgerät, Allgemeines, Bd. 3, Kriegslieferungsverträge (Geheim), e.o. W746g, 10. August 1938.

<sup>94</sup> See BArch: R901-68425, DG/Kairo an AA/Berlin, Nr. 434, 4. Juni 1937; and DG/Kairo an AA/Berlin, Nr. 634, 21. August 1937.

<sup>95</sup> BArch: R901-68425, Dresdner Bank, Filiale Kairo, an Dresdner Bank/Berlin, Nr. 500, 17. August 1937.



1937, and the spring of 1938, the German Embassy in Cairo was quite negative about opportunities in Egypt for German weapons manufacturers. Inquiries to the German Embassy from German arms producers were answered with the observation that their prospects were not good, and that the British government, as was the case in Iraq, was not always supportive of foreign arms suppliers.<sup>96</sup>

Thus, in spite of the economic interest of German arms manufacturers and the Ministry of Economics in Berlin in the promotion of German exports, Hitler's regime did not avidly promote arms agreements with Arab states without at least the implicit acquiescence of the British government. Indeed, Egypt and Iraq, along with perhaps Saudi Arabia and Yemen, as the only nominally independent Arab states, constituted the arms market such as it was for the Arab world. This apparently was not a factor for the Italian government, although the Italians were reluctant to send weapons into Palestine, opting instead to provide financial support for leaders of the Arab revolt. The statistics of the Handelspolitische Abteilung (Trade Policy Section) of the German Foreign Office indicate that Germany ended up exporting relatively little war material to the Middle East in 1936 and 1937, and somewhat more in 1938 and 1939.<sup>97</sup> The statistics for 1936 and 1937 do show the export of a small number of rifles and some munitions to Palestine; but it is not known if these were approved by responsible authorities in Berlin, by the British, or even if they were actually intended for Arab insurgents. We know, for instance, that the Foreign Office in Berlin informed the German Consulate-General in Beirut in October 1937 that Germany would not provide arms for the Arab revolt in Palestine, and that a month later, the embassy in Bagdad confided to the private secretary of King Ibn-Saud of Saudi Arabia that Germany would not support the Arab cause in Palestine with arms.<sup>98</sup> It is possible that some of the small arms exported to Yemen ended up in Palestine. But it seems clear that in 1936 and 1937, the first two years that Germany was in a position to export relatively modest amounts of war material, the Nazi state generally sought to avoid antagonizing Great Britain in the Middle East, and therefore did not actively seek a significant foothold in the still relatively limited arms market in the region. Moreover, its own rearmament needs after 1935 meant that Germany was not in a position to export large quantities of weapons even if it had wanted to do so. Indeed, by late March 1938,

<sup>96</sup> BArch: R901-68425, DG/Kairo an AA/Berlin, Nr. 802, 4. November 1937; and DG/Kairo an AA/Berlin, Nr. 335, 23. April 1938.

<sup>97</sup> PA: Handelspolitische Abteilung, Kriegsgerät (Geheim): Handel mit Kriegsgerät, Allgemeines, Bde. 1-4; and Geheim Akten 1920-1936, II FK.33: Kriegsgerät Allgemeines, Geheimsachen, Statistik über K.G. Ausfuhr.

<sup>98</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. VII, Politik 5a-Palästina, Bd. 2, AA/Berlin (von Hentig) an DGK/Beirut, 8. Oktober 1937; and Pol.Abt. VII, Politik 2-Palästina, Bd. 1, DG/Bagdad (Grobba) an AA/Berlin, Nr. 2633, 9. November 1937.



the British ambassador in Rome, Lord Perth, reported to London that he considered Germany's interest in the Eastern Mediterranean area to be purely commercial in nature, and that in any case the Italian government was not at all in favor of German involvement in the Mediterranean area.<sup>99</sup> This caution and reluctance would diminish somewhat in the lead-up to war in Europe in 1938 and 1939, when a policy of exacerbating existing Anglo-French colonial problems in the Middle East and around the world would be deemed in Berlin to be in Germany's interest.

#### A JEWISH STATE

Arab unrest and periodic violence in Palestine since the end of the First World War were directed against two key elements of the postwar settlement in Palestine. These were British rule in Palestine as authorized by the League of Nations through the mandate system, and the Jewish National Home that had become a legal component of that League of Nations mandate. With the substantial increases in Jewish immigration into the National Home in Palestine, particularly between 1920 and 1925, and again after 1930, the Jewish percentage of the population within the Palestine Mandate rose from about 10 percent in 1918 to close to 30 percent just twenty years later. Of course, a significant part of that dramatic increase after 1930 was the result of the Nazi assumption of power in Germany on January 30, 1933, and its policy of dispossession and the forced emigration of German Jews to destinations that were, from the perspective of Hitler's regime, preferably outside of Europe. Within the context of that Jewish policy, Palestine played a critical role in Nazi efforts to force Jews to leave Germany.<sup>100</sup>

Yet the pursuit of that policy always carried with it concerns among Nazi policy makers that exiled German Jews would contribute to growing anti-German sentiment from their new homes abroad, particularly in the British dominions and in the United States. Indeed, at a meeting on Jewish emigration on September 29, 1936, attended by representatives of the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Economics, and the office of the *Stellvertreter des Führers*, State Secretary Wilhelm Stuckart of the Interior Ministry reiterated such fears, and offered suggestions about the best way to neutralize them: "For these reasons, the emigration of Jews first and foremost to Palestine has been promoted."<sup>101</sup> Aware of Germany's relative popularity in the Arab world before and especially since Hitler's appointment as Chancellor, Stuckart asserted with confidence that in the Middle East there was little chance of harm to Germany as a result of possible anti-German agitation among the Jewish

<sup>99</sup> NAL: FO371/21998-1355, British Embassy/Rome to Foreign Office/London, No. 330, 31 March 1938.

<sup>100</sup> See Nicosia, *Zionism and Anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany*, 126–144.

<sup>101</sup> BArch: R1501, 5514, Vermerk über die Besprechung am 29. September 1936.

population. Nevertheless, events in the region, affected in part by increased German-Jewish immigration into Palestine after 1933, would briefly call into question the wisdom of the Nazi government's policy of promoting Zionism and Jewish emigration from Germany to Palestine, particularly with the approach of war in 1938 and 1939.

The Royal (Peel) Commission on Palestine was established by the British government in November 1936 in response to the Arab revolt that broke out in April of that year. From the beginning, the Peel Commission generated considerable speculation about a possible recommendation to end the British Mandate and establish nominally independent Jewish and Arab states within the borders of Mandatory Palestine. Although the Peel Commission's findings and recommendations were not made public until July 1937, the German Foreign Ministry, mindful of the public speculation about a Jewish state, began in January to consider the political implications of such a recommendation for Germany's domestic Jewish policy and its foreign policy in the Middle East. Walther Hinrichs of Referat-Deutschland, the Nazi party office within the German Foreign Office, warned the state secretary that an independent Jewish state in part of Palestine would likely be the outcome of the Peel Commission's deliberations. He then identified the negative implications of an emigration policy that since 1933 had actively promoted Jewish emigration from Germany to Palestine. Drawing on old anti-Semitic myths, he warned of the dangerous strategic and ideological consequences of an independent Jewish state: "Therefore it should be noted that a Jewish state in Palestine would strengthen Jewish influence in the world to unimaginable levels. Just as Moscow is the central authority for the Comintern, Jerusalem would become the base for a Jewish world organization that, like Moscow, would be in a position to carry out its work with diplomatic means."<sup>102</sup> Referat-Deutschland's Vicco von Bülow-Schwante cited the possible strategic disadvantages of an independent Jewish state that, once admitted to the League of Nations, would join the growing coalition of states hostile to the new Germany.<sup>103</sup> While some in the Nazi bureaucracy adhered to the traditional anti-Semitic myths of a monolithic international Jewish conspiracy to dominate the world from its own independent power base in Palestine, others stressed the strategic disadvantages for Germany in promoting the establishment of yet another state that would be hostile to the Third Reich.

Fears of an independent Jewish state in Palestine grew in government and party agencies during the spring of 1937, raising questions about what had become a key element in Nazi Jewish policy. For state and party agencies in Berlin, unqualified support in the past for unhindered Jewish emigration

<sup>102</sup> PA: R99359, Inland II A/B, 83-21A, Bd.1A, Aufzeichnung des Referat-Deutschlands (Hinrichs) vom 9. Januar 1937.

<sup>103</sup> PA: R27266, Büro des Chefs der Auslandsorganisation, Aufzeichnung des Referat-D vom 27. April 1937.

from Germany to Palestine, and for the Jewish National Home under British authority, was never meant as an endorsement of an independent Jewish state. Nevertheless, some began to see an independent Jewish state as possibly a logical outcome of such a policy. Nor was Germany promoting an Arab state in Palestine, as indicated earlier in this chapter. There seems to have been an unspoken assumption that Great Britain would continue to rule both Jews and Arabs in Palestine, an assumption that, moreover, reflected Hitler's anti-Semitism and his racial view of the world, as well as the role of the British Empire in it. In any case, the possibility of even a nominally independent Jewish state in a small part of a small Mandatory Palestine prompted a reassessment of the regime's policy on Jewish emigration from Germany in 1937. Moreover, there were divisions among interested agencies such as the Foreign Office, the Interior Ministry, the Economics Ministry, the Overseas Organization of the NSDAP (*Auslandsorganisation der NSDAP*), and the SS over the final aim of Nazi Jewish policy and its promotion of Jewish emigration from Germany to Palestine. Was it in Germany's interest to seek to concentrate Jews in Palestine and/or a few other selected parts of the world, or was it preferable to try to scatter them as small minorities in as many different parts of the world as possible? Of course, this was a meaningless debate since there was virtually nothing that the German government could do in the end to control the final destination of Jews once they left Germany.

In April 1937, a little more than two months before the publication of the Peel Commission report, Ministerial Director Ernst von Weizsäcker in the German Foreign Office issued policy guidelines on Palestine to the responsible departments in the German Foreign Office.<sup>104</sup> The guidelines reiterated the government's goal of rapid Jewish emigration from Germany, but cautioned against concentrating Jews in Palestine so as not to facilitate the establishment of a Jewish state. Weizsäcker suggested that Jews be directed to destinations other than Palestine. On June 1, Foreign Minister von Neurath issued further guidelines on Palestine to the German embassies in London and Baghdad, and the German Consulate-General in Jerusalem. Von Neurath reiterated Germany's firm opposition to the establishment of an independent Jewish state in Palestine: "...for a state in Palestine would not absorb world Jewry, but would establish in the process a legal power base for international Jewry, something like the Vatican state for political Catholicism or Moscow for the Comintern."<sup>105</sup> He also called for friendlier relations with the Arabs in Palestine, and the Arab states in the Middle East, but insisted that Germany would not become directly involved in the conflict. He also noted: "In this, German understanding for Arab national aspirations would be clearer than

<sup>104</sup> See PA: R27266, Büro des Chefs der Auslandsorganisation, Aufzeichnung des Referat-D vom 27. April 1937. See also PA: R99359, Inland II A/B, 83-21a, Bd.1a, Aufzeichnung des Referat-D, zu 83-21a 25/5, 25. Mai 1937. Von Weizsäcker was appointed State Secretary in 1938.

<sup>105</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. V, Nr. 561.



PHOTO 3.2. Ernst von Weizsäcker (no date).  
 Courtesy Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Berlin.

before, but without giving any specific guarantees.”<sup>106</sup> Von Neurath instructed the German Embassy in London to notify the British government that Germany’s promotion of Jewish emigration from Germany to Palestine was not an endorsement of an independent Jewish state. Finally, von Neurath stated that a comprehensive reexamination of emigration policy would begin soon.

Referat-Deutschland’s June 22, 1937 circular to all German consular missions abroad announced a forthcoming reassessment of Jewish emigration policy. The circular raised questions about a past Jewish policy that, by emphasizing the rapid removal of Jews from Germany, had dealt with the Jewish question as a purely domestic issue while ignoring its foreign policy implications. The negative consequence of that, according to the circular, was that the significant concentration of Jews in Palestine only enhanced the possibility of a Jewish state.<sup>107</sup> It went on to suggest that the single-minded emphasis on making Germany *judenrein* (cleansed of Jews) gave the false impression that the Jewish question would in fact be resolved for Germany once all of the Jews had departed from the Reich. In an ominous hint at the foundations of future

<sup>106</sup> Von Neurath was not suggesting a change in Germany’s hitherto consistent policy of refusing to intervene in support of the Arabs diplomatically or materially in Palestine and throughout the region. In reality, there was to be virtually no change at all.

<sup>107</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. V, Nr. 564.

Nazi Jewish policy, within the context of the conquest of German living space in the East, the circular concluded: “In reality there exists a larger German interest in maintaining the fragmentation of Jewry. For the Jewish question will still not be solved for Germany when not a single member of the Jewish race lives on German soil. . . The Jewish question is, therefore, at the same time one of the most important problems for German foreign policy.”<sup>108</sup>

In the end, the Nazi government did not reverse those components of its Jewish policy that relied on Zionism, the Zionist movement, and Palestine for the removal of Jews from Germany. The imperative of National Socialist ideology to resist an imagined world Jewish conspiracy by attempting to control where Jewish emigrants from Germany eventually ended up was futile in any case. The German government did not participate in international discussions on Palestine or on the growing Jewish refugee problem, nor did it provide material or diplomatic support for the Arab cause in Palestine at that time. Furthermore, Germany did not put pressure on anti-Semitic governments in eastern Europe, particularly Poland and Rumania, to alter their policies that also vigorously promoted Jewish emigration to Palestine. Still, emigration policy did become a focus of debate among state and party agencies during the second half of 1937 and into early 1938. The extent to which the entire process of Jewish emigration from Germany to Palestine facilitated Zionist efforts to build an independent Jewish state in Palestine was the question on which the debate centered. Yet it appears doubtful that anyone in Berlin seriously thought that Germany could decisively influence events in Palestine simply by altering the regime’s emigration policy. German Jews comprised about 20 percent of the total Jewish immigration into Palestine between 1933 and 1937, and constituted an even smaller percentage of the total Jewish population living in the Jewish National Home.<sup>109</sup> At the time, it was believed that the success or failure of Zionist hopes for a Jewish state would ultimately depend much more on the greater numbers of Jewish immigrants arriving in Palestine from elsewhere, especially from eastern Europe. Any attempt to significantly alter the movement of Jews to Palestine once they left Germany, an almost impossible task in any case, would likely not be fatal to the idea of a Jewish state.

The SS and the Gestapo had remained in the background on the issue of the Arab revolt, the Peel Commission, and a possible Jewish state in Palestine. They were not yet in control of the formulation of Nazi Jewish policy; their role remained essentially the implementation and enforcement of Jewish policy inside Germany. The removal of Jews from Germany, and not the foreign

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> See BArch: R57, 25, Reichsstelle für das Auswanderungswesen, Bericht des Assessors Dr. Wilmanns über seine Reise nach Palästina, G.Z. B2400, 10. Juni 1937. See also Werner Feilchenfeld, Dolf Michaelis, Ludwig Pinner, *Haavara-Transfer nach Palästina und Einwanderung Deutscher Juden 1933–1939* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr/Siebeck, 1972), 90.

policy implications of the eventual destinations of emigrating Jews, was their principal task. While they too opposed the idea of an independent Jewish state in Palestine on ideological grounds, there were some in the SS who did not entirely oppose the idea, even as late as the summer of 1936. Articles in the SS newspaper *Das Schwarze Korps* in 1936 stressed the primary SS task of removing all Jews from Germany, by all possible means, even if that meant the establishment of a Jewish state at some point in the future. One article did note that a solution had to be found to the problem of settling Jews among peoples who rejected their presence in order to prevent what it described as the sacrifice of additional people to Jewish control.<sup>110</sup> However, two months later, the same publication referred to what it termed “Arab terrorists” (*arabische Terroristen*) who opposed Jewish immigration to Palestine, and expressed SS fears that: “The solution to the entire Jewish question will be rendered impossible if it comes to that.”<sup>111</sup> In his article in the *Völkischer Beobachter* on July 9, 1937, Alfred Rosenberg condemned the idea of an independent Jewish state, and criticized the inherent contradictions in British policy since the First World War. However, he also reaffirmed Germany’s noninvolvement in the violence in Palestine, and demanded its quick resolution in a way that protected Germany’s economic interests in the region.<sup>112</sup>

At the end of 1936, an unknown source within Abteilung II-1 in the Sicherheitsdienst of the SS filed a comprehensive report with the title “The Arab Space” (*Der arabische Raum*). The report largely dismissed pan-Arab efforts to create a unified Arab state, and concluded that internal racial, religious, and dynastic differences rendered Arab unity impossible. It also commented that England had learned that fact “...from the proverbial and proven unreliability of the Arabs, who are easy to win over for those willing to pay more Gold...”<sup>113</sup> The report also observed that it would be easy for Germany to win over Arab support in the future given Britain’s support for the Jewish National Home in Palestine, but that it would be hardly worth it because, “There would not be the slightest chance that armed Palestinian Arabs ...could mount serious resistance against the much better disciplined Jews or even the English. Therefore active Arab military assistance for us would not be possible.”<sup>114</sup> Finally, in early 1937, at the height of speculation over the Peel Commission’s forthcoming recommendations, Abteilung II-112 of the Sicherheitsdienst (“Security Service” in the SS) issued a report on the Jewish question in Germany that emphasized rapid Jewish emigration from Germany as the “guiding principle” (*Leitgedanke*) of state policy toward the Jews. It further emphasized the necessary role that Zionism and Palestine played in

<sup>110</sup> *Das Schwarze Korps*, 25. Juni 1936.      <sup>111</sup> *Das Schwarze Korps*, 27. August 1936.

<sup>112</sup> *Völkischer Beobachter*, 9. Juli 1937.

<sup>113</sup> BArch: R58-6381, Betr. Lagebericht “Der arabische Raum,” an II-1, Berlin, den 14. Dezember 1936.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

that policy, and criticized those in the German Foreign Office who allegedly advocated a greater, albeit more superficial, sympathy for the Arab cause. The guidelines warned: “Any attempt to foster anti-Jewish sentiment among the Arabs in Palestine is strictly prohibited. Provoking the Arabs against Jewish immigrants only serves to harm the Reich, for the unrest severely hampers our emigration efforts, and this was particularly evident during the unrest of 1936.”<sup>115</sup>

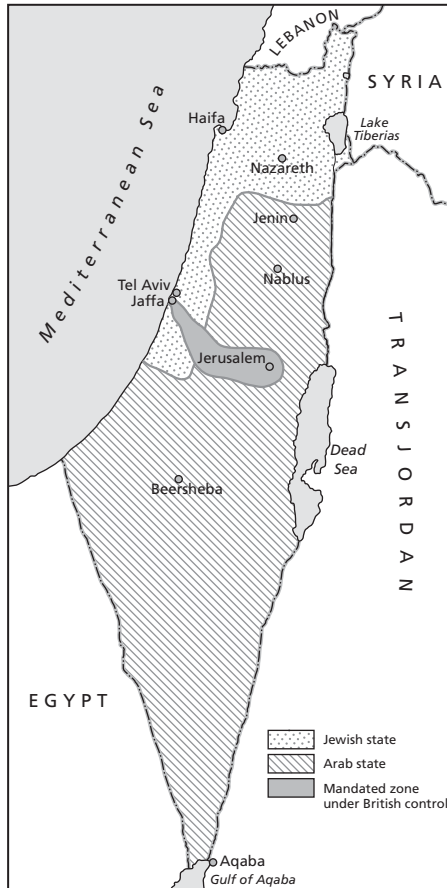
The first ministerial meeting on this issue took place on July 29, 1937, just three weeks after the July 7 publication in London of the Peel Commission report.<sup>116</sup> The meeting was attended by the interested departments in the German Foreign Office, as well as representatives from the Office of the Stellvertreter des Führers, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Economics, the Reichsbank, and Rosenberg’s Foreign Policy Office (Aussenpolitisches Amt) of the NSDAP. The Interior Ministry, the agency still primarily responsible for the Jewish emigration process prior to late 1938, reported that Hitler continued to insist on forcing Jewish emigration from Germany by all possible means, regardless of the destination of the emigrants. The discussions continued on September 21 and 22 at the Ministry of Economics. However, the tone of these last two meetings was quite different from the July 29 discussions. Given Hitler’s apparent wishes, as represented at the July meeting, it was clear at the September meetings that Jewish emigration from Germany to Palestine would continue as before. While the meetings discussed the advantages and disadvantages of the Ha’avara transfer system, and the possibility of revising the agreement to better accommodate the economic interests of Palestinian Arabs and the German Christian community (*Palästinadeutsche*) in Palestine, virtually nothing was said about the role of Jewish emigration from Germany to Palestine in the possible establishment of a Jewish state.<sup>117</sup>

Indeed, by the autumn of 1937, some Nazi authorities had begun to view the growing obstacles to increased Jewish immigration into Palestine with greater alarm than the possibility of a Jewish state. After the publication of the Peel Commission’s report, with its recommendation to partition Palestine into nominally independent Jewish and Arab states, and the retention of the British Mandate in several pockets that would remain under British control, the Arab

<sup>115</sup> See BArch: R58, 956, Aufzeichnung des SD (II/112), “Zum Judenproblem,” Januar 1937. This report is unsigned, but the author was likely Adolf Eichmann.

<sup>116</sup> See PA: R104785, Pol.Abt.VII, Politik 2-Palästina, Bd.1, Aufzeichnung von Pol.VII über die Besprechung betr. Haavara am 29. Juli 1937, zu VIII SE 7115, 3. August 1937.

<sup>117</sup> See PA: R105970, Handelspolitische Abteilung, Handakten Clodius-Palästina, Aufzeichnung über die Besprechung am 21.IX.37 betr. Haavara, zu VIII SE 766/37, 25. September 1937. The Ha’avara Agreement, concluded between the German government and the German and international Zionist movements on August 28, 1933, allowed German Jews going to Palestine to take a small portion of their assets in the form of German exports to Palestine. Once in Palestine, German-Jewish immigrants were reimbursed from the sale of those German goods on the Palestinian market.



MAP 3.3. Peel Partition Plan 1937

revolt resumed with even greater intensity. In response, British authorities placed stricter limits on Jewish immigration, an act that resulted in a decrease in overall Jewish immigration into Palestine and contributed to a decline in the overall level of Jewish emigration from Germany.<sup>118</sup> In response, the Interior Ministry called another ministerial meeting on October 18, attended by representatives of the same offices as well as a representative of the Sicherheitsdienst of the SS.<sup>119</sup> Although the effectiveness and future of the Ha'avara Agreement was still questioned, there was general agreement at this meeting that Zionist

<sup>118</sup> See Esco Foundation for Palestine, Inc., *Palestine*, Vol. 2, 406–407.

<sup>119</sup> See IfZ: F71/3, 4-9 (Lösener Handakten), Vermerk über die Besprechung am 18.X.37, Nr. IB 191 VI/5012dg, 28. Oktober 1937. See also BArch: R1501, 5514, RIM an Stellvertreter des Führers, AA, RWM und SD, IB 191g/5012d, 7. Oktober 1937, and RIM an RWM, Nr. IB 191 IVg/5012d, 14. Oktober 1937.





PHOTO 3.4. Werner-Otto von Hentig (no date).  
Courtesy Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Berlin.

work in Germany, and Jewish emigration from Germany to Palestine, would continue as before.

Through the summer of 1937, the Foreign Office in Berlin generally recognized the necessity of maintaining Palestine as a key element in the regime's policy of forcing Jews to emigrate from Germany. Moreover, it refused Arab requests for a more public German opposition to the possible establishment of a Jewish state, and for a public German identity with the Arab cause in its opposition to the Peel Commission's recommendations. In July 1937, Amin al-Husayni, the Mufti of Jerusalem, met with the German Consul-General in Jerusalem, Walter Döhle. The Mufti suggested to Döhle closer German-Arab coordination in opposing a Jewish state, and asked the Consul-General to arrange a visit to Berlin for his representative, Mousa El-Alami. After informing his superiors in the Foreign Office in Berlin of the Mufti's request, Döhle was told by Ernst von Weizsäcker that there was no point to such a visit. In his response to Jerusalem, von Weizsäcker reasoned in a telegram: "As long as position of Arab states uncertain, visit of representative appears pointless."<sup>120</sup> In the Near East Department (Abteilung VII), Werner-Otto von Hentig, the head of the department, also dismissed the idea of a possible visit to Berlin

<sup>120</sup> See ADAP: Serie D, Bd. V, Nr. 637, 638.

of a representative from the Mufti.<sup>121</sup> On August 7, Abteilung VII issued a policy statement firmly opposing the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. After reviewing all of the arguments for opposing an independent Jewish state, and even admitting that such a state would in fact accelerate Jewish emigration from Germany, the memorandum concluded that, “Foreign policy measures with the goal of redirecting German-Jewish emigration to Palestine to other lands can hardly be considered.”<sup>122</sup> Finally, in his November 5, 1937 meeting in Baghdad with Sheik Yussuf Yassin, the private secretary of King Ibn-Saud of Saudi Arabia, Fritz Grobba politely declined Yassin’s request for strong German diplomatic support for the Arab cause in Palestine, and against the Peel Commission’s recommendations. Citing his government’s wish to maintain good relations with Great Britain, Grobba described his response to Yassin as follows: “I explained to the sheik that Anglo-German relations were also friendly. Given this reality, the Palestinian Arabs were expecting from Germany an active support that Germany could not give to them. . . .”<sup>123</sup>

Germany’s efforts to generally keep the Arabs at a polite distance are also evident in Reich Youth Leader Baldur von Schirach’s visit to the Middle East in late 1937. The trip included stops in Damascus, Baghdad, and Aleppo, as well as to Teheran. In his request for formal permission from Hitler to make the trip, von Schirach explained that he had received many invitations from various countries, including some in the Middle East, and that the purpose of the trip was to get to know the youth organizations in the lands to be visited.<sup>124</sup> However, he was quick to point out that the proposed trip had no political motives, and that the most important part of the trip would be his stop in Iran: “The main goal of the trip, Iran, is of special interest to me because in a relatively short period of time a youth organization was established with a national importance that is considered to be very high.”<sup>125</sup> Of course, Iran was independent, and not an Arab state.

German fears of an independent Jewish state in Palestine had virtually disappeared by the end of 1937. The Peel Commission’s specific

<sup>121</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. V, Nr. 569. Von Hentig was an Orientalist and one of the more knowledgeable diplomats in Arab affairs in the German Foreign Office. During the war, he was attached for a time to the Sixth Army in the southern Soviet Union as it sought to move into the Caucasus and then into the Arab Fertile Crescent. See Eckart Conze et.al., *Das Amt und die Vergangenheit. Deutsche Diplomaten im Dritten Reich und in der Bundesrepublik* (Munich: Karl Blessing Verlag, 2010), 155–156, 209–213.

<sup>122</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. V, Nr. 571. At one point, the memorandum mentioned possibly providing the Arabs with money or even arms through other Arab states, particularly Iraq, as a way of opposing the establishment of a Jewish state. This possibility was dismissed by von Weizsäcker in a comment in the margins.

<sup>123</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. V, Nr. 574.

<sup>124</sup> BArch: R43-3506, Der Jugendführer des Deutschen Reichs an den Staatssekretär und Chef der Reichskanzlei Dr. Lammers, RK.18251, 18. November 1937.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

recommendations, already rejected by the Arabs and the Zionists, and not yet formally adopted by the British government, no longer seemed relevant to Nazi policy by the end of the year.<sup>126</sup> In early 1938, Hitler apparently made a final, specific, commitment to the continued use of Zionism and Palestine in the regime's policy on Jewish emigration from Germany. Carl Clodius of the Trade Policy Department (Handelspolitische Abteilung) in the Foreign Office referred to Hitler's commitment in a January 27, 1938 memorandum, while Ernst von Weizsäcker referred to the same initiative in a note to Rosenberg's Foreign Policy Office (Aussenpolitisches Amt) in the NSDAP that same month.<sup>127</sup> A note from the Foreign Trade Office (Aussenhandelsamt) of the Overseas Organization (Auslandsorganisation, or AO) of the NSDAP to the director of the AO in the Foreign Office on February 1, 1938, referred to Hitler's move in the following way: "... on the basis of a recommendation by Reichsleiter Rosenberg, the Führer has made the decision that Jewish emigration from Germany should continue to be promoted with all possible means, and it should be directed first and foremost to Palestine."<sup>128</sup> Moreover, at a meeting with representatives of the Foreign Office on January 24, the same information was presented by representatives of the Ministry of Economics.<sup>129</sup> At the same time, three former Zionist officials also verified Hitler's initiative in January 1938.<sup>130</sup> Finally, two Gestapo memoranda of February and March 1938 respectively, allude to a desired further emigration of German Jews to Palestine.<sup>131</sup> The backdrop for all of this, no doubt, was the lead-up to the annexation of Austria on March 12, 1938, a move that would instantly increase the Jewish population of the Reich by some 200,000. This reality alone

<sup>126</sup> See PA: R104785, Pol.Abt.VII, Politik 2-Palästina, Bd.1, Aufzeichnung von Pol.VII, 92 (o.D.); R104789, Politik 5a-Palästina, Bd.3, DGK/Jerusalem an AA/Berlin, Nr.Pol. 96/37, 29. Dezember 1937; and R29899, Büro des U.St.S.-Palästina, Weizsäcker an Pol.VII, zu 83-24 Ag. 13/1, 19. Januar 1938. The Arabs rejected the Peel Commission's recommendations out of hand, while the Zionist movement accepted, with reluctance, the principle of partition, but not the specific partition proposal of the Peel Commission. With both Arabs and Jews opposed to that particular plan, the British government seemed to drop the Commission's recommendations by the end of 1937, and formally renounced partition as a solution in 1938. See Esco Foundation for Palestine, Inc., *Palestine*, Vol. 2, 861–874.

<sup>127</sup> See ADAP: Serie D, Bd. V, Nr. 579; and PA: R104785, Pol.Abt.VII, Politik 2-Palästina, Bd.1, Aufzeichnung Weizsäcker an das Aussenpolitische Amt, Pol.VII-92, Januar 1938.

<sup>128</sup> PA: R99387, Inland II A/B, 83-24a, Bd.1, Aussenhandelsamt der AO der NSDAP an den Leiter der AO im Auswärtigen Amt, Ag.13/1, 1. Februar 1938.

<sup>129</sup> PA: R99387, Inland II A/B, 83-24a, Bd.1, Vermerk über die Besprechung vom 24. 1. 1938 betr. die Handelsattachés, 26. Januar 1938.

<sup>130</sup> See Ernst Marcus, "The German Foreign Office and the Palestine Question in the Period 1938–1939," *Yad Vashem Studies* 2 (1958): 193; and Feilchenfeld, *Haavara Transfer*, 32.

<sup>131</sup> See BArch: R187, Sammlung Schumacher, 240/I, Geheime Staatspolizei, Staatspolizeistelle Würzburg, B.Nr. 1130/38 IIB, 28. Februar 1938; and PA: R99388, Inland II A/B, 83-24a, Bd.2, Geheime Staatspolizei an AA/Berlin, Nr. IIB 3-F.455, 29. März 1938.

likely precluded any change in policy that would in any way limit Jewish emigration from a “Greater Germany” to Palestine.

Throughout the Arab territories in the Middle East, and not only in Palestine, there was public outrage at the published recommendations of the Peel Commission beginning in July 1937. From Baghdad, Grobba reported to Berlin that the Iraqi government announced plans to both organize world opinion against the plan, as well as to forbid public demonstrations against the Peel Commission’s recommendations out of fears that demonstrators might attack Iraqi Jews, their property, and their institutions. Grobba also relayed warnings given to him by Iraqi Prime Minister Hikmet Suleiman that should Britain proceed to implement the partition plan, “. . . many volunteers from all Arab countries, including Iraq, would rush to Palestine and fight against the English.”<sup>132</sup> Grobba relayed additional communications he received from other Arab leaders and organizations, within and outside of Iraq, with more or less the same message, many of them appealing for German help in thwarting the Peel Commission recommendations for Palestine.<sup>133</sup>

In these and other reports, Grobba in Baghdad and his superiors in the Foreign Office in Berlin listened to Arab complaints about the situation in Palestine, and requests for some form of German support, be it diplomatic, financial, or weapons. The Arabs received in return only general statements of German sympathy for the Arab people in their quest for national self-determination. Even regarding the question of Jewish immigration into Palestine, Hitler’s government made the explicit decision in the second half of 1937 to continue the one element of its Jewish policy that most Arabs clearly rejected, namely the promotion of Jewish emigration from Germany to Palestine. It seems clear, therefore, that by the beginning of 1938, German policy toward the Arab lands of the Middle East reflected a desire more or less to maintain the post–World War I status quo in the region, as well as a complete disinterest in any form of active political identity, cooperation, or solidarity with Arab nationalism and its goal of Arab independence from European control. But this would be modified, largely for tactical reasons, in 1938 and 1939 as the situation in Europe changed, and as Hitler began to adjust to the likelihood that he would have to achieve his goals in Europe in the face British and French opposition.

<sup>132</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. VII, Politik 5a-Palästina, Bd. 1, DG-Bagdad an AA-Berlin, Nr. 1674, 10. Juli 1937.

<sup>133</sup> See for example PA: Pol.Abt. VII, Politik 5a-Palästina, Bd. 1, Anlage zum Bericht der Deutschen Gesandtschaft in Bagdad, Nr. 1730, 15. Juli 1937; DG/Bagdad an AA/Berlin, Nr. 1692, 13. Juli 1937; and DG/Bagdad an AA/Berlin, Nr. 1752, 17. Juli 1937. This last report noted the outbreak of some anti-Jewish violence in Iraq.

## The Coming of War, 1938–1939

### CONTINUITY AND DEPARTURE IN HITLER'S "ENGLANDPOLITIK"

By the end of 1938, Hitler's regime had reached the conclusion that Great Britain would neither support German expansion in central and eastern Europe, nor necessarily go to war against Germany to prevent it. London's apparent acquiescence in unilateral German rearmament, in Mussolini's war in Ethiopia, in Germany's military occupation of the Rhineland, in Axis military intervention in the Spanish civil war, and other factors likely contributed to this conclusion in Berlin. Although a far cry from the formal Anglo-German accommodation or alliance to which Hitler had referred since the early days of the movement, it was nevertheless a rationale that could be used to at least begin his plans for expanding German "living space" in Europe, despite British disapproval. A rationale such as this was apparent at the infamous Reichskanzlei meeting of November 5, 1937, at which Hitler and his civilian and military advisors made the decision to proceed with plans to annex Austria and to dismember the Czechoslovak state beginning in 1938. Their assumption seemed to be that the risk of precipitating a war in Europe was low at that time. Indeed, at several points in his summary of the meeting, Colonel Hossbach cites Hitler's references to Britain's problems throughout its empire, and his consequent assumption that, as a result of those problems, Britain was less likely to risk a war in Europe: "The difficulties in the empire and the prospect of becoming caught up again in a long-lasting European war should be decisive factors in dissuading England from becoming involved in a war against Germany. The English position will certainly have an effect on that of France."<sup>1</sup>

In late 1937, Hitler seemed reasonably confident that Britain would accept changes with regard to Austria and Czechoslovakia through peaceful

<sup>1</sup> See ADAP: Serie D, Bd. I, Nr. 19.



PHOTO 4.1. Joachim von Ribbentrop (no date).  
Courtesy Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Berlin.

international negotiations, based on the principle of German national self-determination. At his meeting with Hitler at Berchtesgaden on November 19, 1937, Lord Halifax indicated Britain's willingness to accept peaceful changes regarding Austria and Czechoslovakia on the basis of multilateral agreements. From London, Ambassador von Ribbentrop reported on several occasions in early 1938 his conviction that the current British government would not attempt to militarily resist even a unilateral and forced German annexation of Austria.<sup>2</sup> Czechoslovakia, of course, involved much more than the principle of national self-determination of the Sudeten Germans as far as Hitler's intentions were concerned; and these intentions went beyond what the British government was willing to accept. In his May 30, 1938 directive, known as "Operation Green" (*Fall Grün*), Hitler instructed his military commanders to prepare for the invasion of Czechoslovakia in the near future. Hitler stated in

<sup>2</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. I, Nr. 31 (Mit Anlage), 145, 146, 147, 149. See also Halifax, *Fullness of Days*, 184–190. Halifax also mentions that when the conversation turned to the return of some of Germany's former colonies, Hitler indicated that he was not interested in North Africa and the Mediterranean area due to competing Anglo-French-Italian interests there.

no uncertain terms: “It is my unalterable decision to smash Czechoslovakia in the foreseeable future through a military action.”<sup>3</sup> With these words, Hitler clearly intended to eliminate the state of Czechoslovakia altogether. On May 11, the British ambassador in Berlin, Neville Henderson, informed von Ribbentrop that while Britain was willing to consider peaceful changes in the status of the Sudeten Germans, it could not remain indifferent to a German invasion of Czechoslovakia.<sup>4</sup> Hitler’s decision to agree to the Munich conference in the fall of 1938, and thus to delay his final plans for Czechoslovakia, indicate that the rationale to proceed in Europe without English support, confident that England would not resist militarily, was perhaps flawed. He decided not to risk war with Britain in 1938, and agreed to a deal at the Munich conference in the fall that fell significantly short of his intention to eliminate the Czechoslovak state. As a result, and with some reluctance, the German government found it expedient to take advantage of Britain’s imperial problems in the Middle East and elsewhere in an effort to distract London from the situation in central Europe, and thus weaken its willingness to consider war over Hitler’s plans to expand Germany’s living space in Europe.<sup>5</sup>

German efforts to pressure Britain into acquiescing in his plans for Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland in 1938 and 1939 were augmented by an anti-British propaganda campaign. Beginning in late 1937, the British Embassy in Berlin began reporting on the growing anti-British tendencies in the German press that portrayed Great Britain as staunchly opposed to Germany’s equality as a great power.<sup>6</sup> Through much of 1938, the British government was unsure of German intentions toward Britain, as indicated in a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy on November 14.<sup>7</sup> But by the end of 1938 and the start of spring of 1939, reports indicate that London was reasonably satisfied that German propaganda in the Middle East prior to the outbreak of war was merely intended to put pressure on the British position in the region, and thereby turn London’s attention away from Europe, rather than to undermine or damage the security of the British Empire.<sup>8</sup> The specific aims of the campaign were to impress upon the British government Germany’s determination to

<sup>3</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. II, Nr. 221 (Anlage).      <sup>4</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. II, Nr. 154 (Anlage).

<sup>5</sup> This tactic is outlined in a memo from Werner-Otto von Hentig, the head of the Near East department (Abteilung VII) in the German Foreign Office, to Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop in late June 1938. See IfZ: Nachlaß Werner-Otto von Hentig, ED 113/6, “Vorschläge zur Behandlung von Arabern und Indern,” 27. Juni 1938.

<sup>6</sup> See Henke, *England in Hitlers politischem Kalkül*, 79–80, 120; and Aigner, *Das Ringen*, 310 ff.

<sup>7</sup> See NAL: FO371/21658-14396 (Secret 1938), Committee on Foreign Policy, 32nd Meeting, November 14, 1938.

<sup>8</sup> See NAL: FO371/22988-C551618, Report of the Press Attaché of the British Embassy in Berlin, December 28, 1938; FO371/21665-C14758, Foreign Office Memorandum of November 22, 1938; and FO371/23232-E2274, War Office Memoranda of March 2 and May 7, 1939. See also Herf, *Nazi Propaganda to the Arab World*, Chap. 3; and Henke, *England in Hitlers politischem Kalkül*, 201 ff.

achieve its aims in central Europe by war if necessary, and to distract British attention from Europe by publicly attacking Britain's imperial policies, but not its strategic position or security. Much of the content for this campaign was provided by the volatile situation in the Middle East, especially in Palestine following the publication of the Peel Commission's report in July 1937.<sup>9</sup> Early in 1938, Germany began broadcasting in Arabic to the Middle East from a transmitter at Zeesen near Berlin. The broadcasts stressed Arab-German friendship, and they were critical of British and French policy in the Middle East. Palestine was a particularly convenient source for anti-British propaganda; yet the German attacks on British policy that appeared in the German press and on German radio did not call for the elimination of British power in the eastern Mediterranean, or for anything that would significantly alter the post-World War I settlement and status quo in the Arab world. Vague references to the legitimate national aspirations of the Arab people were not necessarily meant to promote the end of British power and influence in the Middle East, an end to the Jewish National Home in Palestine, or the achievement of Arab independence anywhere in the Arabic-speaking world. Once again, this was a conclusion reached at the time by British officials in London and the Middle East.

In 1938 and 1939, Hitler involved himself personally in the effort to focus attention abroad on Britain's problems in the Middle East, especially in Palestine. In a speech before the Reichstag on February 20, 1938, he publicly rebuked the British parliament and press for their persistent criticism of Nazi political oppression and the persecution of the Jews in Germany.<sup>10</sup> Referring to the harsh punishment of Arab rebels by British military courts, he advised the members of the British parliament to look into the judgments of British courts in Jerusalem rather than the decisions of the German People's Court, and suggested that he would never permit members of the German Reichstag to publicly question British justice. He expressed understanding and respect for the problems and for the legitimate interests of the British world empire, but then advised the British to, in effect, mind their own business and tend to their own problems. In his speech at the annual Nuremberg Party rally on September 12, 1938, he compared the plight of the Sudeten Germans with that of the Palestinian Arabs with the words: "I am not inclined to permit the establishment of a second Palestine here in the heart of Germany through the cleverness of other statesmen."<sup>11</sup> In a speech at Saarbrücken on October 9, Hitler demanded that Britain respect Germany's legitimate sphere of interest in central Europe, just as Germany respects and accepts British authority in Palestine and elsewhere in the world. Again, stressing the quid pro quo logic behind his idealized conception of Anglo-German relations, he advised London:

<sup>9</sup> See the articles and editorials published during this period in the *Völkischer Beobachter*, 8-13., 26. Juli 1938; 2., 9., 21. August 1938; 19., 21., 23. Oktober 1938; and 15-23., 25. November 1938.

<sup>10</sup> Domarus, *Hitler*, Vol. 2, 793–804. <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 904.



“We would like to advise all of these gentlemen to concern themselves with their own problems, and leave us in peace.”<sup>12</sup> He continued this line of argument at the Bürgerbräukeller in Munich on November 8 with the words: “The gentlemen of the British Parliament are surely very much at home in the British world Empire, but they are not in Central Europe. Here they lack knowledge of the conditions, events, and the relationships. . . in the end, we ourselves don’t know our way around very well in India, or in Egypt, or even in Palestine.”<sup>13</sup> Finally, in Wilhelmshaven on April 1, as he rejected British criticism of Germany’s March 15, 1939 occupation of Bohemia and Moravia, Hitler actually endorsed Britain’s insistence that Germany had no business in Palestine with the words: “We do not seek anything in Palestine. Just as we Germans have so little business in Palestine, so too does England have so little business in our German living space.”<sup>14</sup>

The original orders for Operation Green were based on the expectation that German demands would be unacceptable to the Czechoslovak government, and therefore a pretext for military action. However, developments through the summer and fall of 1938 produced sufficient doubt in Hitler’s mind about the likely British reaction to a German military assault to force him to cancel plans for a German invasion of Czechoslovakia. On July 18, the German Embassy in London submitted a comprehensive report to the German Foreign Office in Berlin on Anglo-German relations in light of the recent German annexation of Austria and the developing crisis over the Sudetenland and Czechoslovakia. The contents of the report likely added to the confusion in Hitler’s mind about how he might proceed with the Sudetenland issue. The report began with a very negative view of the state of bilateral relations between Berlin and London, and cited as causes several factors: fears aroused in Britain over Germany’s recent annexation of Austria; general war-like tendencies throughout Europe, allegedly fed by world Jewry, the Communist International, and various nationalist groups within individual countries; Britain’s rearmament program, and particularly its air defense system; and the political polarization in British domestic politics between the Chamberlain and Churchill factions and their perceived different approaches toward German demands in Europe. The report further observed that the great majority of the British population preferred an understanding with Germany. It concluded that although the current state of bilateral relations was unsettled and filled with tension, the current British government supported the negative German view of the Soviet Union, and Germany’s demand that the issue of the Sudetenland be resolved through bilateral agreements rather than through the League of Nations. However, the report cautioned that only a peaceful resolution of the Sudeten German crisis was acceptable to London, and that Britain would undoubtedly side with France if Germany chose the path of

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 956.    <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 969.    <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, 1121.

military action against Czechoslovakia. Ambassador von Dirksen then suggested: “The attempt to achieve an understanding with England will therefore have to be the urgent task of our foreign policy, as soon as the proper conditions for it can be established.”<sup>15</sup>

Thus, Hitler was confronted with the choice between the free pursuit of German policy in its own self-defined sphere of influence in Europe and peaceful relations with Great Britain, a choice that he had always hoped to avoid. On September 26, Sir Horace Wilson, an advisor to Neville Chamberlain, warned Hitler that Britain would support France in any Franco-German conflict that might arise from the crisis over the Sudetenland.<sup>16</sup> Two days later, the German Embassy in London warned the Foreign Office in Berlin by telephone that the British government would likely intervene militarily in any German military action against Czechoslovakia.<sup>17</sup> Given Mussolini’s apparent desire for an international meeting to peacefully resolve the Sudeten issue, Hitler was isolated internationally and forced to settle at least temporarily for a compromise over the Sudetenland, one that fell far short of his intention to erase the Czechoslovak state from the map of Europe.

In the months following the Munich Agreement and the cession of the Sudetenland to Germany, Hitler seemed to regret his decision to back away from his initial intention to invade Czechoslovakia. He concluded that Britain in fact would not have declared war merely to ensure the survival of Czechoslovakia. This is apparent in speeches he delivered in Saarbrücken on October 9, in Weimar on November 6, and in Munich on November 8.<sup>18</sup> In all three, he implied that he would no longer tolerate British interference in Germany’s sphere of influence in Europe, and that Germany’s legitimate rights would no longer be sacrificed through needless negotiations with other powers. By the start of the new year 1939, therefore, Hitler was prepared to pursue his aims in Europe even if it meant war with Great Britain. On March 15, having concluded that the British had been bluffing a few months earlier, Hitler ordered German troops to occupy Bohemia and Moravia, and to enter Prague. In the end, he did carry out his intention to eliminate the Czechoslovak state.

Hitler had not given up his illusions of reaching some sort of geopolitical accommodation with Great Britain, based on mutual recognition and support for separate German and British spheres of interest. When he ordered German troops into Bohemia and Moravia on March 15, his acceptance of the

<sup>15</sup> BArch: R43 II/1436 (Auswärtige Angelegenheiten), DB/London an AA/Berlin, A. 3161 (Geheim), “Der gegenwärtigen Stand der deutsch-englischen Beziehungen,” 18. Juli 1938.

<sup>16</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. II, Nr. 634. See also Paul-Otto Schmidt, *Statist auf diplomatischer Bühne 1923–1945: Erlebnisse des Chefdolmetschers im Auswärtigen Amt mit den Staatsmännern Europas* (Bonn: Athenäum Verlag, 1949), 409–410.

<sup>17</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. II, Nr. 657. See also Ulrich von Hassell, *Die Hassell-Tagebücher 1938–1944. Aufzeichnungen vom anderen Deutschland* (Munich: Siedler Verlag, 1989), 54–55.

<sup>18</sup> See Domarus, Vol. 2, 956, 965, 967–969.

possibility of war represented an attempt to force Britain into the sort of partnership he had long favored, rather than a desire to undermine or destroy the British Empire.<sup>19</sup> He hoped to neutralize France and thereby deny Britain a foothold on the European continent. He would then turn his attention to the invasion and defeat of the Soviet Union, and the conquest of German *Lebensraum* in eastern Europe. In his meeting with military commanders in the Reichskanzlei on May 23, 1939, Hitler reiterated his primary goal: “Danzig is not the object here. For us it is about the expansion of our living space in the east. . . .”<sup>20</sup> Hitler also concluded that since there was little likelihood of achieving this aim without provoking a war with the western powers at some point, plans were drawn up for the defeat and occupation of the Netherlands, Belgium, and France. While an air and naval campaign would be carried out from airfields and ports along the North Sea and English Channel until the British accepted Germany’s new position of hegemony in Europe, there were as yet no plans for the occupation of Great Britain, and certainly none for the destruction of the British Empire.

By the summer of 1939, Hitler had decided that, despite a continuing desire for some sort of bilateral understanding with Great Britain, he was now prepared to go to war against Britain and France rather than postpone any longer his quest for *Lebensraum* in eastern Europe. This included his last-minute agreement with the Soviet Union less than two weeks before the German invasion of Poland. On the other hand, he continued to harbor hopes for some sort of last-minute understanding with the British government, and the avoidance of an all-out war in the west. In his meetings with British ambassador Henderson on August 23 and 25, 1939, just a week before the German invasion of Poland, he spoke of his many attempts to reach an understanding with Britain in the past, and London’s refusal to respond positively to those overtures.<sup>21</sup> He warned Henderson that Germany was determined to resolve its problems with Poland unilaterally, that it now had the military and political means to do so, and that the recently concluded pact with Stalin freed Germany from the burden of a major two-front war. His rationale remained a bilateral agreement between Germany and Great Britain that established mutually recognized spheres of influence for each, with Germany’s sphere primarily in Europe and Britain’s overseas. For Hitler, the inherent problems in Anglo-German relations had always been centered in Britain’s refusal to grant Germany that free hand in Europe. From Hitler’s perspective, and certainly prior to September 1, 1939, it never had anything to do with

<sup>19</sup> See Henke, *England in Hitlers politischem Kalkül*, 155, 204 ff.

<sup>20</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. VI, Nr. 433.

<sup>21</sup> See ADAP: Serie D, Bd. VII, Nr. 200, 265. See also Hitler’s August 11, 1939 discussions with Carl Burckhardt, the League of Nations Commissioner for Danzig, in Carl Burckhardt, *Meine Danziger Mission 1937–1939* (Munich: Verlag Georg D. W. Callwey, 1960), 348.

disagreements or conflicts over British imperial interests outside of Europe in general, or with the Mediterranean region and the Middle East in particular.

In December 1937, Schwarz van Berk from the Nazi newspaper *Der Angriff* was in Cairo where he was collecting information on the situation in Palestine. He sent a rather long report to Werner-Otto von Hentig of the Near East Department (Abteilung VII) in the German Foreign Office in Berlin with his observation on the high level of violence in Palestine since the outbreak of the revolt. On that particular issue, van Berk discussed the weakness of the Arab insurgents as a result of their lack of money and weapons, the activities of the Mufti and those around him in Beirut, and the reluctance of Arab governments to actively help the Palestinian uprising. But much of van Berk's letter to von Hentig concerned his assessment of Germany's interests in the evolving situation in the region, specifically what he perceived as some of the possible benefits that might accrue to Hitler's government. He identified two advantages that the unrest in Palestine had created for Germany: "...for one that the English will have to focus on this point...and for another that the Jewish problem outside of Germany remains a discussion point."<sup>22</sup> In his report, van Berk sang the praises of the Ha'avara transfer system, and its economic benefits for Germany as well as for Zionist efforts in Palestine, and closed by citing the irony that although Germany sends many Jews to Palestine, there remains much sympathy for the Reich among the Arab population.

However, Germany made only sporadic attempts to take advantage of Arab unrest after the summer of 1938, when tensions in Europe surrounding Nazi moves against Austria and Czechoslovakia provided Hitler with a pretext for contributing to Britain's problems in the Middle East and elsewhere. There is some evidence that the German government sought to use the unrest in Palestine to distract Britain from the Sudeten crisis, and thereby discourage British intervention in central Europe. Hitler held a secret conference in mid July, 1938, attended by Göring, Keitel, Goebbels, Himmler and a few others, at which he ordered the timing of an attack on Czechoslovakia to coincide with any period of heightened conflict in Palestine.<sup>23</sup> Admiral Canaris' Abwehr, along with German Ambassador Fritz Grobba in Bagdad, would also be

<sup>22</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. VII, Politik 2-Palästina, Bd. 1, Schwarz van Berk/Kairo an Werner-Otto von Hentig/Berlin, 9. Dezember 1937.

<sup>23</sup> This information was relayed by General Walther von Brauchitsch to Ian Colvin, a British journalist in Berlin with contacts to important personalities in Nazi Germany. Colvin writes that the meeting was held "around" the 14th of July. See Ian Colvin, *Vansittart in Office: An Historical Survey of the Origins of the Second World War Based on the Papers of Sir Robert Vansittart* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1965), 220. H. Fitzgerald Harley, a member of the British Union of Fascists who had been in Germany at the time, told the British Embassy in Paris that he saw the minutes of the July meeting in the office of Dr. Karl Schmidt of the Gestapo, and that it had been decided at the meeting to provide the Arabs with some money in order to provoke further unrest in Palestine. See NAL: FO371/21782-C7624. British Embassy/Paris to Foreign Office/London, 22 July 1938.



PHOTO 4.2. Ernst Woermann (no date).  
Courtesy Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Berlin.

involved in cultivating unrest in Palestine as a way of possibly discouraging British intervention in central Europe. Former Abwehr officer Helmut Groscurth made the following note in his diary entry for August 29, 1938: “Conversation with Ambassador Grobba from Baghdad. The Arab movement should be immediately activated.”<sup>24</sup> Canaris had met the Mufti, Amin al-Husayni, early in the year during a trip to Beirut, and apparently provided some financial aid for the Mufti’s political activities in Beirut, to which he had fled in 1937 in order to avoid arrest in Palestine by the British authorities. Moreover, Grobba was used on at least one occasion to deliver money to the Mufti’s personal secretary in Damascus, Musa el-Alami.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, in a note to Under State Secretary Ernst Woermann in the Foreign Office in Berlin in May 1939, Grobba did mention financial assistance that Germany had recently provided to Arab rebels in Palestine through Saudi Arabia.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Helmuth Groscurth, *Tagebücher eines Abwehroffiziers 1938–1940* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1970), 106.

<sup>25</sup> See Karl-Heinz Abshagen, *Canaris* (London: Hutchinson, 1956), 208; and Melka, “The Axis and the Arab Middle East,” 53. The Abwehr also sought to provide arms to Arab rebels in Palestine at the time through the government of Saudi Arabia, which had been interested in acquiring weapons for use in Palestine. See ADAP: Serie D, Bd. V, Nr. 590. See also Grobba, *Männer und Mächte*, 112.

<sup>26</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. VI, Nr. 313, 422.

By the summer of 1939, the British government had suspected German financial assistance to the Mufti for the Arab revolt in Palestine, and Grobba's role in the process.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, in Berlin there was at least some consideration of encouraging Arab unrest in Syria to distract France from central Europe. After a warning from Franz Reichert, the agent of the Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro in Jerusalem, that more unrest in Syria against French rule was imminent, Herbert Hagen of II-112 of the Sicherheitsdienst in the SS suggested: "...under these circumstances it seems possible, if there is interest at the moment, to strengthen the political propaganda among the Arabs there."<sup>28</sup> However, there is no evidence that Hagen's suggestion led to any direct German intervention in Syria. In brief, while it appears likely that some German financial support did reach the Mufti in Beirut and the Arab rebellion in Palestine through Canaris's Abwehr, it does not appear that Germany tried to send weapons to Palestine or Syria during the two years before the outbreak of war in Europe. Indeed, even when the situation in Europe became increasingly unstable in the second half of 1938 and throughout 1939, Germany remained quite cautious in its response to events in the Middle East. It is also important to note that Arab unrest in Palestine declined dramatically in the summer of 1939, despite Palestinian Arab rejection of the British government's White Paper on Palestine in May. The wealth of German Foreign Office documents portray top Nazi officials such as von Ribbentrop, von Weizsäcker, Woermann, and von Hentig as not particularly interested in courting Arab opinion at that time. Fritz Grobba in Baghdad, on the other hand, seemed to be the only major German diplomat in the region with an interest in closer political and economic ties to Iraq and Saudi Arabia; in the case of the latter that meant selling some arms to the Saudis, as well as funneling some money through the Saudi government to the Arab revolt in Palestine. Yet Grobba too was reluctant to grant various Arab leaders much of what they wanted from Germany at that time, particularly as he agreed that, in the event of war, the Saudis and other Arab states would likely side with Great Britain.<sup>29</sup>

The Foreign Policy Office of the NSDAP (APA) took an interest in the Middle East during the two years or so before the war. It tended to support a policy of greater German involvement in the Arab world, particularly in Saudi Arabia. In March 1938, King Ibn-Saud sent his personal secretary, Khalid al-Hud, to Berlin to negotiate closer political and economic ties with Germany.

<sup>27</sup> See NAL: FO371/21887-E4838, Memorandum of the Foreign Office, August 12, 1938; FO371/21872-E7560, Memorandum of the Foreign Office, December 14, 1938; FO371/21871-E7394, Memorandum of the Foreign Office, December 1938; FO-371/23238-E5101, Memorandum of the Colonial Office, July 14, 1939; and FO371/23191-E5128, Foreign Office/London to British Embassy/Baghdad, July 18, 1939.

<sup>28</sup> See Nicosia, *Third Reich*, 279 (n.98).

<sup>29</sup> See PA: Pol.Abt. VII, Politik 2-Saudisch Arabien, Bd. 1, DG/Djidda an AA/Berlin, Nr. Dj.9, 27. Januar 1939; and Pol.Abt. VII, Politik 2-Saudisch Arabien, Bd. 1, DG/Bagdad an AA/Berlin, Nr. Dj. 44, 18. Februar 1939.

He was able to meet only with the APA. The APA received with enthusiasm al-Hud's request for German military assistance, which included 25,000 rifles with ammunition. Its memorandum of July 23, 1938 outlined the APA's hopes as follows: "Germany's policy in the Near East could be effectively supported through Saudi Arabia, the center of the Mohammedan world. The APA has therefore tried for a long time to establish ties with Saudi Arabia through the neutral means of economic exchange."<sup>30</sup> The same memorandum, as well as others, complained of strong opposition from some of the responsible Reich ministries to closer political and economic ties with Saudi Arabia.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, both the Ministry of Economics and much of the Foreign Office in Berlin were unenthusiastic about arms and other exports to Saudi Arabia because of its inability to pay with foreign currency, as well as the Saudi government's inability to pursue policies to which the British might object.<sup>32</sup> Nor was the German military leadership (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, or OKW) particularly keen on German arms sales to, and efforts to forge closer military and political ties with, Saudi Arabia, as von Hentig noted in a February 28 memorandum in the Foreign Office: "The Oberkommando der Wehrmacht shares our view that we cannot expect an improvement in our political position from such weapons deliveries under these circumstances, but that they would instead work against us."<sup>33</sup> One apparent victory for Grobba and for the APA did come in February 1939 when full diplomatic relations were finally established between Germany and Saudi Arabia.

By late May 1939, Hitler's acceptance of the likelihood of war with the west over Poland led to a slight change in the German position on selling some weapons to Saudi Arabia. This somewhat altered view was also evident by then in the German Foreign Office, and enabled Grobba to convince State

<sup>30</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. VII, Politik 2-Saudisch Arabien, Bd. 1, Aufzeichnung des APA, Pol. VII 1061, 23. Juli 1938. There was always friction between Rosenberg's Foreign Policy Office (APA) in the Nazi party and the German Foreign Office. Most of the younger party members who entered the diplomatic corps in greater numbers after 1933 were products of von Ribbentrop's Dienststelle Ribbentrop in the NSDAP. See Piper, *Alfred Rosenberg*, 288.

<sup>31</sup> See also PA: Aussenpolitisches Amt, Politische Berichte-Saudisch-Arabien, Aktennotiz des Amts für Vorderasien, 12. Juni 1939.

<sup>32</sup> See PA: Pol.Abt. VII, Politik 2-Saudisch Arabien, Bd. 1, von Hentig/AA an Woermann/AA, zu Pol. VII 1263, 6. September 1938; Politik 2-Saudisch Arabien, Bd. 1, von Hentig/AA an Malletke/APA, (no date); Politik 2-Saudisch Arabien, Bd. 1, Woermann/AA an von Hentig/AA, zu Pol. VII/1263, 26. September 1938. In July 1938, Hitler indicated his support for the state agencies when he issued an order prohibiting party officials from speaking publicly about foreign policy issues: "In order to avoid false impressions, I hereby forbid until further notice certain party leaders from speaking publicly about foreign policy problems." See BArch: R43 II/1400, Auswärtige Angelegenheiten, 25. Juli 1938.

<sup>33</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. V, Nr. 590. See also IfZ: Nachlaß Werner-Otto von Hentig, ED 113/34, von Hentig an Aussenpolitisches Amt der NSDAP, September 1938. In thinking about a possible war, von Hentig concluded: "We must assume, therefore, that Ibn Saud... will be on Britain's side."



Secretary Woermann and even von Hentig that closer relations with Saudi Arabia could be in Germany's political and economic interest in the event of war in Europe. Grobba asked Woermann in early May 1939 to reconsider his position on arms sales to Saudi Arabia, implying that Germany would likely be at war with England soon, and that for this reason, he was renewing his efforts with regard to Saudi Arabia. He reiterated that the Saudi king had promised his country's benevolent neutrality should war break out in Europe, and had requested in return German help in developing his country and its defensive capabilities. Grobba argued that Germany should assert its position in Saudi Arabia and predicted that: "In the event of war we will surely try with all our means to cultivate relations with Ibn-Saud; but everything that we now can establish in peace and quiet will then have to be improvised with great sacrifice."<sup>34</sup> In the same month, von Hentig made a similar case to Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop for closer ties to Saudi Arabia, implying as well that war in Europe was a strong possibility.<sup>35</sup> He referred to the political and economic situation in the Middle East, which made a move in Saudi Arabia advisable in view of the European situation. In explaining his own change of mind, he pointed out that most of the countries in the region would either side with the British or retain a pro-British neutrality. He also asserted that the British White Paper of May 1939 had effectively neutralized the Arab revolt in Palestine, and that Italy was an object of distrust and scorn throughout the Arab world. In this region of vanishing opportunities, von Hentig now viewed the Saudis as one of the few remaining trading partners in the region, especially in view of their small but steadily growing oil revenues.

In the middle of May, the Saudi representative Khalid al-Hud returned to Berlin to make another attempt at securing German weapons. This time, he met with a more interested and receptive German Foreign Office, and was not forced to waste his time with the APA as he had done a year earlier. On June 8, 1939, he was received by von Ribbentrop who agreed to the Saudi request for a large quantity of German rifles and the construction of a munitions factory in Saudi Arabia.<sup>36</sup> On June 17, Hitler received al-Hud at the Berghof and gave his approval for the sale of 8,000 rifles with 8 million rounds of ammunition, the construction of a small munitions factory in Saudi Arabia, and, in the more distant future, the sale of anti-aircraft guns and tanks.<sup>37</sup> Italy, aware of its own unpopularity in the Arabian Peninsula and that a greater German presence might help to weaken British power in the

<sup>34</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. VI, Nr. 313.

<sup>35</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. VI, Nr.422. In a note in the margin, Ribbentrop expressed his agreement with von Hentig's arguments. Von Hentig again outlined his new position in another memorandum to von Ribbentrop on June 9. See PA: Pol.Abt.VII. Politik 2-Saudisch Arabien, Bd.I. Hentig an RAM, Pol.VII 949, 9. Juni 1939.

<sup>36</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. VI, Nr.498. <sup>37</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. VI, Nr.541.



Red Sea, had come to support Germany's involvement in Saudi Arabia.<sup>38</sup> Negotiations between the Saudi representative, the German Foreign Office, and the OKW on a weapons package and terms of payment continued until an agreement was reached in July.<sup>39</sup> The deal, which included 4,000 rifles, ammunition, anti-aircraft guns, and the munitions factory, was never put into effect due to the outbreak of war in September.

In the spring and summer of 1939, German policy with regard to weapons exports to the Middle East appeared to reflect a realization in Berlin that in the event of war, England's position in the region was virtually unassailable. Von Hentig's May 22 memorandum to Ribbentrop had described the disappearance of opportunities for Germany throughout the region, leaving Saudi Arabia as perhaps the last and only mechanism for potentially complicating Britain's problems in the Middle East. Yet, suspicions about Saudi Arabia lingered in Berlin, despite al-Hud's meetings with von Ribbentrop and Hitler in June 1939. This left the German government with the possibility that, in the end, it might refrain from delivering the promised arms. In fact, on July 11, less than a month after Hitler's initial approval of the sale of arms to Saudi Arabia, the OKW passed on the following instructions from Hitler to the Foreign Office in Berlin: "On 11 July 1939, the Führer let it be known through his adjutant that he disapproved of weapons deliveries to hostile countries or to countries whose position in a war is doubtful. Weapons should be delivered to destinations where they could be useful or at least not damaging to us, e.g. to South America, the Baltic states, Norway, and Bulgaria."<sup>40</sup> In the end, while arms exports to Iran and Afghanistan increased significantly in 1939, those to the Arab states remained negligible.<sup>41</sup>

In his memoirs, Grobba characterizes Germany's policy in the Arab world during the 1930s as one of wasted opportunities, as having failed to promote German political and economic interests and influence in the region by taking advantage of Arab hostility toward Britain and France, and sympathy for

<sup>38</sup> PA: Pol.Abt.VII, Politik 2-Saudisch Arabien, Bd.I, Aufzeichnung von Hentig, Pol. VII 1059, 20. Juni 1939. See also: Grobba, *Männer und Mächte*, 109–110.

<sup>39</sup> PA: Pol.Abt.VII, Politik 2-Saudisch Arabien, Bd.I, Aufzeichnungen von Hentig, Pol.VII 1163, 4. Juli 1939.

<sup>40</sup> PA: HaPol Abt.-Kriegsgerät (Gemein), Kriegsgerät, Handel mit Kriegsgerät-Allgemeines, Bd. 4, OKW an AA/Berlin, Nr. 6147/398, 22. Juli 1939.

<sup>41</sup> See PA: HaPol Abt.-Kriegsgerät (Geheim), Kriegsgerät, Handel mit Kriegsgerät-Allgemeines, Bde. 1–4. As early as October 1936, Hitler had personally ordered the Foreign Office in Berlin to pursue closer economic ties with the governments of Iran and Afghanistan. The intention here, according to a report from Karl Ritter of the economic affairs department (Sonderreferat-W) in the Foreign Office, appears to have been to secure a significant role for Germany in the economic development of these two countries. After describing this aim with regard to Afghanistan, Ritter described the same aims in Iran as follows: "The same applies to Iran. Also with regard to Iran, the Führer desires an active economic policy and cooperation in Iran's development." See PA: Handelpolitische Abteilung, Handakten-Wiehl, Afghanistan, Aktenvermerk von Karl Ritter, 16. Oktober 1936.

Germany.<sup>42</sup> He attributes this to a racism that was directed against both Arabs and Jews, to Hitler's fundamental disinterest in the Middle East, to his deference to Italian ambitions in the region, and finally to a basic desire to preserve the British Empire. He concludes that because of his racial view of the world and a geopolitical determination that gave primacy to both England and Italy, Hitler in the end never accepted the idea of Arab independence and national self-determination. Franz Halder, the Chief of the General Staff of the Army between 1938 and 1942, shared Grobba's view in his Foreword to a study of German relations with Arab nationalist movements, prepared for the U.S. Army by two former German officers who served in the Middle East during the war. Referring to the years both before and after 1939, Halder concluded: "German efforts to exploit the Arab nationalist movements against Britain lacked a solid foundation. Occupied by other problems more closely akin to his nature, Hitler expended too little interest in the political and psychological currents prevalent in the Arab world. . . no uniformly thought-out plan was developed for the exploitation of the Arab nationalist movements."<sup>43</sup> This view seems to be confirmed in the documentary record of the German Foreign Office in Berlin, and of other state and party agencies, certainly before the outbreak of war in Europe in September 1939. The German government's policy of very limited involvement in Palestine, as well as its cautious and often reluctant approach before the war to arms sales to states such as Iraq, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, was meant to dissuade Britain from intervening in central Europe; there is no indication that Hitler had decided prior to September 1939 on the need to undermine the imperial positions of Great Britain or France in the Middle East through the support of Arab independence in the region. Indeed, the value of exploiting Arab nationalism as a useful means to other ends was recognized by Mussolini and Göring at a meeting in April 1939, at which they agreed that Axis anti-English propaganda was meant to create "...among the Arabs a certain tension, but not a revolution."<sup>44</sup>

German policy in the Middle East before the war also remained in part subordinate to the needs of both domestic Nazi Jewish policy that included rapid Jewish emigration from Germany to Palestine, as well as a foreign policy that included Germany's alliance obligations to Mussolini's Italy. Arabs initially tended to overlook the direct relationship between German Jewish

<sup>42</sup> See Grobba, *Männer und Mächte*, 317–318.

<sup>43</sup> National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD (hereafter NARA): MS/P-207, "German Use of the Arab Nationalist Movements in World War II," by General der Flieger a.D. Hellmuth Felmy and General der Artillerie a.D. Walter Warlimont, with a Foreword by Generaloberst a.D. Franz Halder. Historical Division Headquarters, United States Army-Europe, Foreign Ministry Studies Branch, 1955, 1957. In 1957, Fritz Grobba submitted a 300-page supplement to this report, one that essentially confirms its basic conclusions about Hitler's general disinterest in the Middle East.

<sup>44</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. VI, Nr. 211.

policy and increased Jewish immigration into Palestine during much of the 1930s. As observed in the previous chapter, some expressed admiration for Nazi anti-Semitism and persecution of Jews in Germany, and viewed Germany as a fellow victim of Anglo-French duplicity and imperialism during and after the First World War. Nevertheless, instances of Arab criticism of Nazi Jewish policy as a major cause of their “problem” in Palestine did become more common during the two years prior to the beginning of the Second World War. During his meeting with Hitler in Berlin in June 1939, for instance, the Saudi representative Khalid al-Hud criticized Germany’s Jewish emigration policy and its obvious causal link with greatly increased Jewish immigration in Palestine.<sup>45</sup> In January 1938, the German Consul-General in Jerusalem, Walter Döhle, had reported from Jerusalem that Arab sympathy for Germany was in fact declining due to the German government’s open and consistent promotion of Jewish emigration to Palestine. He also referred to Germany’s increased import of Palestinian oranges from Jewish citrus farmers, and suggested that Germany’s persistent refusal to materially support the Arab revolt in Palestine against Great Britain and the Zionists only undermined Arab sympathy for Germany. Döhle further warned: “I fear that the Arab people’s hatred of the English is developing into a hatred of all Europeans in general. . . .”<sup>46</sup> In November 1938, Grobba warned Berlin from Baghdad of a common Iraqi complaint that German persecution of the Jews only served to increase sympathy for Jews around the world, and for Jewish claims and efforts in Palestine.<sup>47</sup> Official German references to dissatisfaction with German emigration policy throughout the Arab lands continued through the summer of 1939. Moreover, in June and July, both Werner-Otto von Hentig of Abteilung VII and Walter Hinrichs of Referat-Deutschland referred to Arab criticism of recent public roundups and expulsions of Polish Jews because of the international sympathy for those Jews that these actions generated. They reiterated Arab complaints that Nazi Jewish policies only intensified Jewish immigration into Palestine. In particular, they described growing Arab hostility toward Germany over its role in “illegal” Jewish immigration into Palestine, a role that required some degree of cooperation between the Gestapo and Jewish authorities and organizations in Palestine, including the Haganah.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. VI, Nr. 541.      <sup>46</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. V, Nr. 577.

<sup>47</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. VII, Gesandtschaft Beirut, 63, Palästina und Transjordanien, Bd. 2, DB/Bagdad an AA/Berlin, Nr. 2950, 16. November 1938.

<sup>48</sup> See PA: Inland II A/B, 83-26 Polen, Aufzeichnung von Hentig, Pol. VII 1041, 19. Juni 1939; and Referat-D (Hinrichs) an Gestapo (Lischka), zu 83-26 19/6, 10. Juli 1936. For details on the Gestapo’s role in the “illegal” Jewish immigration into Palestine beginning in 1938, see Nicosia, *Zionism and Anti-Semitism*, 257–278.

## GERMANY, ITALY, AND THE MIDDLE EAST

It seems clear that Hitler's government saw the Middle East as a desirable export market for German industrial products, including perhaps limited weapons sales. Moreover, Hitler's repeated references since the early years of the Nazi movement to the Mediterranean region as Italy's natural sphere of interest and expansion seemed to reflect his own political disinterest in the Mediterranean region and the Arab world. In May 1937, the foreign policy section of the army (OKW) issued a confidential report on talks between German Foreign Minister von Neurath, Mussolini, and Italian Foreign Minister Ciano in Rome, during which "...the full agreement in all matters of foreign policy was reached."<sup>49</sup> Ciano later observed in March 1939: "I recalled that the Führer has said both to me and to the Duce that the Mediterranean does not interest the Germans; and it is upon this premise that we have formulated the policy of the Axis."<sup>50</sup> Hitler's apparent endorsement of Italian imperial ambitions was not at all predicated on support for specific Italian claims against British-controlled territory, or on promoting an Anglo-Italian conflict in North Africa and the Middle East. Indeed, it is not easy at any given time to identify precisely all of the territories that Fascist Italy coveted in the Mediterranean, Africa, and the Middle East. It is equally difficult to determine the appropriate balance between British and Italian imperial interests and control in those regions that Hitler's government might have preferred in both the short and the long term. Gerhard Weinberg writes that Mussolini clearly wanted territories that were under French imperial control, namely Tunisia, parts of Algeria, Djibouti, as well as an expansion of Italian-controlled Libya at the expense of parts of French Equatorial Africa.<sup>51</sup> These territories would all come at the expense of the French empire, and therefore would not pose a problem for Hitler's geopolitical calculations, at least not before the fall of France in 1940. However, Weinberg also identifies significant territories in the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and Africa in which the Italians had expressed an interest, territories that would clearly conflict with Britain's imperial interests and position. These territories included Malta, Cyprus, Egypt, British Somaliland, Aden, Iraq, Iran, the western coast of Arabia, and the eastern coast of the Mediterranean that included Palestine. This latter and much broader group of territories is somewhat less clear, and appears increasingly in Mussolini's fantasies during the early years of the war. Indeed, potential Italian designs

<sup>49</sup> Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, Freiburg i.B. (hereafter BA-MA): RW5-350, Wehrmachtamt-Ausland, Nr. 4368/37, Geheim, Übersicht über die aussenpolitische Vorgänge in der Zeit vom 23.4. – 12.5.37, 12. Mai 1937. See also BA-MA: RW5-350, Wehrmachtamt-Ausland, Nr. 8250/37, Geheim, Übersicht Nr. 55 über die aussenpolitische Vorgänge vom 19.8. – 2.9.39, 2. September 1937.

<sup>50</sup> Gibson, *The Ciano Diaries, 1939–1943*, 46.

<sup>51</sup> Gerhard Weinberg, *Visions of Victory: The Hopes of Eight World War II Leaders* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 46–47.



PHOTO 4.3. Mussolini meets with Hitler in Munich (25 September 1937).  
Courtesy Bundesarchiv, Berlin.

such as these on key parts of Britain's imperial system prior to 1940 would certainly have been in conflict with Hitler's desire to avoid any conflict with Britain in the Mediterranean region.

Hitler's references to German support for Italian imperial ambitions in the Mediterranean area were many, and naturally became more frequent during the late 1930s with the forging of the alliance between Berlin and Rome. In some ways, the emerging alliance tended to formalize and reinforce his general disinterest in the Mediterranean, as well as his support for a strong Italian position in the area. For example, Hans Frank told Mussolini in September 1936 in Rome of Hitler's view that Italy rightfully should have a dominant role in the Mediterranean region.<sup>52</sup> During his visit to Germany in September 1937, Mussolini recognized German interests in Austria, and accepted a German declaration of support for Italian interests throughout the Mediterranean region.<sup>53</sup> By November, 1938, Consul-General Döhle observed

<sup>52</sup> Muggeridge, *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, 44.

<sup>53</sup> PA: Pol.Abt.IV, Po. 2-3 Italien, AA/Berlin an alle Botschaften und europäischen diplomatischen Missionen sowie Konsulat Genf, Pol.IV-4936, 30. September 1937.

from Jerusalem that, within the context of the Rome-Berlin Axis, Germany was in full support of Italian policy in the Middle East.<sup>54</sup> In Rome in March 1939, German Ambassador von Mackensen reaffirmed to Ciano that Hitler still fully supported Italian interests in the Mediterranean, and that Germany had no territorial ambitions in the region.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop strongly implied that support for Italian imperial ambitions, rather than for Arab national self-determination, was part of German strategic and foreign policy. He informed state and party agencies on March 25, 1939 that: "I request, therefore, that the following principles be observed: 'Our position on all ethnic and minority questions in the lands of the Mediterranean Sea must be subordinate to the wishes of the Italian government.'" <sup>56</sup>

The Ethiopian war in 1935, followed by the start of the Spanish civil war in 1936, brought Mussolini to the realization that his ambitions would have to be achieved in the face of Anglo-French opposition. However, his ill-defined notions of the entire Mediterranean Sea as Italy's *mare nostrum* did not necessarily include the goal of removing entirely the imperial positions of both Great Britain and France from the Mediterranean region and from the Red Sea. In fact, Italy posited no tangible claims against Britain in the Middle East, perhaps with the exception of a desire to share in some capacity in the control and operation of the Suez Canal. While anxious to protect and promote its own prestige and influence in Palestine, Italy did not seek to replace Britain as the mandatory power there. Indeed, Mussolini had come to accept the British claim that Palestine and Transjordan were central elements in its imperial communications with southern Asia, and he generally did not dispute Britain's authority in those territories. On the other hand, Italy had more clearly demonstrated its interests with regard to the French Mandates in Syria and Lebanon, including its wish to succeed France as mandatory power in those two states.<sup>57</sup> Of course, Italy's very clear territorial ambitions in French-controlled Tunisia and Algeria since the latter part of the previous century represented a direct threat to French imperial interests. Corsica and Nice were also significant aims in the Italian quest for more influence in the Mediterranean region during the interwar years. Their position in Italian history guaranteed that Corsica and Nice would create additional friction with France. Of course, those territories had nothing to do with the Arab world. Anglo-Italian friction also grew out of Italian ambitions in non-Arab areas such as Ethiopia, Somalia, and Malta, while a more limited

<sup>54</sup> PA: Pol.Abt.VII, Politik 2-Palastina, Bd.I, DGK/Jerusalem an AA/Berlin, J.Nr. 2289, 2. November 1938.

<sup>55</sup> Muggeridge, *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, 278.

<sup>56</sup> BArch: R43/II-1450, AA/Berlin an sämtliche Reichsministerien, Stellvertreter des Führers und Chef der Reichskanzlei, Rk.8447b, 25. März 1939.

<sup>57</sup> See, for example, PA: Pol.Abt.III, Politik 5-Palastina, Bd.2, DB/Rom an AA/Berlin, 13171, III o 4682, 5. September 1929; and Botschaft Ankara, P03-Palastina, 1924–1938, DGK/Jerusalem an das AA/Berlin, J.N.2735/27, 31. Dezember 1937.

potential for problems prior to the war was created by Italy's poorly defined aims in Egypt, Yemen, and the Red Sea.

By early 1938, Italy had embarked on an intense anti-English propaganda campaign throughout the Middle East, a program of some financial support for Arab insurgents in Palestine, and efforts to negotiate the sale of arms to Yemen and Saudi Arabia.<sup>58</sup> Its efforts to woo Arab opinion after 1936 were designed more to put pressure on Britain to accept the Italian conquest of Ethiopia and some measure of equality with Great Britain in East Africa and the Red Sea, than to seriously undermine British power in the Arab world. In this regard, Mussolini's strategy in the Arabic-speaking lands seemed more in line with Hitler's during the two years prior to the start of the Second World War, as both sought to dissuade London from using force to impede their respective political ambitions. Given his long-held wish to make both England and Italy Germany's allies, Hitler was particularly committed to avoiding an Anglo-Italian military conflict in the Mediterranean area, the Middle East, and East Africa before 1940. While both saw value in utilizing Britain's overseas troubles to pressure London into a more compliant attitude toward their respective foreign policy plans in central Europe, the Mediterranean, and Northeast Africa, neither sought at this point to critically undermine Britain's position in the Middle East. In November 1937, the British ambassador in Berlin, Neville Henderson, sent the following assessment of the value of Italian policy in the Mediterranean region for Germany's developing aims in Europe:

If an Anglo-German understanding proves impossible of accomplishment, it is likely that the German government will seek in the first place to realize its aims not by an act of aggression against Great Britain, but by a policy of pressure in other parts of the world. The ties with Italy and Japan will afford Germany a good opportunity for exploiting her own nuisance value and it may be expected that the German government will more or less actively assist Italy in causing us trouble in the whole of the Mediterranean basin.<sup>59</sup>

While Italian efforts to encourage anti-British feeling in the Arab world were of some advantage to Germany, Hitler's regime also encouraged measures that would prevent an Anglo-Italian conflict in the Mediterranean area. For example, Berlin approved of the Anglo-Italian "Gentlemen's Agreement" of January 1937, according to which Britain and Italy agreed to take steps to bring to an end their propaganda war in the Middle East, and to maintain the current status quo throughout the region.<sup>60</sup> Although this agreement did not lead to a

<sup>58</sup> See Nir Arieli, *Fascist Italy and the Middle East, 1933–1940* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 133.

<sup>59</sup> NAL: FO371/20820-E6816, Henderson/Berlin to Foreign Office/London, 17 November, 1937.

<sup>60</sup> Kuhn, *Hitlers aussenpolitisches Programm*, 201. See also Malcolm Muggeridge (ed.), *Ciano's Hidden Diary, 1937–1938* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1953), 75.



significant improvement in Anglo-Italian relations, it was a step toward a more comprehensive Anglo-Italian understanding that would follow in 1938. In the summer and autumn of 1937, Britain briefly sought Italian support for the Peel Commission's recommendations for the end of the British Mandate and the partition of Palestine into nominally independent Arab and Jewish states. In the face of both Arab and Jewish criticism of the plan, London wanted to reach an agreement whereby Italy would cease its propaganda support for anti-British forces in Palestine, both Arab and Jewish.<sup>61</sup> On August 23, 1937, the Foreign Office in Berlin instructed the German embassy in Rome to refrain from any effort to influence Italian policy or Italy's negotiations with England.<sup>62</sup> Germany's strong opposition to the idea of a Palestine partition and the establishment of even a very small, nominally independent Jewish state was not a factor in German-Italian relations. The August 23 telegram also contained instructions for the German embassy to inform the Italian government of Germany's views on the situation in Palestine, as well as to learn what the Italian position on Palestine and the partition plan would be in any future Anglo-Italian negotiations. Mussolini's position on Zionism and a Jewish state in Palestine, while never entirely clear, seemed to want it both ways with the Jews and the Arabs at the time. The Italian government let it be known that it supported the establishment of a Jewish state, albeit in some location other than Palestine.<sup>63</sup>

The German Foreign Office reacted favorably to the Anglo-Italian agreement of April 16, 1938. According to the agreement, both sides undertook to preserve the status quo in the eastern Mediterranean and the Red Sea.<sup>64</sup> In return for British recognition of the Italian conquest of Ethiopia and a larger role in Yemen, Italy agreed to stop its anti-British propaganda in the Middle East, and to respect the status quo in Palestine and throughout the Arab world. Both Britain and Italy agreed to recognize the independence of Saudi Arabia and Yemen, and Mussolini even agreed to a reduction in the number of Italian troops in Libya, a reduction that was reversed just five months later.<sup>65</sup> Italian efforts to secure from Britain a greater role in the operation of the Suez Canal were not successful. In his diaries, Ciano characterized the treaty with satisfaction as the achievement by Italy of parity with Great Britain in the Red Sea, as having turned the lands of the Red Sea into "a condominium of two powers" that "...obliges Italy and Great Britain to resist every attempt on the part of a

<sup>61</sup> Earl of Avon, *The Eden Memoirs*, 486, 662; and Keith Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain* (London: Macmillan, 1970), 335. See also: PA: Inland II A/B, 83-21a, Bd. 1a, Aufzeichnung von Pol.IV (Heinburg), zu 83-21A 5/8, 18. August 1937.

<sup>62</sup> PA: Inland II A/B, 83-21a, Bd. 1a, Telegramm Nr. 269, AA/Berlin an DB/Rom, 23. August 1937.

<sup>63</sup> See PA: Inland II A/B, Referat-D, 83-24a, "Gründung eines Palästinaataes," Bd. 1, AA/Berlin an DB/Rom, 19. Februar 1938. See also Muggerridge, *Ciano's Hidden Diary*, 75.

<sup>64</sup> See: ADAP: Serie D, Bd. IV, Nr.409; Neville Chamberlain, *In Search of Peace* (N.Y.: G. Putnam & Sons, 1939), 105ff; Muggerridge, *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, 190–191, 220

<sup>65</sup> Arielli, *Fascist Italy and the Middle East*, 138.



third power to establish itself in Arabia.”<sup>66</sup> Moreover, by the time of the signing of the accord, the recommendations of the Peel Commission report for partition of Palestine and the establishment of nominally independent Jewish and Arab states had been dropped completely.

From Berlin, Ernst von Weizsäcker sent a telegram to the German Embassy in Prague on April 19, 1938, in which he observed: “Given our community of interests with Italy, as contained in the Axis, we see in the elimination of Italian-English difficulties advantages for us as well.”<sup>67</sup> Later that same month, an unsigned German Foreign Office memorandum elaborated on the reasons for Germany’s support for the Anglo-Italian agreement of April 16, 1938. The author, very likely von Weizsäcker again, pointed to the risks for Germany in a war between Britain and Italy in the Mediterranean and North Africa, particularly the possibility of being drawn into the conflict. The author makes a key point that reflected the Reich’s positive assessment of great power bilateral agreements that in Berlin’s view had the potential to both neutralize past alliances as well as the entire post-World War I international order and its League of Nations sponsor. He remarks that the Anglo-Italian agreement represented a new success for the idea of bilateral agreements, as opposed to the notion of general regulations in which all interested parties might participate. He considered this too as a positive development for Germany, and concludes: “It is to be hoped that the effects of the new treaty will include a further departure from these sterile methods of the past, and in the process make our continued foreign policy endeavors easier.”<sup>68</sup>

Hitler’s support for the April 1938 accommodation between Italy and Great Britain reflected his opposition to a conflict in the Mediterranean between his Italian ally and either Britain or France prior to the outbreak of war in September 1939. Indeed, conflict in the Mediterranean would likely have required material support for Italy, and would have been a distraction that could only weaken Germany’s efforts in central and eastern Europe. Henke observes that discussions between Germany and Italy during the spring of 1939 revealed a Germany focused primarily on a possible war against Britain and France in western Europe, and not on a great power conflict in the Mediterranean region.<sup>69</sup> In March 1939, Hitler told Italian Ambassador Attolico that the Axis would need from 18 months to 2 years to prepare for war against Britain and France.<sup>70</sup> This was probably intended to discourage Mussolini from pushing the British too far. Hitler reiterated his general support for Italy, but said nothing about specific Italian claims in the Mediterranean. In fact, by August 1939 Ciano had come to suspect the German government of

<sup>66</sup> Muggerridge, *Ciano’s Hidden Diary*, 99–100, 115, 187–191. While Ciano no doubt had France in mind when referring to article 3 of the treaty and its negative reference to a possible “third power” in the region, he was confident that Germany would not be that third power.

<sup>67</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. I, Nr. 742      <sup>68</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. I, Nr. 755.

<sup>69</sup> Henke, *England in Hitlers politischem Kalkül*, 249.      <sup>70</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. VI, Nr. 52.

dishonesty in its very general statements of support for Italian imperial interests vis-à-vis Great Britain and even France. He seemed to fear that Hitler placed little value on Germany's alliance with Italy, and was merely using it as a tool in the pursuit of his own interests and aims in Europe.<sup>71</sup> Hitler certainly opposed any unilateral action by Italy against France or Britain in the Mediterranean region in 1939, as Germany was engaged in preparing for its upcoming military campaign against Poland.<sup>72</sup> Italy's repeated warnings that it could not contemplate war until 1942 or 1943 at the earliest were gladly accepted by Göring during his talks with Mussolini in Rome on April 15 and 16, and by von Ribbentrop during his talks with Ciano in Milan on May 6 and 7.<sup>73</sup> It seems clear that in 1938 and 1939, both Germany and Italy agreed on the necessity of avoiding war between Italy and the western democracies in the Mediterranean region, at least until such time as Germany had achieved its goals in eastern Europe. For Hitler, this logic in his strategic planning seemed sound enough; but it was one that would never quite reflect the actual realities of the war on the ground once it began on September 1, 1939.

The Anglo-Italian agreements in 1937 and 1938 obviously did not satisfy Italy's long-range imperial ambitions, whatever they were, in the Mediterranean Sea, North Africa, and the Middle East. Nor did German endorsement of the agreements mean that Hitler necessarily would support over the long term the current status quo in the Middle East in which Britain's imperial position was clearly dominant vis-à-vis Italy's. In a speech in Genoa on May 14, 1938, just one month after the Anglo-Italian agreement of April 16, Mussolini hinted that as an empire, Italy would not settle for parity in the Mediterranean, but that it would eventually have to become the dominant force in the entire region.<sup>74</sup> In September, General Ugo Cavallero asserted that within two years Italy would have the resources to occupy Egypt, and perhaps even attack Britain's base at the port of Aden in the southwestern corner of the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>75</sup> In November and December, Mussolini clarified his intentions in Egypt by telling Ciano that besides acquiring Tunisia, Corsica, and Djibuti, Italy would at a minimum demand a share of control over the Suez Canal.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, Ciano confirmed Germany's understanding and support for a future, albeit undefined, change in the status quo in the Mediterranean area

<sup>71</sup> Gibson, *The Ciano Diaries, 1939–1943*, 118–120.

<sup>72</sup> See Schmidt, *Statist auf diplomatischer Bühne*, 434.

<sup>73</sup> Italy had no intention of going to war against Britain and France in 1939. The Italian government repeatedly communicated to Berlin its wish to avoid war at least for a period of up to three years. See ADAP: Serie D, Bd. VI, Nr. 52, 205, 211, 341, 459 (Anhang).

<sup>74</sup> Muggeridge, *Ciano's Hidden Diary*, 116.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 152. Some sources state that Cavallero told the Germans at that time that Italy would not be ready for war until 1943. See MacGregor Knox, *Hitler's Italian Allies: Royal Armed Forces, Fascist Regime, and the War of 1940–1943* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 16.

<sup>76</sup> Muggeridge, *Ciano's Hidden Diary*, 191, 201n; and Muggeridge, *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, 250–251, 258.

when von Ribbentrop assured Mussolini in general terms in October 1938 that "...the Mediterranean is destined to become an Italian Sea. Germany intends to work to that end."<sup>77</sup> Finally, despite his suspicions of German motives and intentions by the summer of 1939, Ciano describes Hitler's assurances to him in August of that year as follows: "Italy, which is, on the other hand, the most important nation in the Mediterranean, must affirm and enlarge its dominion over the shores of that sea."<sup>78</sup>

To the extent that Hitler countenanced Italian expansion in the Mediterranean and the Middle East in a future war, there was an obvious preference before the war that Mussolini focus his ambitions on the French rather than on the British position in the region. In January 1939, for example, with the threat of war in Europe growing, the OKW foreign policy section summarized Mussolini's increasingly public claims for Italian expansion in the Mediterranean. The OKW report characterized those claims as directed solely against France, with the usual calls for an Italian takeover of Nice, Corsica, and Tunis. The report avoided mention of Italian hopes regarding the Suez Canal and the Red Sea. It concluded that none of Italy's ambitions constituted a threat to British imperial interests, a conclusion that was in keeping with Hitler's endorsement of the Anglo-Italian Agreement of April 1938, and generally with his continued aversion to a possible Axis conflict with the British in the Mediterranean Sea. With this in mind, and in the most general terms, the January 21 OKW report then concluded: "The Führer and the Reich government have clearly stated that they view the Italian demands with sympathy. The Italians have promptly kept the Reich government informed about the content of Italian-English discussions."<sup>79</sup>

Of course, Italian ambitions in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, notwithstanding the likely conflicts with British and French strategic interests, guaranteed the failure of Mussolini's propaganda efforts in the region over the previous decade. It had been an effort that sought to portray Italy as the natural friend and ally of all Muslims and Arabs in their struggles against Anglo-French imperialism. His moves in 1938 and 1939, based as they were on the logic of an expanded Italian empire in the region, only reinforced anti-Italian animosities that had existed for a long time among the Arab populations of North Africa and the Middle East.<sup>80</sup> For example, Italy's harsh rule over Libya since 1911, and its invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 obviously did nothing to help in promoting Italy's image in the Arab world. Moreover, Italian efforts to colonize the coast of Libya with Italians in the 1930s, at the expense of the Arab and Berber populations, were coupled with new Italian race laws that

<sup>77</sup> Muggeridge, *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, 246. <sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

<sup>79</sup> BA-MA: RW5-350, OKW Nr. 369/39, Geheim, Aussenpolitische Mitteilung: „Die Lage im westlichen Mittelmeer,“ 21. Januar 1939.

<sup>80</sup> See Arielli, *Fascist Italy and the Middle East*, 144–162; and Hirszowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, 13–15.

applied throughout its empire. They restricted social and sexual relations between Italians and indigenous Arab and Berber populations, and established a virtual apartheid system that had been characteristic of most European colonial empires. The Italian invasion of Muslim Albania in April 1939, coupled with the Anglo-Italian Treaty a year earlier, only deepened Arab distrust for Fascist Italy; its policies clearly contradicted the Italian propaganda line about alleged post-World War I British and French treachery, and about Italian sympathy and support for the Arab people. Even the Italian anti-Jewish race laws of 1938 did little to enhance Italy's image among Arab nationalists. Indeed, by 1939, Hitler's Germany was generally viewed in a positive way by the Arab and Muslim populations in the region, reflecting the long-standing absence of a German colonial interest or presence in the Arab world. The general animosity toward Italy, on the other hand, was the natural result of an opposite reality.

Most in the Nazi hierarchy, including Hitler himself, do not seem to have viewed Italy's negative image in the Arab world as a significant problem before 1940. However, those few in the German Foreign Office in Berlin who had advocated a greater German interest in, and an expanded German presence among, the Arab states, albeit not in conflict with the imperial interests of Britain, France, and Italy, were indeed alarmed. They were particularly concerned with those Arab states already at least nominally independent, such as Iraq and Egypt, and were troubled by the distrust and animosity that those populations and their governments increasingly displayed toward Germany's Italian ally during the crisis years of 1938 and 1939. The main advocate of a larger German presence in the Arab world was Fritz Grobba, the German ambassador in Baghdad between 1932 and the outbreak of the Second World War. From his post in Baghdad, Grobba cultivated relations with Iraqi leaders within the context of Britain's continuing position of influence in the former British Mandate, as well as with important political personalities from Saudi Arabia, including King Ibn Saud. Grobba knew in the end that the Iraqi government would likely side with Britain in the event of a war in Europe; but he believed that Saudi Arabia would remain neutral in any future war, and thus, as an Arab state with which Germany might be able to establish a constructive relationship. He finally persuaded his somewhat reluctant superiors in Berlin to establish full diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia in February 1939. In the event of war, he had argued, he would likely have to leave Iraq, but Saudi Arabia's anticipated neutrality might enable him to work from the Saudi kingdom as German ambassador, and thereby maintain a German presence in the region.<sup>81</sup> Grobba served briefly as German ambassador for both Iraq and Saudi Arabia from his post in Baghdad in 1939,

<sup>81</sup> See Grobba, *Männer und Mächte*, 114.

but the German government recalled him to Berlin from Baghdad rather than have him remain in Saudi Arabia as ambassador when the war began.

In July 1938, Grobba met in Baghdad with an unnamed representative of Ibn-Saud's who expressed the Saudi monarch's fear that the recently concluded Anglo-Italian treaty meant that Italy was expanding its role in Arabia and the Red Sea. He lamented Germany's lack of interest in the Red Sea, and its tendency to pursue its own interests by following the Italian lead. Grobba reported that the Saudi representative confidently asserted: "Italy is to be compared with a rabid dog that dies after forty days," and "in the future Germany will be the only strong power."<sup>82</sup> On a visit to the Saudi capital in late January 1939, Grobba met with Luigi Sillitti, the Italian ambassador to Saudi Arabia, and the results of their talks would seem to support the contention that Germany did indeed follow Italy's lead in assessing Saudi Arabia's role in a future war. Sillitti told Grobba that he did not believe Saudi Arabia was subservient to Britain's wishes in the region, and that Italy wanted to strengthen Saudi resolve to resist Britain and to remain neutral in any future war by providing it with some weapons and military training. He stressed the strategic importance of Saudi Arabia and the need for the Axis to support the Saudi wish to remain neutral. In his summary of Sillitti's points sent to Berlin on January 27, Grobba indicated that he agreed entirely with the Italian assessment.<sup>83</sup> But he warned Sillitti that the only way to ultimately assure Saudi neutrality would be to provide the Saudis with abundant supplies of foodstuffs, just as the English had done for the Arab revolt against the Ottomans that began in Arabia in 1916, and as they would likely attempt to do in any future war. Finally, after stressing Ibn-Saud's distrust of both Britain and Italy, Grobba also stated that the Saudi government wished to purchase German arms. He suggested that it might be worthwhile for Berlin to consider supplying some German arms support for the Saudis as a way of helping them to maintain their independence from Britain and their neutrality in any future war. However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Grobba's suggestion that Germany consider sending small quantities of arms to Saudi Arabia was not well received by the Near East Department (Abteilung VII) of the Foreign Office.<sup>84</sup>

In any case, Italy's very negative image in the Arab world continued to cause some degree of frustration on the part of Fritz Grobba that does not seem to have been shared by his colleagues and superiors in Berlin. This was very clear in his lengthy March 7, 1939 memorandum to Under State Secretary

<sup>82</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. VII, Pol.2-Saudisch Arabien, Politische Beziehungen Saudisch Arabiens zu Deutschland, Bd. 1, DG/Bagdad an AA/Berlin, Nr. 1687, 4. Juli 1938.

<sup>83</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. VII, Pol.2-Saudisch Arabien, Politische Beziehungen Saudisch Arabiens zu Deutschland, Bd. 1, DG/Djidda an AA/Berlin, Nr. Dj. 9, 27. Januar 1939. See also Grobba, *Männer und Mächte*, 109–110.

<sup>84</sup> See PA: Pol.Abt. VII, Pol.2-Saudisch Arabien, Politische Beziehungen Saudisch Arabiens zu Deutschland, Bd. 1, DG/Bagdad an U.St.S. Woermann, Nr. Dj. 44, 18. Februar 1939.

Woermann in the Foreign Office in Berlin.<sup>85</sup> For example, Grobba mentioned Arab dissatisfaction with comments in the German press that the Reich government was disinterested in Syria, and that it was indifferent to Italy taking control over Syria. Arabs also expressed to Grobba their fears that Germany sought to strengthen Italy in the region, and that Berlin did not care much about the national aspirations of the Arab people. Some told him that Germany should make an effort to convince Italy that the friendship of the Arab people was worth more in the end than Italian control over them. King Ibn-Saud had warned Grobba that Egypt's efforts to free itself of the last vestiges of British control were hindered at times by fears of Italian ambitions. Even the German diplomats at the German embassy in Cairo had complained that Germany had done nothing to allay Egyptian fears of Italian aims, and thus had done nothing to promote Egyptian neutrality in the event of war.

Grobba summed up these and other Arab complaints about the relationship between Germany, Italy, and the Arab world in the following way: "Fear of Italy and hopes about Germany, from which one expects that, to win the friendship of the eastern peoples, it [Germany] will prevail upon Italy to leave the territories of the Near East alone."<sup>86</sup> He further noted that Arab fears about Italy are well founded, that Germany was in a position to achieve for itself a very favorable position in relation to Britain and France in the region, but that: "An obstacle that remains is our close relationship with Italy, as long as the eastern peoples fear Italian intentions."<sup>87</sup> Grobba then recommended the following steps: while Germany should definitely continue to refrain from pursuing its own independent and active policy in the region, it should also stop encouraging Italian policies that will only turn Arabs into enemies; it should inform the Italians that there were no lands to be won in the Middle East, and that the Axis should support Arab efforts to gain independence, albeit without giving the impression that it is providing any direct support for the Arab cause. Finally, Grobba warned Berlin that in the event of a war, the Middle East would play a much more important role than it did in the previous war, particularly due to its rich and ever-expanding reserves of crude oil, as well as rich stores of other raw materials. In this regard, he concluded, friendship with the Arab peoples had to be cultivated as part of Germany's preparations for the next war, preparations that would require a Middle East policy that was more active and independent than was currently the case.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>85</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. VII, Pol.2-Saudisch Arabien, Politische Beziehungen Saudisch Arabiens zu Deutschland, Bd. 1, DG/Bagdad an U.St.S. Woermann, Nr. 796, 7. März 1939.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* The March 7 report also mentions the opinion of some in the Iraqi government that they were not worried about the Arab states in North Africa, presumably west of Egypt, and that they did not care if Italy replaced France in Tunis.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> When war broke out in Europe in September, Iraq severed diplomatic relations with Germany. Grobba was forced to leave Baghdad. Although he was still the German ambassador to Saudi Arabia, and was invited to come to Djidda in that capacity by King Ibn-Saud, the German

Grobba's assessment and recommendations were firmly rejected by his superiors at the Foreign Office in Berlin. Under State Secretary Woermann replied to Grobba on April 18 that Saudi Arabia's uncertain position vis-à-vis Great Britain in the event of a war made any attempt to expand an already friendly relationship between Berlin and the Saudis inadvisable. Woermann also instructed Grobba that the delivery of German arms to Saudi Arabia or Yemen was out of the question at that time, especially in the case of Yemen where Italian sensitivities might be provoked by German arms deliveries. The continuing issue of arms sales to these two states is considered in the section that follows. Woermann concluded by cautioning Grobba that there would be no change in German policy in the Arabian Peninsula, especially due to the all-consuming political situation in Europe: "In summary, I would like therefore to say that we...for the time being do not believe that we can institute a fundamental change in our current policy in the area of the Arabian Peninsula."<sup>89</sup> Grobba's effort to forge an active German Middle East policy, one that was independent of Italian imperial ambitions in the run-up to war in 1938 and 1939, was rejected by Hitler's regime in 1939. It does not appear to have been driven by a desire to establish a German colonial foothold in North Africa and the Middle East; nor was Grobba unaware of the political uncertainties and risks associated with closer German involvement in individual Arab states.<sup>90</sup> Rather, he had concluded that war against the western democracies in the near future was probably unavoidable given the situation in Europe, and that a more active policy in, and friendlier relations with, the Arab world, rather than continuing passivity and blind support for Italian imperialism in North Africa and the Middle East, would be to Germany's strategic advantage.

#### ARMS EXPORTS

Germany's inability to more precisely define its specific geopolitical interests and aims in the Arab world was apparent in the critical months of 1939, as the situation in Europe seemed to move toward war. This is important given the strategic significance and close proximity of the Mediterranean area that

Foreign Ministry ordered him back to Berlin. Thus, his recommendations for an independent and active German policy in the region went unheeded. For Grobba's negative postwar account of all of this, see Grobba, *Männer und Mächte*, 183. He apparently did receive some support for his efforts to forge closer ties with the Saudis from Alfred Rosenberg's Aussenpolitisches Amt. See USHMM: The Alfred Rosenberg Diary, Mitte Mai 1939, 249.

<sup>89</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. V, Nr. 592.

<sup>90</sup> For instance, he strongly rebuffed the efforts by Hashemite conspirators to obtain German weapons for the overthrow of the Saudi monarchy. The conspirators tried to convince Grobba that Ibn-Saud was pro-English, and thus, not sympathetic to Germany. It is not clear what their relationship was to the Hashemite monarchies of Transjordan and Iraq. For Grobba's entire position on this initiative, see PA: Pol.Abt. VII, Pol.2-Saudisch Arabien, Politische Beziehungen Saudisch Arabiens zu Deutschland, Bd. 1, DG/Bagdad an AA/Berlin, Nr. 27, 7. Januar 1938.



constituted the potentially dangerous southern flank in Hitler's upcoming battle for German *Lebensraum* in Europe, and any role that his Italian partner might play in a future war. In Europe, of course, Hitler's government took the initiative in the pursuit of its objectives in Czechoslovakia and Poland. In the Mediterranean and the Middle East, however, Berlin had played a passive, essentially reactive, role in developments in the region. There was a relative absence of specific German ambitions in the region, beyond a general desire to expand Germany's economic presence and the volume of its exports.<sup>91</sup> This, along with the logical consequence of Hitler's deference to Italian interests and "leadership" south of the Alps, meant that the substance of Germany's Middle East policy prior to September 1, 1939 amounted to little more than maintaining Mussolini's agreement to avoid war in the Mediterranean region for at least a few years. Again, this was certainly implied in Hitler's approval of the April 1938 Anglo-Italian Agreement, as well as in the several statements that he and von Ribbentrop made thereafter at meetings with Mussolini and Ciano.

To the extent that Germany paid any attention to the Arab states during the 1930s, it was directed for the most part only to those states that had some degree of autonomy in their relationships with powers other than Great Britain. This is evident in its primary motivation and mission in the region, namely the promotion of German economic interests, and especially German exports. By the end of 1938, however, the likely position of these states in an eventual war in Europe between Germany and Great Britain became increasingly relevant in German policy calculations.<sup>92</sup> The states to which Berlin did pay some attention were Iraq, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and to a lesser degree, Yemen. These were all Arab states in which Britain continued to exercise a high degree of influence, especially in Iraq and Egypt, as a result of previous colonial rule. Britain also maintained a continuing military presence in these states through bilateral treaties. The non-Arab states in the wider region, namely Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan, were also targets in German strategic and economic considerations. Arms and other military equipment constituted an important part of Germany's industrial production that was of interest to these states. However, these were products that only Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan imported from Germany, albeit in relatively insignificant quantities in 1938 and 1939.

The experience of the consortium of German weapons manufacturers, formed in 1936 to promote exports of German weapons and referred to in the previous chapter, had been one of uneven success with regard to Iraq. German exports to Iraq, consisting mainly of cement, various industrial

<sup>91</sup> See Schröder, "Die Beziehungen der Achsenmächte," 81–82.

<sup>92</sup> See for example Fritz Grobba's memorandum from Baghdad regarding his uncertainty whether Iraq would enter a war between Germany and Britain as Britain's ally, or declare its neutrality. He presented this question while also recognizing both official as well as popular admiration and sympathy in Iraq for Germany. ADAP: Serie D, Bd. V, Nr. 586.



products and machinery, and finally in 1937 some small arms and munitions, had tripled between 1932 and 1937.<sup>93</sup> Still, the Ministry of Economics was well aware that Great Britain remained the major economic force in Iraq. This was particularly so in the Iraqi petroleum industry given the terms of Iraqi independence in 1930 and Iraq's relatively important political and military position in the region. Nevertheless, there was some hope in Berlin for further increasing overall German exports to Iraq, in part through weapons sales, between 1937 and the outbreak of war in 1939. Consortium members Rheinmetall-Borsig, Krupp, and Otto Wolff concluded agreements with Iraq in 1938 for some artillery pieces, small arms, and ammunition, to be paid for with foreign currency over a five-year period, and approved by the British government.<sup>94</sup> However, the consortium had its problems in Iraq as well. Grobba reported that in Baghdad the representatives from Rheinmetall and from Wolff often fought over contract details, with the result that Iraqi authorities took advantage of these squabbles and played one firm against the other.<sup>95</sup> Nevertheless, Iraq remained a target for German weapons exports through the late 1930s, albeit one that resulted only in modest sales that in any case remained dependent on British approval.

Nor did Egypt prove to be a lucrative market for German arms manufacturers after 1936. According to the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936, all arms acquired by the Egyptian army were required to be compatible with the weapons used by the British military. The German embassy in Cairo concluded, therefore, that British weapons firms would have a virtual monopoly in arms sales to the Egyptian government, and that other countries might play a role, but only with British permission.<sup>96</sup> This was also the case with regard to the Iraqi military, as mentioned in the previous chapter. This meant that German weapons would have to be compatible with those of the British army, making it very difficult and expensive for German firms to supply such weapons. The German Ministry of Economics concluded in 1938 that the higher costs and long delays, especially given the needs of the German rearmament program, meant that weapons exports to Egypt would not be worth it.<sup>97</sup> By the end of 1938, both the Economics Ministry and the Foreign Office in Berlin concluded that the talk of a possible war and the clear likelihood of Egypt siding with the British meant that there was little chance of promoting weapons

<sup>93</sup> See BArch: R3101-VI, 222/2, "Der deutsch-irakische Warenaustausch," Reichwirtschaftsministerium v.s. Nr. 35, 5. April 1938; and "Irak: handel mit Deutschland," Reichwirtschaftsministerium v.s. Nr. 102, 1. September 1938.

<sup>94</sup> PA: Handelspolitische Abteilung, Kriegsgerät (Geheim): Handel mit Kriegsgerät, Allgemeines, Bd. 3, "Kriegslieferungsverträge" Geheim, e.o. W746g, 10. August 1938.

<sup>95</sup> See PA: Handelspolitische Abteilung, Handakten-Wiehl, Irak (Geheim), Bd. 1, W-III S.E., Tagesmeldung vom 14. April 1938.

<sup>96</sup> BArch: R901-68425, DG/Kairo an AA/Berlin, Nr. 579, 24. Juni 1938.

<sup>97</sup> BArch: R901-68425, RWM an AA/Berlin. 901/30g, 5. August 1938.

exports to Egypt.<sup>98</sup> Thus, between 1936 and 1939, Germany managed to sell only a few automatic pistols to the Egyptian government.

The Foreign Office in Berlin remained somewhat skeptical about intensifying the friendly relations that already existed between Germany and Saudi Arabia. In the summer of 1938, for example, von Hentig appeared to define how far Berlin was willing to go in cultivating its relations with the Saudi monarchy. In his discussions in Berlin in late August with Saudi Deputy Foreign Minister Fuad Hamza, von Hentig reviewed with the Saudi minister the state of German-Saudi relations. After referring to the usual Arab distrust of Italy and admiration for Germany, Fuad Hamza inquired about further steps that Germany might be willing to take in Arabia to enhance German-Arab relations. In his response, von Hentig made suggestions for closer cultural ties between Germany and the Arab world, in particular German-language training for Arabs and Arabic-language training for Germans, as well as translations of German and Arabic literature, and other cultural exchanges.<sup>99</sup> A month later, in a note to the Foreign Policy Office (APA) of the Nazi party, Under State Secretary Woermann outlined his understanding of Saudi Arabia's relationship with Great Britain and concluded: "As the situation stands today, we must therefore assume that Ibn-Saud, who is also reluctant to assert himself in the Palestine question, will side with the English. From a political point of view, therefore, we cannot at present approve the sale of weapons on credit to the king."<sup>100</sup> Thus, arms exports to Saudi Arabia generally did not appeal to the German government and to the Wehrmacht, at least not until the summer of 1939. By that time, however, with the outbreak of war in Europe imminent, it was too late for Germany to guarantee the delivery of weapons to Saudi Arabia. German weapons exports to Saudi Arabia and Yemen between January 1936 and March 1938 had been quite modest and not without some misgivings and debate within the Foreign Office in Berlin.

A January 10, 1939 memorandum from *Legationssekretär* Schlobies in Abteilung VII provided some details as he confirmed this negative position. It stated: "In the matter of weapons deliveries to Saudi Arabia. . .the Foreign Office has to date for political and economic reasons taken a negative position."<sup>101</sup> Schlobies cited the Anglo-Italian agreement of April 1938 and Germany's relations with both Italy and Great Britain as reasons, as well as the strong possibility that the Saudis would side with the British in a future war; he also referred to the alleged "unreliability" (*Unzuverlässigkeit*) of the Arabs. Yet, he also asserted that Germany did in fact favor expanding its general economic relations with Saudi Arabia given the kingdom's economic development potential. This was a position that the Ministry of Economics and the Foreign Policy Office (APA) had also favored. Finally, Schlobies also referred

<sup>98</sup> BArch: R901-68425, RWM an AA/Berlin, 9/871/38g, 5 Dezember 1938.

<sup>99</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. V, Nr. 582. <sup>100</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. V, Nr. 585.

<sup>101</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. V, Nr. 588.

to the general opposition of the German military (OKW) to formal and legal weapons deliveries to the Saudis, although it expressed its willingness to allow the clandestine delivery of some obsolete weapons. This position was essentially reaffirmed by von Hentig in a February 28, 1939 memorandum in Abteilung VII, in which he cited the agreement of the OKW that the political and economic conditions were not conducive to large arms shipments to Saudi Arabia.<sup>102</sup>

Grobba's efforts through the spring and summer of 1939 to convince his colleagues in Berlin that Saudi Arabia would not join Britain in a future war had little impact on German policy. On May 2, he wrote to Woermann: "I have the clear impression that he [Ibn-Saud] hates the English and that he tries to pull as far away as possible from their influence."<sup>103</sup> As examples, Grobba mentioned the fact that the Saudi king awarded oil concessions to the United States, and not to Great Britain, and that he strongly disapproved of the Anglo-Italian treaty of April 1938. He argued that the original purpose of establishing formal diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia in February of that year was precisely to secure a diplomatic post for Germany in the region in the event of a war with Britain. He then made a final pitch for the necessity of providing Saudi Arabia with arms: "Ibn-Saud offers us at a minimum his well-intentioned neutrality in war. He expects from us in return the help he has requested for domestic development and for the arming of his country. I don't have the slightest doubt that he will keep his word if we meet his requests."<sup>104</sup>

Grobba's letter did manage to change the views of some in Berlin, but it was clearly too late. Three days after Grobba sent his appeal to Berlin, Under State Secretary Woermann noted in the margin of Grobba's letter: "I have been convinced by this letter."<sup>105</sup> Later that month, von Hentig in Abteilung VII noted in a May 22 memorandum that he too had come around to accepting Grobba's contention that Ibn-Saud was sincere in his desire to be independent of England and to develop a strong relationship with the Reich.<sup>106</sup> This might include Saudi purchases of German weapons, full support for German participation in the exploitation of Saudi natural resources, including oil, and perhaps even some sort of a political understanding. Saudi Arabia, he noted, was in the process of accruing wealth, which not only made it less dependent on Great Britain, but also able to pay for German weapons and other goods with foreign currency. As he concluded by ruling out any opportunities for German influence in Egypt, Iraq, Syria, or Palestine, von Hentig strongly recommended exploring closer ties with the Saudi government. Military intelligence also came around to supporting this approach to Saudi Arabia on June 26 when it warned that Britain's May 17 White Paper on Palestine represented a British turn to the Arabs and away from the Jews, and part of the British government's

<sup>102</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. V, Nr. 590.      <sup>103</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. VI, Nr. 313.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*      <sup>106</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. VI, Nr. 422.

*Einkreisungspolitik* (policy of encirclement) to solidify relations with the Arabs, the Turks, and the Soviet Union in preparation for war against Germany.<sup>107</sup> The argument here was that closer ties to Saudi Arabia might help to neutralize Britain's political strategy in the region.

As previously mentioned, King Ibn-Saud's adviser, Khalid al-Hud, met with von Ribbentrop on June 8, and with Hitler on June 17, to request German weapons support. Hitler approved the request, and the groundwork was laid for an agreement that included a gift from Germany of 4,000 rifles with ammunition, and Saudi weapons purchases from Germany worth RM 6 million.<sup>108</sup> The German government apparently had come to the conclusion by the middle of the summer of 1939 that Germany might need one friendly Arab state in the Middle East, that King Ibn-Saud in fact really did intend to keep Britain at a distance in the event of war, and that he would maintain friendly neutrality toward Germany.<sup>109</sup> In the end, however, events moved quickly in Europe in the summer of 1939. Hitler's focus on and preparations for the invasion of Poland intensified and the initial weapons agreement was never implemented. The possibility of at least some sort of a German foothold in the Arabian Peninsula, while briefly considered in the summer of 1939, was never accorded meaningful support until it was too late. Thus, arms exports to Saudi Arabia between January 1936 and April 1938 amounted to several thousand rifles with ammunition, some explosives with charges, and a few pistols with ammunition. During the same period, Yemen received some 4,500 rifles with ammunition, 55 automatic pistols, and one airplane.<sup>110</sup> In any case, Germany's support for the Anglo-Italian Treaty in April 1938 would minimize German arms shipments to either Saudi Arabia or Yemen.

Finally, given its geographical proximity to Europe and its political status as a fully independent state, Turkey would inevitably play a different and more

<sup>107</sup> BA-MA: RW5-350, OKW Nr. 5625/39, Geheim, Übersicht Nr. 76 über aussenpolitische Vorgänge bis zum 26. Juni 1939, 26. Juni 1939.

<sup>108</sup> PA: Pol.Abt. VII, Pol.2-Saudisch Arabien, Politische Beziehungen Saudisch Arabien zu Deutschland, Bd. 1, AA/Berlin an DB/Rom, Telegramm Nr. 301, 20. Juni 1939; and Woermann an Khalid al-Hud, 12. Juli 1939. See also Hirsowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, 58–59.

<sup>109</sup> See PA: Pol.Abt. VII, Pol.2-Saudisch Arabien, Politische Beziehungen Saudisch Arabien zu Deutschland, Bd. 1, Aufzeichnung von Hentig, Herrn Vortragenden Legationsrat Schmidt vorgelegt, Geheim, 21. Juni 1939.

<sup>110</sup> PA: Geheim-Akten 1920–1936, II FK.33: Kriegsgerät Allgemeines, Geheimsachen, "Statistik über K.G. Ausfuhr"; and Handelspolitische Abteilung, Kriegsgerät (Geheim), Handel mit Kriegsgerät, Allgemeines, Bde. 1–4. It is impossible to know how much of this material if any was smuggled into Palestine during those years. Ibn-Saud at times spoke of using Saudi Arabia as a conduit for arms to be smuggled into Palestine, and Grobba verifies that King Ibn-Saud was indeed eager to channel arms imports to the Palestinian Arabs. See BArch: R901-68470, DG/Jidda an AA/Berlin, Tel. Nr. 6, 14. Februar 1939; and Grobba, *Männer und Mächte*, 112, 114–115. Similarly, the Foreign Office, the Economics Ministry, and the OKW opposed major weapons sales to Yemen. See BArch: R901-68470, AA/Berlin an RWM, W 416g, 18. Mai 1938; and R901-68470, AA/Berlin an RWM, W250/39g and W251-39g, 20. März 1939.

immediate role in German calculations in the months leading up to war in Europe. German goals in eastern Europe, based as they were on the conquest of German living space, of necessity would require an all-out war with, and destruction of, the Soviet Union. Moreover, in August 1939 Hitler had to conclude that after the defeat of Poland he would likely have to deal with Britain and France in the west before mounting an assault on the Soviet Union. In some ways, Turkey possessed many of the same strategic considerations for German war planners as did the Ottoman Empire during the previous war, especially given Turkey's position on the southern border of the Soviet Union that was simultaneously the southern flank of any future German military operations in the East. But unlike a generation earlier, Hitler's government determined that German interests in a future war were well served by Turkish neutrality. A neutral Turkey would also preclude an Anglo-French military campaign through Anatolia, in contrast to the Allied attempts in the First World War to offset German military success in Russia by directly attacking Germany's Ottoman Turkish ally at Gallipoli and attempting to seize the Straits.

During the 1930s, German-Turkish trade was extensive. Germany accounted for about half of all Turkish exports, and the Turkish and German governments discussed the sale of German arms, including tanks and warships, to Ankara well into the late 1930s. Most of these talks came to naught, as Germany required payment in foreign currency or raw materials, which the Turks apparently were unable to provide.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, statements throughout 1938 reaffirming Turkish neutrality were openly supported by the German Foreign Office. For instance, after discussions with the Turkish state secretary and the Turkish ambassador in the summer of 1938, von Ribbentrop concluded: "A policy of benevolent neutrality would also appear to me to be the proper basis from which closer cooperation can later develop."<sup>112</sup> Indeed, increasing indications of German ambitions in eastern Europe by 1939 were not immediately seen as a threat to Turkish sovereignty, so long as they did not include southeastern Europe.

However, there was a considerable degree of Turkish unease in its relationship with Hitler's Germany by the late 1930s, due in part to Italian expansionism and ambitions in the Balkans and possibly Syria. Indeed, increasingly close German-Italian relations by 1938, followed by Italy's invasion and occupation of Albania in April 1939 and the German-Italian "Pact of Steel" the following month, adversely affected German-Turkish relations and made them somewhat more problematic in the months leading up

<sup>111</sup> See for example BArch: R901-68459, Verzeichnis der schwebenden Geschäfte, 13. Dezember 1938; and AA/Berlin an RWM, Durchdruck als Konzept, zu W1352/398, 23. August 1939.

<sup>112</sup> See for example Ribbentrop's July 1938 statement recognizing Turkish neutrality in PA: R29775, Büro des Staatssekretärs, Türkei, Bd. 1, Aufzeichnung von Ribbentrop, R.M. 224, 1. Juli 1938.

to war in 1939.<sup>113</sup> Turkish determination to remain neutral in any war was, at a minimum, also clearly and consistently supported by the German government, notwithstanding Berlin's unease with Turkish negotiations and agreements with both France and Great Britain in the spring of 1939 that were likewise aimed at guaranteeing Turkish territorial sovereignty and neutrality in the event of a war in Europe.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>113</sup> See for example PA: R29775, Büro des Staatssekretärs, Türkei, Bd. 1, DG/Ankara an AA/Berlin, Nr. 135, 27. April 1939; AA/Berlin (Weizsäcker) an DG/Ankara, Nr. 100, 2. Mai 1939; and DG/Ankara an AA/Berlin, Nr. 142, 3. Mai 1939. The Pact of Steel unequivocally committed each of the signatories to full support for the attainment of the other's "living space." For the Turkish government, of course, the question remained exactly what Italy's "living space" might include. For the German text of the Pact of Steel, see ADAP: Serie D. Bd. VI, Nr. 426. See also Knox, *Hitler's Italian Allies*, 15–16.

<sup>114</sup> See PA: R29775, Büro des Staatssekretärs, Türkei, Bd. 1, Aufzeichnung von Woermann, Pol. VII 450, 21. März 1939; and Weizsäcker an DG/Belgrade, DG/Athen, und DG/Bukarest, Pol. II 1636, 1640, 15. Mai 1939.

## From the Periphery to the Center, 1940–1941

### FROM THE PERIPHERY

When the war began in Europe in September 1939, most Arab states were unable or unwilling to oppose Britain and France, or for that matter, Italy and Spain. Much of Morocco, as well as Algeria and Tunisia had been part of the French empire since the previous century, while Libya had been under Italian rule since 1911. On the basis of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936, a nominally independent Egypt, which had been under various levels of British control since 1882, was forced to sever diplomatic relations with Germany. The Egyptian government interned some German nationals, and took over German banks and other businesses, as Egyptian public opinion remained overwhelmingly in favor of neutrality.<sup>1</sup> Egypt declared war on Germany in March 1945. Iraq, nominally independent since 1930, also severed diplomatic relations with Germany, in spite of popular sympathy for Germany among some in the Iraqi government and population. Moreover, the Mufti of Jerusalem and his Palestinian Arab associates were headquartered in Baghdad from October 1939 until the early summer of 1941. The Iraqi government expelled most German nationals living and working in Iraq, and temporarily interned some. Iraq would eventually declare war on the Axis powers in January 1943. Saudi Arabia did not sever its diplomatic relations with Germany right away, and remained neutral for most of the war. It wished to retain German friendship, while avoiding anything that might arouse British suspicions.<sup>2</sup> In Syria and Lebanon, the expected nominal independence was put on hold as France reasserted its control and continued both mandates. Agreements in 1936 had initially proposed Syrian and Lebanese independence after three years, to be followed by membership in the League of

<sup>1</sup> Hirscoicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, 65–67.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 68–69. Saudi Arabia also declared war on Germany in March 1945.

Nations.<sup>3</sup> However, the deteriorating situation in Europe, coupled with domestic sectarian and other political conflicts, resulted in a postponement of Syrian and Lebanese independence. Non-Arab Turkey remained neutral for most of the war, before declaring war on Germany in early 1945. By the end of March 1945, the few Arab states with some degree of independence, including Saudi Arabia, as well as a fully-independent Turkey, had declared war on Germany.

In Palestine, still a British Mandate, the Arab insurgency seemed to put itself on virtual hold following the release of the British White Paper on May 17, 1939 and the approach of war that summer. It remained for the most part moribund for the duration of the war, despite the widespread Palestinian Arab rejection of the provisions of the White Paper.<sup>4</sup> British Colonial Office records contain many references in 1939 to apathy among Palestinian Arabs and a waning interest in continuing the revolt. They also indicate that the Mufti, who had been in exile in Beirut since October 1937, at least initially hoped to be able to strike a deal with the British after the war broke out in 1939.<sup>5</sup> Within a year of the start of the war in Europe, the German Foreign Office had come to believe that Arab violence and unrest had ended, at least for the time being. In December 1940, in a summary of Germany policy in the Arab world, it drew the following conclusion about Palestine: “The situation is generally peaceful. Jewish-Arab conflict is no longer to be seen.”<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the Mufti was obviously aware that his main rival in Palestine, the Nashashibi clan, had declared publicly its support for Britain and France. In any case, heightened Anglo-French security concerns in the immediate region forced al-Husayni to leave his temporary exile in Lebanon and move to Iraq with his entourage in October 1939.

In spite of a growing propaganda campaign by the Axis powers proclaiming solidarity with all Arabs and Muslims against British and later American imperialism and the Jews, a general Arab uprising or revolt in support of the Axis against the Allies never materialized during the war years. The many

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 64. See also Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 83.

<sup>4</sup> The White Paper of May 17, 1939, finally rejected the idea of a partition of Palestine and stipulated that a single Palestinian state would be granted independence in ten years. Jewish immigration would be capped at 75,000 over the next five years, after which it would be left to the entire Palestinian population to democratically determine future levels of Jewish immigration. Since the Jewish population would at most constitute barely one-third of the population of Palestine by 1944, the White Paper would mean the end of Jewish hopes for a majority and a Jewish state. The Zionist movement categorically rejected the White Paper, but so too did much of the Palestinian Arab leadership who objected to allowing an additional 75,000 Jewish immigrants into Palestine between 1939 and 1944.

<sup>5</sup> See NAL: KV2–2084, Colonial Office, CX/88500, September 30, 1939. For more on the Mufti’s earlier inclinations to seek some sort of accommodation with the British at the expense of the Zionists and the Jewish National Home in Palestine, see Philip Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem: Al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni and the Palestinian National Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 50–80.

<sup>6</sup> PA: R29882, Büro des Unterstaatssekretärs, Irak, Bd. 1, Zusammenstellung für die Besprechung beim Herrn Staatssekretär am 9. Dezember 1940, Die deutsche Politik in Arabien.



wartime reports from German diplomats, military personnel, and various German agents (*Vertrauensmänner*) in parts of North Africa and the Middle East indicated the continued existence among the Arab populations of affection and sympathy for Germany. They also indicated a continued aversion to Italy, a popular mood that later led to random Arab shooting at retreating Italian troops in North Africa.<sup>7</sup> Germany's relative disinterest in the Middle East and North Africa as a region for expanding its own imperial interests, as well as Italy's well-known and very real appetite for additional territories in North Africa and the Middle East, may provide at least a partial explanation for the general absence of wartime anti-British and anti-French unrest and violence in the region. Certainly the presence of powerful Axis and Allied armies in the Arab lands was also a disincentive to popular revolt. But even the presence of a strong German military force in North Africa between 1941 and 1943, the very prospect, however brief, of an Axis military victory over the British in the region in 1942, and an all-out Nazi propaganda campaign calling on Arabs and Muslims to rise up and join in the Axis struggle against Anglo-American imperialism and alleged Jewish domination failed to ignite a new "Arab revolt."

Hitler's Germany was clearly not in a position to undertake military action in the Arab world during the first year of the war in Europe. It was mindful of a possible two-front war in Europe, as well as the concentration of British and French troops in the close proximity of the Arab states of the Fertile Crescent and North Africa. Berlin also considered the theoretical possibility of an Anglo-French attack on Germany through the Balkans, and a possible Anglo-French preference for a war on the southern periphery of Europe. For these reasons, it was in Germany's interest that Italy initially chose to remain out of the war, at least for the time being.<sup>8</sup> It seemed apparent to the Nazis that a two-front war, with one front in southern Europe and the Mediterranean, was unlikely so long as Italy stayed out of the war. In this scenario, it was also necessary that Turkey remained neutral, that the Nazi-Soviet Pact survive, and that London and Paris be forced to brace for a German attack in western Europe following Hitler's rapid victory in Poland.<sup>9</sup>

Berlin seemed content to let Germany's Arabic-language radio propaganda in the Middle East, begun on April 25, 1939 from Zeesen, a town just south of Berlin, intensify after the outbreak of war in Europe.<sup>10</sup> According to German

<sup>7</sup> See for example BA-MA: RH2-614, OKH/Chef des Generalstabes des Herres, Op.Abt. (IIb), Zwischenmeldung vom 21. Dezember 1941. The files in RH2 contain many reports on the military situation in North Africa in 1941 and 1942, some of which mention Arab attacks on Italians, but none of which mention any Arab efforts in North Africa to revolt in support of the Axis troops. See also B.H. Liddell-Hart, *The Rommel Papers* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1953), 138–139.

<sup>8</sup> Hitler told this to Mussolini at their meeting at the Brenner Pass on March 18, 1940. See, for example, the report on the substance of their conversation in ADAP: Serie D, Bd. IX, Nr. 1.

<sup>9</sup> See Hirsowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, 70–73.

<sup>10</sup> For a good summary of early German Arabic-language radio propaganda to the Arab world, see Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, 37 ff.

military intelligence, the considerable air time of the German radio station was having a positive effect in the Arab world. For example, in a report from Teheran in late November 1939, an unnamed German agent reassured Berlin that there was little danger of Iran entering the war, and then offered his view of German radio propaganda toward the Arab states in the region: “On radio the appeal is made for the soul of the Arabs. Every evening the Arabic speaker on Berlin radio gives rousing addresses aimed at the entire Arab world. He is a brilliant speaker. . . and doubtlessly exercises great influence over his listeners.”<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the regime took steps to organize within the government Germany’s coming wartime propaganda activity in the Middle East. With the approach of war in the summer of 1939, the German Foreign Office formally assumed a leading role in the conduct of German propaganda activities toward the Middle East. Joseph Goebbels’s Propaganda Ministry also assumed a supporting role in foreign propaganda, although not without complaints.<sup>12</sup>

At their meeting at the Brenner Pass on March 18, 1940, Hitler repeatedly thanked Mussolini for his initial decision to remain out of the war. Hitler recognized this as very much in Germany’s interest. Indeed, given his fundamental disinterest in the Mediterranean and the Middle East early in the war, the only discernible strategic link between Hitler’s regime in Berlin and the future of the Mediterranean and the Middle East remained the imperial interests and ambitions of his Italian ally.<sup>13</sup> The Nazi regime had concluded that the western allies would have preferred to fight on Europe’s periphery, particularly in the Mediterranean region, where they were much stronger, and where German military power was negligible. Had the Italians immediately entered the war, Germany likely would have been distracted militarily from its strategic objectives in Europe. At that meeting with Mussolini at the Brenner Pass, Hitler is paraphrased as saying: “By the middle of September [1939] there was no longer a danger for Germany from the west, and it was therefore correct that Italy remained out of the war.”<sup>14</sup> After insisting that he had always wanted friendship with Great Britain, Hitler went on to tell Mussolini that Italy alone

<sup>11</sup> BA-MA: RW 5–583, Bericht eines Vertrauensmannes, “Der Osten und Orient nach dem Pakt von Ankara,” Streng Vertraulich, November 1939; and Bericht eines Vertrauensmannes aus Teheran, “Der Rundfunkkampf um die arabischen Welt,” Streng Vertraulich, Ende November 1939.

<sup>12</sup> BArch: R 58–783, Deutscher Pressenachrichtendienst und die deutsche Propaganda im Vorderen Orient, II 224 v.K./Kö, Geheime Reichssache, 25. August 1939. See also Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, 38–40. For an example of Goebbels’ periodic displeasure with the propaganda activities of the German Foreign Office, see his entry for May 13, 1941 in Fröhlich, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, Teil I, Bd. 9, 308. See also Peter Longerich, *Propagandisten im Krieg. Die Presseabteilung des Auswärtigen Amtes unter Ribbentrop* (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 1987).

<sup>13</sup> See Mallmann and Cüppers, *Halbmond und Hackenkreuz*, 69–71.

<sup>14</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. IX, Nr. 1.

was Germany's friend and partner in Europe. The two also agreed that the most opportune time for Italy to enter the war on Germany's side would be when Germany was on the verge of victory against Britain and France in western Europe. Hitler assured Mussolini that the Reich had been making the necessary preparations for an assault on the west, and that Italy's entry should follow Germany's anticipated military victories. Finally, Hitler told Mussolini that Germany had no interests in the Mediterranean region, implying once again that Italy's imperial ambitions in the region could only be satisfied with the rapid defeat of Britain and France.

Nevertheless, in their plans for the attack in the west in the spring of 1940, the Germans were forced to prepare for Italy's entry into the war and reach a decision about the preferred manner in which Italian forces might be integrated into the final struggle with the western powers. Expecting a rapid victory, Hitler must have remembered Mussolini's promise at the Brenner Pass in March to enter the war at the very moment the Germans were poised to inflict a final, crushing defeat on Anglo-French forces in western Europe. Moreover, in his April 4 instructions to the Wehrmacht, Hitler ordered that hostilities in the Balkans be avoided for the time being, but that Anglo-French naval power in the Mediterranean Sea should be neutralized.<sup>15</sup> The assumption here had to be that the Italian navy and air force would be primarily responsible for this enormous task, a responsibility that Italy would be unable to fulfill. However, the Germans were also forced to begin defining their own strategic interests in an eventual reorganization of the Mediterranean region, specifically the Arab lands of North Africa and the Middle East. Italian entry into the war, on the heels of a German victory in western Europe, of necessity would result in a political reorganization of the Arab lands, and possibly more. What, then, would Germany seek or support in the region given the significant but not always well-defined ambitions of its Italian ally? Precisely how would the victors dispose of the Anglo-French-controlled lands of the Arab world? And what role if any would Arab nationalism and Arab demands for independence play in German policy following its anticipated victory over France and Britain?

Retired General Gerhard Engel, Hitler's adjutant between 1938 and 1943, referred in 1941 to the low priority that Hitler attached to the Middle East in German strategy and policy during the Second World War. In his diary entry for April 24, 1941, for example, Engel notes that Hitler subordinated everything to the German war against the Soviet Union. With regard to the Middle East, Engel paraphrases Hitler as follows: "Unfortunately the Arabs are unreliable and prone to bribery with money, something the English and the French understand. F. [Führer] regrets and excuses himself that one cannot be everywhere and help."<sup>16</sup> The diplomat Fritz Grobba arrived at the same

<sup>15</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. IX, Nr. 46.

<sup>16</sup> Hildegard von Kotze (ed.), *Heeresadjutant bei Hitler 1938–1943. Aufzeichnungen des Majors Engel* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1974), 102.

conclusion in his memoirs with regard to Hitler's dismissiveness of the Arabs, one that was based on what he perceived as Hitler's strategic short-sightedness, as well as racist Nazi views of Arabs. Grobba argued that Hitler's refusal to recognize the right of the Arabs to complete sovereignty and independence was a significant cause of Germany's failure in the Middle East during the war: "We did not use the chances we had in the Middle East in the last war with the friendly views of the Arabs because we did not promise the Arabs independence, something that would have been a pre-condition for their willingness to bear arms."<sup>17</sup>

On July 1, 1940, Werner-Otto von Hentig in the German Foreign Office put together an extensive analysis of the situation in the Arab world following Germany's military victory in France, with concrete suggestions for a German strategy in the region pending the achievement of an Axis victory.<sup>18</sup> He began by stressing the strategic importance of the region for Germany's future central African colonial empire. The North African states of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya would, of course, remain under some form of French, Spanish, and Italian rule, albeit with greater autonomy. Egypt, on the other hand, would be freed from British rule and given independence, along with sovereignty over the Sudan. In Palestine, von Hentig recommended that Jewish immigration to Palestine be ended, that Jews be given minority rights there, and that efforts be made to find other areas in the world to which Jews from Europe should immigrate. In the states of the Fertile Crescent, however, von Hentig argued that it would be a mistake for Germany to support any form of Italian rule, as Arab hatred of Italy would only damage Germany's economic and political interests, in particular its relations with Turkey and its future interests in the oil resources of Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula. He suggested an independent state or several states, after an appropriate transition period. He concluded with a determined plea for immediate and direct German involvement in the Arab world and its political future with the following words: "For the current war, as well as for the postwar period, it is necessary to establish a clear position on how we view the future of these states, what sort of assistance we are prepared to give them, and what demands we will make on them in return for our assistance."<sup>19</sup> In the summer of 1940, von Hentig's suggestions appear to have been ignored by his superiors in the German Foreign Office and by Hitler's inner circle.

However, a few general German aims in North Africa and the Middle East did in fact materialize in Hitler's planning in the summer of 1940, as German troops won military victories on the western front in Europe. His June 18, 1940 meeting with Mussolini in Munich, just a week after Italy's entry into the war

<sup>17</sup> Grobba, *Männer und Mächte*, 317. See also Grobba's supplementary report to the 1957 report by Generals Helmuth Felmy and Walter Warlimont in NARA: MS/P-207.

<sup>18</sup> IfZ: Nachlaß Werner-Otto von Hentig, ED 113/6, Aufzeichnung von Hentig, 1. Juli 1940.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

and a day after the French surrender, was all about defining the conditions that the Axis would impose on the defeated France. When Mussolini announced Italy's entry into the war on June 10, he had stated Italian aims only in the most general terms, namely to obtain a dominant position in the Mediterranean area that would ensure Italy's free access to the oceans through the Straits of Gibraltar in the west, and the Suez Canal in the east.<sup>20</sup> The meeting centered on more immediate issues that included the surrender of the French fleet in the Mediterranean and the division of France into occupied and unoccupied zones. The Italians managed to briefly raise the matter of their claims to Tunisia, Corsica, and Djibuti, although Hitler told Mussolini that he was not interested in imposing harsh peace terms on the French. Hitler implied that his government hoped to keep Britain isolated and therefore more inclined to eventually make peace with the Axis. While Hitler did not mention the Arabs or the Middle East at all in this context, the minutes of the meeting reveal that: "The Führer further explained that he did not intend to deal with the French as they had done with us in 1918. He is prepared to make concessions on a few important points that are of significance for the French."<sup>21</sup> While Hitler did stipulate at the meeting that he would not agree to every French request, he would nevertheless pursue this approach "...if it is at all possible to push a French government in France to an understanding."<sup>22</sup> Ciano, who was also present at the meeting, confirms Hitler's intention "...to avoid offering conditions to the French such as would give a pretext to refuse to conclude the negotiations..."<sup>23</sup> There was nothing at the meeting to indicate that Germany itself possessed imperial claims in the Arab world, or that Hitler paid the slightest heed to Arab demands for national self-determination and independence. Yet Hitler's apparent deference to French interests would seem to indicate that any Italian demands for substantial colonial compensation in North and East Africa and the Middle East might not receive complete German support after all if, in the end, Hitler chose to preserve for the most part the integrity of the French colonial empire in North Africa and the Fertile Crescent.

<sup>20</sup> Knox, *Hitler's Italian Allies*, 17.      <sup>21</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. IX, Nr. 479.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* The German diplomat Rudolf Rahn, assigned to the German embassy in Paris in August 1940, has written that the appointment of the pro-French and Francophile Otto Abetz as German ambassador in Paris reflected this approach by Hitler toward France in the summer of 1940. See Rudolf Rahn, *Ruheloses Leben. Aufzeichnungen und Erinnerungen* (Düsseldorf: Diederichs Verlag, 1949), 145. See also Roland Ray, *Annäherung an Frankreich im Dienste Hitlers? Otto Abetz und die deutsche Frankreichpolitik 1930-1942* (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2000). Abetz, German ambassador to France from June 1940 to August 1944, also points to this approach by Hitler to a defeated France in the summer of 1940. See Otto Abetz, *Das offene Problem. Ein Rückblick auf zwei Jahrzehnte deutscher Frankreichpolitik* (Köln: Greven Verlag, 1951), 130.

<sup>23</sup> Mugggeridge, *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, 372. Nevertheless, Ciano does note that at this meeting the Italians still put forward their claims to Nice, Corsica, Tunisia, and French Somaliland, as well as their "interests" in Algeria and Morocco.

Another complicating factor was the position of Franco's Spain in any Axis-dominated postwar settlement in North Africa. Spain's demands for colonial compensation from France as the price for entering the war on the side of the Axis had always included at a minimum all of Morocco and parts of Algeria, a reality that conflicted with Hitler's desire to make peace with France and, ultimately, Great Britain, and to at least partially satisfy Italian claims. Moreover, Germany's wartime planning began to include the need for several military bases in northwest Africa.<sup>24</sup> On June 19, State Secretary von Weizsäcker informed Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop that the Spanish ambassador in Berlin had raised the issues of Spain's possible entry into the war, and its claims on French territory in North Africa. The ambassador told von Weizsäcker that the Spanish government would find it unacceptable for the French empire to maintain control over certain territories in North Africa, and that "...it claims the area around Oran, the unification of Morocco under a Spanish Protectorate, the expansion of its current Sahara territories to the 20th degree of latitude, the extension of its coastal territory in the coastal section between the Niger delta and Cape Lopez."<sup>25</sup> In September 1940, Spanish Foreign Minister Serrano Suñer met with von Ribbentrop and demanded all of Morocco and part of Algeria, as well as other parts of the French colonial empire, as the price for Spain's entry into the war.<sup>26</sup> In effect, Spain's demands throughout 1940 and 1941 as the price for entering the war on the side of the Axis remained all of French-ruled Morocco and at least a part of French-controlled Algeria. In his wartime diary entry for November 11, 1940, the German diplomat and former ambassador to Italy, Ulrich von Hassell, once again points to the obvious contradictions between Franco's aims in northwestern Africa and German hopes for a wartime accommodation with France. He also suggests that Italy's ambitions in North Africa further complicated the situation for German policy makers and their strategy with regard to France.<sup>27</sup> Finally, Ciano notes in his diaries in November 1940 that Suñer had been very critical of "...the German effort to get together with the French."<sup>28</sup> There was no mention of Arab nationalism, or the possibility of independence for Morocco and Algeria in any of these deliberations and exchanges.

Hitler's brief meeting with Franco at Hendaye in southern France on October 23, 1940 apparently failed to produce an agreement that would pave

<sup>24</sup> Stanley Payne, *Franco and Hitler: Spain, Germany, and World War II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 72, 76–77. See also Goda, *Tomorrow the World*, chap. 2.

<sup>25</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. IX, Nr. 488. See also Payne, *Franco and Hitler*, 89 ff.

<sup>26</sup> Schmidt, *Statist auf diplomatischer Bühne*, 497–500. Schmidt also writes that Hitler instructed von Ribbentrop to avoid promising Spain any transfers of French colonial territory in North Africa because of the need to convince the Vichy government to enter the war against England.

<sup>27</sup> See Von Hassell, *Die Hassell-Tagebücher*, 215–216.

<sup>28</sup> Gibson, *The Ciano Diaries, 1939–1943*, 312.



PHOTO 5.1. Adolf Hitler meets with Francisco Franco at Hendaye (October 1940). Courtesy Bundesarchiv, Berlin.

the way for Spain's entry into the war on the Axis side. In a draft secret protocol following the meeting, Hitler agreed in principle that Spain would receive Gibraltar, along with unspecified French territories in Africa, for which France would be compensated with British colonial territory.<sup>29</sup> Just a few weeks later, in his Directive No. 18 (*Weisung Nr. 18*) of November 12, 1940, Hitler once again addressed this potential conflict should Spain enter the war on the side of the Axis. He asserted: "The goal of my policy toward France is to cooperate with this country in an effective way in the future pursuit of the war against England."<sup>30</sup> He envisioned France's future role as one of "benevolent neutrality" (*die Rolle einer nicht kriegführenden Macht*) that would tolerate necessary wartime measures undertaken by Germany in its African colonies, and would use its own troops in support of the defense of its own territories. The directive also mentioned the desirability of a quick Spanish entry into the war, and the deployment of German troops in Spain for the purpose of driving Britain out of Gibraltar as the first step toward driving them out of the western Mediterranean area. The matter of Spanish claims against France in Morocco and Algeria as the price for its entry into the war was not mentioned in the directive. Indeed, Hitler had already told Mussolini in Florence on October 28,

<sup>29</sup> Payne, *Franco and Hitler*, 92–93.

<sup>30</sup> Domarus, *Reden*, Bd. 3, 1609–1610.



1940 that it was in the best interests of the Axis that the Vichy government should maintain its control over the French empire in North Africa.<sup>31</sup>

If Italian imperial ambitions prior to the summer of 1940 were not always clear, the defeat of France and what appeared to be Britain's imminent collapse and the possible end of the war pushed Mussolini's government to become somewhat more specific.<sup>32</sup> On July 17, German Ambassador von Mackensen reported from Rome that the Italians were demanding Nice, Corsica, Tunisia, and part of Algeria, as well as a land connection between Libya and Ethiopia. The latter would require the transfer of a significant portion of British-controlled Sudan to Italy. Also included in the Italian position was the suggestion that treaties with Egypt, Syria, and Palestine be concluded that would guarantee Italian political and economic influence and access to raw materials. It is unlikely that Mussolini was prepared to recognize the independence of these three states, although von Mackensen suggested that "... for Egypt, Italy has decided to make some significant concessions in questions regarding its [Egypt's] sovereignty and independence."<sup>33</sup> In fact, in December 1939, German intelligence from Rome had reported that Italy's recent and future ambitions in eastern Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, specifically in Ethiopia, parts of the Sudan, all of Somaliland, Yemen, and the Red Sea, meant that Italian interest in Egypt was centered on the Suez Canal as Italy's point of access to those areas. Italy would demand at a minimum the internationalization and complete neutrality of the canal, according to the international statute of 1888.<sup>34</sup> Finally, the Italians at that particular time were also asking for British and French Somaliland, and a southward expansion of Libya's border.

As observed earlier, Germany's sense of its own strategic interests in the Arab world materialized somewhat in late July and August 1940, after the Axis worked out its cease-fire terms and agreement with France in late June.<sup>35</sup> On July 21, 1940, both State Secretary von Weizsäcker and Under State Secretary Woermann outlined the German Foreign Office's tactical approach to the obvious contradictions involved in the fulfillment of Italian imperial ambitions, the need to maintain at least temporarily the status quo with regard to French colonial interests in North Africa and the Fertile Crescent pending the

<sup>31</sup> Muggerridge, *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, 400.

<sup>32</sup> See Arielli, *Fascist Italy and the Middle East*, 139–140, 162–165, 187–188.

<sup>33</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. X, Nr. 193. See also BA-MA: RW5–584, Bericht unseres Vertrauensmannes in Italien, Streng Vertraulich, 15. Dezember 1939.

<sup>34</sup> BA-MA: RW5–584, Bericht unseres Vertrauensmannes in Italien, Streng Vertraulich, 15. Dezember 1939.

<sup>35</sup> The formal armistice between France and Germany was signed on June 22, and between France and Italy two days later. The agreements outlined the rules for administration of French territories, including French colonial territories. Reflecting Germany's support for Italian pre-eminence in the Mediterranean, the rules for certain overseas territories were largely left to the Franco-Italian armistice. See Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 89–93.



final outcome of the war, and a carefully crafted German propaganda message to the Arabs. Woermann stipulated that he believed that Germany should follow Italy's lead in any reorganization of the Arab world, and observed that such a policy was embedded in the terms of the cease-fire agreements that were reached after the French surrender. He reiterated: "As a result, a German claim for leadership in the Arab world, or a shared leadership claim with Italy is out of the question."<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the substantial correspondence between the Foreign Office in Berlin, the German embassy in Rome, and the German Cease-Fire Commission in the summer of 1940 indicates quite clearly that the German government continued to accept Italy's leadership in the Mediterranean area and Arab world.<sup>37</sup> Yet, it also indicates that Hitler was increasingly committed to supporting French demands that its empire remain for the most part intact in any final peace settlement with the Axis powers.<sup>38</sup> However, Woermann also observed that Germany's political disinterest did not mean its economic disinterest. He maintained that Germany had an interest in expanding its air connections, as well as its future access to Iraqi oil: "We will be able to achieve the solution to both questions in cooperation with Italy, but under the vigorous protection of our own interests."<sup>39</sup>

Woermann did finally address the question of the Arabs and their quest for national self-determination. He pointed to the pro-German sympathies of the Arabs and their intense aversion to Italy. He further cautioned that Germany should not let itself be drawn into what he termed "the Arab game," to be used by the Arabs as a support against the Italians. He concluded: "This means that our policy, along with our radio propaganda in the Near East or toward North Africa and the Middle East, now as before, should be pursued with the utmost anti-English, as well as a toned down anti-French, urgency."<sup>40</sup> In his notes in the margin of the Woermann memorandum, von Weizsäcker penciled in that he agreed with the content. Regarding the situation with the Arabs and German policy, Woermann further suggested that since Germany was still at war "... we should just tell the Arabs what we are fighting, namely England, and speak only in terms of the 'liberation of the Arab world,' without any statements about

<sup>36</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. X, Nr. 200.

<sup>37</sup> See for instance PA: R29607, Büro des Staatssekretärs, Friedensverhandlungen mit Frankreich, Bd. 1, DB/Rom an AA/Berlin, Telegramm ohne Nummer, 25. Juni 1940; Hencke/Waffenstillstandskommission an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 32, 5. Juli 1940; Hencke/Waffenstillstandskommission an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 91, 1. August 1940; and Aufzeichnung von Grote, Pol. I 12244g, 4. September 1940.

<sup>38</sup> See for instance PA: R29607, Büro des Staatssekretärs, Friedensverhandlungen mit Frankreich, Bd. 2, Hencke/Waffenstillstandskommission an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 156, 2. September 1940; Aufzeichnung von Federer, Pol. I Mg., 21. September 1940; and Hencke/Waffenstillstandskommission an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 174, 21. September 1940.

<sup>39</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. X, Nr. 200. See also Dietrich Eichholtz, *Krieg um Öl: Ein Erdölimperium als deutsches Kriegsziel 1938–1943* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2006).

<sup>40</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. X, Nr. 200.

future goals.”<sup>41</sup> Of course, that had been the substance of German radio propaganda to the Arabs since shortly before the start of the war, and it wouldn’t change very much as the war progressed. At this point, therefore, references to Arab independence were simply out of the question.

By late August 1940, after almost a year of war in Europe, the Foreign Office in Berlin circulated an internal policy paper that outlined German policy toward the Arab world.<sup>42</sup> The paper, dated August 20, 1940, was in part the result of inquiries by several unnamed Arab leaders at the few remaining German diplomatic missions in the Middle East. The circular seemed to take for granted that victory in the war in Europe was a certainty, despite the refusal of Great Britain to surrender and the increasing aid it was receiving from the United States. It also reflected the position that Woermann had outlined and von Weizsäcker had approved just one month before. The paper began by reiterating the proposition that Germany possessed no political interests in the Mediterranean area, a space it defined as including the Arab world in its southern and eastern sections. It also stipulated that Germany did have important economic, communications, and cultural interests in the Arab lands. To this point, therefore, after more than seven years of National Socialism and a year of war in Europe, German policy had not changed substantively from the Middle East policies of the earlier Imperial and Weimar governments. Furthermore, the paper once again declared that Germany would follow Italy’s political lead in the Arab lands: “It [Germany] will therefore leave the lead to Italy in the political reorganization also of the Arab space.”<sup>43</sup> As states and regions in the “Arab space,” it listed the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, Palestine, Transjordan, Syria-Lebanon, and Iraq, and reiterated the position that Germany claimed neither a unilateral nor even a shared leadership role in the political future of these areas. It was not deemed necessary to mention the North African Arab states west of Egypt since these lands were already under the direct rule of Italy, Vichy France, and Spain, Germany’s real and would-be allies.

The August 20 paper also briefly specified the non-political interests that Germany would vigorously pursue. Above all, it reasserted Germany’s claim to participate in the exploitation of Iraqi oil reserves, its insistence on secure air traffic connections in the region, and the continuation of German archeological activities in the Middle East, all of which would be accomplished in full cooperation with Italian authorities. Finally, the paper once again described the public position that Germany would follow with regard to Arab demands for national self-determination, at least for the duration of the war. It reiterated the need to avoid any public discussion or positions on specific political issues regarding the future of the Arab lands of North Africa and the

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> PA: Botschaft Rom (Quir.) Geheim Akten, 44/1, “Arabische Länder 1940,” Runderlaß Pol. VII 2025g (Woermann), 20. August 1940.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

Middle East. Rather, the German Foreign Office and other state agencies were advised to stress only “. . .the common German and Arab interest in the defeat of England. . .” and that the Reich extended to the Arab people “. . .the full sympathy of Germany for the struggle for freedom of their people. . .”<sup>44</sup> Finally, individual German officials were advised to avoid any public discussions or positions on the future political organization of the Arab lands: “Any raising of the question of the future political organization of the Arab area is to be avoided. . .”<sup>45</sup>

However, pressure from some Arab leaders would not allow German officials to ignore the political future of the Arab world entirely. For example, in the fall of 1940, from his refuge in Iraq, the Mufti of Jerusalem formulated a list of requests that he sent to Berlin with his private secretary, Osman Kemal Haddad.<sup>46</sup> The German Foreign Office, in a telegram to the German embassy in Rome that reported on the Mufti’s “wish list,” also indicated that the Mufti’s suggestions had the approval of some members in the Iraqi government. The list included German and Italian recognition of the following: the independence of the Arab states (Syria, Palestine/Transjordan, Egypt, Sudan, and the Protectorates on the rim of the Arabian Peninsula); no German or Italian Mandates or limits on Arab independence; the right of Arab states to form a union; the right of the Arabs to solve the Jewish question in Palestine; and maintenance of the status quo for the Christian holy places in Palestine. The Mufti’s list also suggested that the Iraqi government would sign a treaty of friendship with the Axis, as well as secret treaties to govern economic and cultural affairs, and would also assist in the organization of uprisings in Palestine and Transjordan against the British and help to secure weapons for this from the French troops in Syria. There were no references to the Arab states in North Africa. Without commenting at all on the Mufti’s suggestions regarding Arab independence, von Weizsäcker did express German support for securing French weapons for an Arab uprising in Palestine, so long as the Italians were in agreement: “Reich government takes a positive position in the matter, i.e. under certain circumstances it would be ready to help with captured weapons (*Beutewaffen*) and money, but would only proceed in agreement with Italy.”<sup>47</sup> He instructed the German embassy in Rome to take the Mufti’s list to Foreign Minister Ciano to ascertain the reaction of the Italian government. Moreover, since Iraq still maintained diplomatic relations with Italy, von Weizsäcker instructed the German embassy in Rome to avoid discussion of the matter with the Iraqi embassy there.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*    <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> PA: Botschaft Rom (Quir.), Geheim Akten 44/1, “Vorschläge des Grossmufti betr. Arabische Länder 1940,” AA/Berlin an DB/Rom, Nr. 1232, 9 September 1940. Kemal Haddad traveled under the name of Tawfik al-Shakir

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

The German Foreign Office was initially under the impression that Italian diplomats in Baghdad had already approved in principle the Mufti's request for just such a public declaration.<sup>48</sup> However, the Italian government quickly replied to the German embassy in Rome with a rejection of a public declaration of support for Arab independence.<sup>49</sup> In particular, Mussolini rejected any idea that the Axis powers should renounce mandates or other kinds of limits on Arab sovereignty after the war. The Italian rationale was that the Arabs did not have the experience or ability to effectively govern themselves and, as a result, would be unable to resist aggression by outside powers, particularly by the British. The Italians also argued that Iraq was not capable of organizing an Arab insurgency in Palestine, even with outside financial support. About the only item that Italy did endorse was the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between Iraq and Germany. The embassy in Rome further reported that in spite of its rejection of most of the Mufti's recommendations, the Italian government also suggested that the discussion started by the Mufti's initiative should not be cut off. It recommended that the kinds of assurances given to the Arabs in the past should be continued: "Until now, oral, and unofficial guarantees have been given for the independence and integrity of the Arab states. These assurances were of a general character, and they could be renewed, and also carried on radio broadcasts. Nothing more than that should be undertaken."<sup>50</sup>

The Italians also recommended that the Mufti's recent requests from Baghdad for financial assistance should be granted, although not in the amounts he had asked for, and not exactly for his stated purposes. Instead, the Italians argued that the financial assistance should be used by the Mufti for, among other things, political assassinations and for sabotaging the oil pipelines in Iraq in order to disrupt the British war effort in the Middle East. Thus, the Italian government was quite clear in its opposition to any official public declaration by the Axis in favor of Arab sovereignty and independence, while simultaneously expecting specific Arab action of a military nature designed solely to contribute in some way to the military defeat of Great Britain at the hands of a victorious Italy.

In another telegram on the same day from the German embassy in Rome, von Mackensen relayed Ciano's description of alleged Italian approval in Baghdad of a declaration favoring Arab independence as "pure fantasy"

<sup>48</sup> On his way to Berlin from Baghdad, Kemal Haddad had told German ambassador von Papen in Turkey that such an approval had been given in Baghdad. See PA: R29539, Büro des St.S., Arabien, Bd.1, Tarabya an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 602, 6. August 1940.

<sup>49</sup> PA: Botschaft Rom (Quir.), Geheim Akten 44/1, "Vorschläge des Grossmufti betr. Arabische Länder 1940," DB/Rom an AA/Berlin, Nr. 1678, 14. September 1940. This telegram from the German embassy in Rome to Berlin contains the Italian response, in German translation, of September 11 to the German communication of two days earlier.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

(*reine Phantasie*).<sup>51</sup> Ciano explained to von Mackensen that Italian diplomats in Baghdad had done nothing more in June and July than to repeat what Italian radio had been broadcasting from Bari, namely that Italy had an interest in the Arabs' ability to stand on their own (*Selbstständigkeit*) against England, and to protect their territorial integrity. In other words, Axis propaganda should give the impression of German and Italian support for Arab self-determination, even when that was not the actual intent of their policies. He concluded: "For purely propagandistic reasons at that time, such statements by the Italian ambassador were deemed useful, but which could never be characterized in any way as an obligatory declaration or to be published in writing."<sup>52</sup>

Besides reflecting its still somewhat ill-defined imperial ambitions in the Arab states of the Fertile Crescent and Egypt, Italy's rejection of the Mufti's earlier proposals also pointed to the continuing absence of any specific postwar German political plans for the Arab lands, in deference to its Italian ally. Nevertheless, Berlin concluded at the end of September 1940 that the Axis powers could no longer avoid giving some sort of public pronouncement about their ultimate intentions toward the Arabs, regardless of Italian opposition to such a move. This seemed especially urgent to the German government in late September, as actual military conflict had just begun in the region with Italy's military campaign from Libya against the British in Egypt. On the matter of a public recognition of Arab independence, Berlin proposed a compromise to the Italian government, a plan that would alter the delivery, but not the essential substance, of the Axis message in the Arab world. In a late September memo to von Ribbentrop, Woermann recommended that Germany would have to make some kind of public statement to the Mufti's private secretary, Kemal Haddad, who had been waiting in Berlin for a month after delivering the Mufti's original request. Woermann suggested a weak declaration, to be sent by radio broadcast that would mainly differ from past German statements to Arab officials in that it would appear publicly as official German policy: "For some time it has been Germany's wish that the Arab lands free themselves from English and French domination, enjoy greater self-government, and that they achieve full independence. In their struggle to achieve this goal, the Arab lands can count on Germany's complete sympathy."<sup>53</sup> Unlike past unofficial statements, Woermann's suggestion did include the words "full independence" (*volle Unabhängigkeit*), with the implication that it was meant for at least some Arab states. Of course, this level of clarity would be even more problematic for Mussolini's regime.

<sup>51</sup> See PA: R29533, Büro des St.S., Arabien, Bd.1, DB/Rom (Quirinal) an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 1677, 14. September 1940.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> PA: Botschaft Rom (Quir.), Geheim Akten 44/1, "Vorschläge des Grossmufti betr. Arabische Länder 1940," Woermann an von Ribbentrop, (n.d.) The likely date for this communication is September 28, 1940.

Meanwhile, a degree of Arab pressure on Germany was also coming from some officials in the Iraqi government, which had broken diplomatic relations with Germany when war broke out in Europe a year before. In spite of its diplomatic break with Germany and declared neutrality, the Iraqi government still resented Britain's increased wartime military presence in, and pressure on, the Iraqi government to sever diplomatic relations with Italy. The German ambassador in neutral Turkey, Franz von Papen, informed the Foreign Office in Berlin on October 3 that he had met in Istanbul with Naji Shawkat, at the time the Iraqi justice minister. Shawkat called for a more assertive German Middle East policy, one that did not merely follow the lead of Italy.<sup>54</sup> He reminded von Papen that Italy was not at all trusted in Iraq and elsewhere in the Arab world, especially now due to its refusal to issue a public declaration in support of the independence of the Arab states in the Near East. He also warned von Papen that the Arabs would eventually enter the war on the side of Great Britain if their hopes remain unfulfilled by Germany. In his report to the Foreign Office in Berlin, von Papen observed that Shawkat demanded an official German declaration right away. The German approach to the Arabs, he argued, had to change, particularly since the military conflict between Italy and Britain was now raging on the Egyptian-Libyan border, and Arab support could be the difference between victory and defeat for the Axis in the Arab world. He asserted: "In this regard, I would be remiss if I did not advise you that the course of these events has extraordinarily serious implications for the position of the Reich. From here it is about unleashing Arab forces in Syria and Palestine in a way that would benefit the Italian war effort."<sup>55</sup>

The two key issues in this give and take between Berlin and Rome centered on Arab independence and the possibility of forming some sort of federation or closer union of Arab states. Italy came around to approve a general and noncommittal declaration of sympathy for the principle of Arab independence, but refused to include in any declaration of Italian support for a union or federation of independent Arab states.<sup>56</sup> With the apparent agreement of the Italian government, Germany issued its first public statement in late October 1940 on the question of the political future of the Arab people. Broadcast on German radio on October 21 and 22, and officially published on October 23, the declaration read as follows:

Germany, which has always been filled with feelings of friendship for the Arabs and has always cherished the hope that they will thrive and be happy and gain their historic, natural and rightful place among the peoples of the earth, has for a long time followed

<sup>54</sup> PA: Botschaft Rom (Quir.), Geheim Akten 44/1, "Vorschläge des Grossmufti betr. Arabische Länder 1940," DGK/Istanbul an AA/Berlin, Nr. A4828, 3. Oktober 1940.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> PA: Botschaft Rom (Quir.), Geheim Akten 44/1, "Vorschläge des Grossmufti betr. Arabische Länder 1940," DB/Rom an AA/Berlin, Nr. 1785, 2. Oktober 1940; AA/Berlin an DB/Rom, Nr. 1401, 6. Oktober 1940; and DB/Rom an AA/Berlin, Nr. 1819, 8. Oktober 1940.

with interest the struggle of the Arab lands for the attainment of their independence. The Arab lands can continue to count on Germany's complete sympathy in their efforts to reach this goal. With the publication of this declaration Germany finds itself in full agreement with its ally Italy.<sup>57</sup>

Needless to say, the Mufti's private secretary and others were quite disappointed with the declaration, despite the fact that the German Foreign Office did report some satisfaction with the declaration in the Arab world.<sup>58</sup> The declaration did not explicitly recognize Arab independence; it was merely a statement that Germany had observed the long Arab struggle for independence in the past with sympathy. Von Weizsäcker's reply to the Mufti's secretary, altogether beside the point, was that the Arabs would have to win their independence for themselves. Therefore, as Hitler's government moved forward into 1941, it still followed the Italian lead in the Middle East as it became more and more absorbed in its preparations for the invasion of the Soviet Union.

Despite Hitler's focus on eastern Europe and an invasion of the Soviet Union sometime in mid 1941, as well as his continuing ambivalence about the Arab world, wartime circumstances in the Middle East in the fall of 1940 put pressure on Germany to more directly engage the military and political issues in the region. Hitler's apparent determination to avoid direct German involvement in the question of the future of the Arab world had reflected his long-held view that North Africa and the Middle East should be subject to some mutually agreeable division of the region among the European powers that included Italy, Britain, France, and Spain. To the extent that the Nazi regime had any imperial aims beyond the European continent, they were to be found in sub-Saharan Africa, in some or all of Germany's former colonies, as well as other potential postwar acquisitions. By the summer of 1940, of course, there was no specific talk of a continuing British imperial presence in the Arab lands of the Middle East after an Axis victory, although there was nothing in German policy and projections about the future in 1940 and 1941 that necessarily precluded some sort of continuing British presence. In fact, in discussions in Munich with Italian Foreign Minister Ciano in June 1940, German Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop had stated that Britain would have to give up some of its imperial possessions, but that the British Empire was "...an element of stability and social order in the world..." and that the Führer "...does not desire the destruction of the British Empire."<sup>59</sup> And in his speech before the Reichstag of July 19, Hitler stated: "For as long as there has been a National Socialist

<sup>57</sup> PA: Botschaft Rom (Quir.), Geheim Akten 44/1, "Vorschläge des Grossmufti betr. Arabische Länder 1940," Aufzeichnung Weizsäcker, Pol. VII 3273g, "Gespräch mit dem Privatsekretär des Großmufti aus Anlaß der Abgabe einer Erklärung über die deutsche Politik gegenüber den Arabern," 21. Oktober 1940. See also Grobba, *Männer und Mächte*, 199.

<sup>58</sup> Mallmann and Cüppers, *Halbmond und Hakenkreuz*, 73.

<sup>59</sup> Muggeridge, *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, 373. In his diary entry for June 18-19, 1940, Ciano wrote: "If London wants war, it will be a total war... But Hitler makes many reservations on the



regime, there have been two goals in its foreign policy program: 1. the establishment of a true understanding and friendship with Italy, and 2. the establishment of the same kind of relationship with England.”<sup>60</sup> Berlin’s problem with regard to any future postwar settlement in the Middle East and North Africa remained the inherent conflicts in the positions and ambitions of those entities with which Germany was not at war, but which had a direct interest in the region. These included Italy, Vichy France, Spain, and, of course, the Arabs. Moreover, Hitler still seemed to entertain notions of a continuing British imperial presence in the Arab world following an Axis victory in the war.

Several German military intelligence reports from the Arab world in the late summer and fall of 1940 reflect these contradictions. For instance, these reports all speak of the Arab wish for real independence from England, the generally positive Arab view of Germany, and, as always, the entirely negative view and distrust of Italy. A note from the OKW to the German Foreign Office in late November described the determination of the Arabs to rid themselves of British rule, as well as their reluctance to do much about it during the war for fear of replacing British control with an even worse Italian regime: “In Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and a large part of the Muslim world one vigorously demands freedom from the English yoke; however, one fears that a victory of the Axis powers will mean Italy’s domination of the eastern Mediterranean, something that is even less desirable than English domination.”<sup>61</sup> From a military perspective, the report also regretted that the total failure to dispel Arab fears of future Italian control over the Arab world made it impossible to generate a general Arab uprising against British authority. With the arrival in Beirut of the Italian Armistice Commission for Syria in 1940 following the surrender of France, accompanied by a few German officials, public fears of Italian expansionism in the eastern Mediterranean only intensified.<sup>62</sup>

Military intelligence and other officials also questioned the policy of Hitler’s government with regard to Syria and Lebanon in the fall and winter of 1940–1941. Otto Abetz, the German ambassador to Vichy France in Paris, warned that any German support for Arab independence, particularly support for the establishment of a large, unified, and sovereign Arab state in the Fertile Crescent, would be regarded by the Vichy regime as a violation of the armistice

desirability of demolishing the British Empire, which he considers even today, to be an important factor in world equilibrium.” See Gibson, *The Ciano Diaries, 1939–1943*, 265.

<sup>60</sup> Domarus, *Hitler*, Bd. 3, 1553. In September 1940, Alfred Rosenberg wrote in his diary that Hitler felt pained to have to attack Great Britain and that he hoped the war with England would not last long. See USHMM: The Alfred Rosenberg Diary, September 10, 1940, 439, 441.

<sup>61</sup> BA-MA: RW5–358, OKW an AA/Berlin, Nr. 19237/40, Laufende Informationen Nr. 72, 25. November 1940. See also RW5–358, OKW an AA/Berlin, Nr. 415/40, Laufende Informationen Nr. 54, 22. August 1940; and RW5–350, OKW Nr. 01200/40, Aussenpolitische Übersicht, Entwicklung der aussenpolitischen Lage im Monat September 1940, 7. Oktober 1940. These reports also warned that the British were fully taking advantage of Arab hatred of Italy.

<sup>62</sup> Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 90.



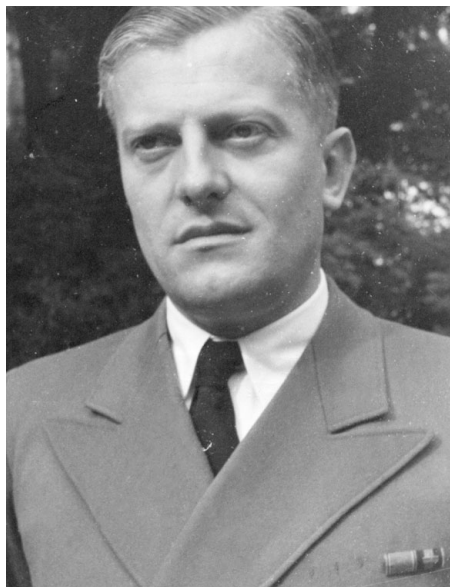


PHOTO 5.2. Otto Abetz (no date).  
Courtesy Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Berlin.

between France and the Axis powers that had guaranteed the continued viability of the French empire. He also warned that it would likely facilitate a Gaulist or Free French takeover in Syria.<sup>63</sup> Abetz describes Hitler's "generous" offers to the chief of state of Vichy France, Henri-Philippe Pétain, at their meeting in Montoire on October 24, 1940 in his postwar memoirs. He writes about Hitler's belief in the need to build a European coalition led by Germany and France to defeat Britain. He also describes Hitler's assurances to Pétain that, following the return of Germany's former colonies in sub-Saharan Africa and the likely redrawing of some colonial boundaries, any French losses would be compensated with territory from British colonies. Indeed, Under State Secretary Woermann asserted in early 1941 that the recent push by the Mufti and some members of the Iraqi government for a large pan-Arab state in the Fertile Crescent was impossible due to Germany's obligations to both Italy and to Vichy France.<sup>64</sup> Military intelligence reports on Syria from the late summer of

<sup>63</sup> Abetz, *Das offene Problem*, 157–159. For more on Otto Abetz, his personal and professional ties to France, his unique role as both German ambassador to France and "Plenipotentiary of the Foreign Office to the German Commander-in-Chief" in Paris, and his specific task of maintaining friendly relations with the Vichy French government, see Conze et al., *Das Amt und die Vergangenheit*, 151, 190 ff.

<sup>64</sup> For more on Hitler's promises to Pétain at Montoire, at the expense of both Italian and Arab nationalist aims in Syria, see IfZ: Nachlaß Werner-Otto von Hentig, ED 113/26, von Hentig an



PHOTO 5.3. Adolf Hitler meets with Henri Philippe Pétain at Montoire (October 1940). Courtesy Bundesarchiv, Berlin.

1940 to the spring of 1941 also paint a picture of uncertainty and conflict with regard to Germany's interests there.<sup>65</sup> The Vichy regime seemed to be in control, with the military commander, General Henri Dentz, said to be a supporter of Pétain. However, the existence of so many French military and civilian officials who were supporters of Charles de Gaulle, and the threat of an English invasion from the south, left things very much up in the air. In any case, the reports seemed to support the notion that German support for Arab independence might undermine Vichy rule in Syria, and thereby strengthen the Gaullists who also hoped to preserve the French empire after the war.

#### TO THE CENTER

Italy's defeats in North Africa and Greece in the fall of 1940 resulted in greater German military and political involvement in the Mediterranean region and the

Melchers, 7. November 1940. See also Werner-Otto von Hentig, *Mein Leben. Eine Dienstreise* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), 355–356; and Grobba, *Männer und Mächte*, 209–211.

<sup>65</sup> See BA-MA: RW5–350, OKW, Nr. 0888/40, Aussenpolitische Übersicht, Entwicklung der aussenpolitischen Lage im Monat Juli 1940, 5. August 1940. See also the unidentified agent (*Vertrauensmänner*) reports from the spring of 1941 in BA-MA: RW49–594.

Arab world. This naturally produced a slight change in the tenor of German-Italian relations, with Germany taking on a somewhat more active role in Axis decision making toward the Arab world. Germany's greater military commitment in the Middle East in 1941 occurred despite Hitler's simultaneous preparations for the assault on the Soviet Union (code name Operation Barbarossa) and the expected conquest of German *Lebensraum* in eastern Europe, originally planned for May 1941. Although Britain's refusal to surrender meant that the war in western Europe had not yet been brought entirely to a successful conclusion, Hitler was confident in late October 1940 that it was only a matter of time before an isolated Britain would give up. He abandoned for the time being plans for an invasion of the British Isles, and reasoned that a quick elimination of the Soviet Union would likely force London to sue for peace. Moreover, in October 1940 he hoped to be able to quickly end the war in the Mediterranean with an Axis victory in Egypt, the closing of the Suez Canal, and possibly the taking of Gibraltar in cooperation with Franco's Spain.<sup>66</sup> He likely assumed that all of this would occur in a relatively short period of time so that he would still be able to launch his assault on the Soviet Union by the beginning of the summer of 1941.

However, Hitler was forced to face the negative impact of Italy's disastrous invasions of Egypt in mid-September and Greece some six weeks later. As observed earlier, the Nazi regime had previously cautioned Mussolini the year before to avoid a second front in the Mediterranean until after a successful war against Britain and France. That this prerequisite appeared to Hitler to have been achieved by the fall of 1940 accounts for his general confidence that the Axis could end the war against Britain in the Mediterranean in the fall and winter of 1940–1941, without disrupting plans for the invasion of the Soviet Union. However, the Italian invasion of Egypt was decisively turned back by reinforced British forces in Egypt by December 1940. The British then moved across the border into Libya, captured much of the Italian command and many of its troops, and took control of much of Cyrenaica (eastern Libya) by the end of January 1941.<sup>67</sup> To further complicate matters for the Germans, Mussolini also launched his unsuccessful invasion of Greece on October 28. It was repulsed by the Greeks with some assistance from the British navy in the eastern Mediterranean. In brief, before the end of 1940, as Nazi preparations for a massive assault on the Soviet Union were getting under way, Hitler was forced to confront two significant Italian defeats in the eastern Mediterranean and the Arab world, defeats that also represented significant victories for the British. Moreover, Italian losses in Egypt and Greece between September 1940 and January 1941 would compromise Italy's ostensible political and military leadership of the Axis in the Mediterranean and Middle East. Of necessity,

<sup>66</sup> Hirschowitz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, 97–98.

<sup>67</sup> See Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 201–212; and Hirschowitz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, 98.



PHOTO 5.4. Erwin Rommel and Afrikakorps arrive in Tripoli (February 1941).  
Courtesy Bundesarchiv, Berlin

this would force Germany to play a more direct military and political role in the region.<sup>68</sup>

Having previously refused German offers of an armored division to help in the invasion of Egypt, the Italians were forced to seek German military assistance in Libya in December 1940 and January 1941. Following Italy's defeat at the hands of the British, the possibility arose that British forces, after having entered Cyrenaica, might soon be in a position to take all of Libya. Hitler concluded that Germany could not permit an Italian defeat in the Mediterranean and North Africa, and on December 31 assured Mussolini of Germany's full support.<sup>69</sup> In meetings with his military commanders on January 8 and 9, Hitler stated that an Italian collapse was to be avoided at all costs. Two days later, he issued Directive No. 22 (*Weisung Nr. 22*) to provide military assistance to Italy in Libya, in spite of the fears of some of Hitler's generals that sending troops and equipment to North Africa would compromise preparations for Operation Barbarossa. On February 6, 1941, Operation Sunflower (*Fall Sonnenblume*) was set in motion with the order to ship substantial numbers of German troops to North Africa. On February 12, a large German

<sup>68</sup> See Mallmann and Cüppers, *Halbmond und Hakenkreuz*, 71–75.

<sup>69</sup> Hirsocwicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, 99.

force under General Erwin Rommel arrived in Tripoli to salvage the Axis position in North Africa and to breathe new life into the war against Britain in the Arab world. Although Rommel was placed in command of German and Italian troops on the ground, general military operations were still technically under the authority of the Italian High Command in North Africa. At least in terms of military operations, this new reality might be interpreted as the reluctant acceptance by Germany of more responsibility in Axis decision making in the Arab world. Particularly in time of war, the line between military and political decision making is often blurred.

Perhaps sensing potential political changes as a result of the new military realities in the Mediterranean and North Africa, Amin al-Husayni, the Mufti of Jerusalem, sent his private secretary, Kemal Haddad, from Baghdad back to Berlin. Haddad left Baghdad on January 22 and arrived in Berlin via Ankara and Rome on February 12, 1941. Sometime after his arrival in Berlin, he met with Fritz Grobba and gave him a letter from the Mufti for Hitler.<sup>70</sup> The content of the letter was different from the list of specific recommendations for the Axis powers to undertake vis-à-vis the Arabs that the Mufti had sent to the German government with Haddad the previous September. Still, Haddad also carried with him a list of demands that more or less mirrored those he had submitted to the Germans in the early fall of 1940. It is not known to what extent this list and its contents were discussed in his meetings with officials in the German Foreign Office.<sup>71</sup>

The letter to Hitler was dated January 20, 1941 and seemed to pursue a different, much more indirect and diplomatic approach. It began with al-Husayni reminding the Führer of the incalculable strategic value of the Arab lands in the Middle East to the strength and security of the British Empire, and the degree to which past Anglo-French dominance of the Arab lands had actually strengthened the strategic bonds between London and Paris. Referring specifically to the Arab states of the Fertile Crescent and Egypt, the Mufti juxtaposed the enormous strategic advantages that Britain reaped from control of these Arab lands to the determination of the Arab people to end that control. As he would always do for the duration of the war, the Mufti claimed to speak for all Arabs when he promised that the Arab people would take up arms as the loyal ally of the Axis powers against the British. Perhaps mindful of the challenging strategic position in the Arab world in which the Germans found themselves in early 1941, al-Husayni was likely trying in a more indirect way to solicit from Hitler the still missing formal commitment to, and declaration of, Axis support for full Arab independence. Without submitting any specific requests or demands this time, the Mufti was asking the German government

<sup>70</sup> Gerhard Höpp (ed.), *Mufti-Papiere. Briefe, Memoranden, Reden und Aufrufe Amin al-Husainis aus dem Exil, 1940–1945* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2004), 20–23. The original letter, dated January 20, 1941, was in French.

<sup>71</sup> See Hirsocowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, 109.

to begin a process of negotiations with him for future cooperation: “By sending my private secretary to the German government, I am seizing this opportunity with the aim, in the name of the strongest Arab organization and in my own name, to begin the negotiations necessary for a sincere and trustworthy cooperation in all areas.”<sup>72</sup>

Sometime before Haddad’s arrival in Berlin on February 12, the German Foreign Office addressed the political situation in the Middle East, in light of the negative military realities for the Axis in the region. In December 1940, in a year-end summary of German Middle East policy, the Foreign Office in Berlin recognized the contradictions in Germany’s relationships with both Italy and the Arab world. On the one hand, the summary recognized Arab nationalism as Germany’s natural ally, while on the other it noted that Italy rejected “. . . the written recognition of the independence of the Arab states and their right to form a union. . .”<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, the summary concluded that Germany must continue to follow Italy’s lead in the Arab world: “The line of German policy is therefore settled, to leave to Italy the unconditional lead in political matters in the Arab area.” Heading into 1941, therefore, Germany chose to continue following the Italian lead on the question of Axis recognition of future Arab independence, namely that there should be no formal, public commitment to the sovereignty and independence of the Arab states in a postwar world. Informal, general, and highly emotional statements in Axis propaganda expressing sympathy for Arabs suffering under British colonial rule and their quest for independence would be the accepted approach. In a May 22, 1941 meeting in the German Foreign Office that dealt with propaganda, Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop reiterated that in the Arab world Germany had to consider the interests of the Vichy French government, particularly in Syria. He stipulated that “. . . the propaganda toward the Arab world must for the time being be strengthened only to the extent that freedom only in the most general sense is mentioned.”<sup>74</sup>

On February 4, 1941, von Ribbentrop asserted that: “We must now as before pay special attention to Italian sensitivities in policy toward the Arabs.”<sup>75</sup> Yet, von Ribbentrop also observed that since the Italians had been ignoring the Arab question, Germany should take the initiative in certain cases, albeit with proper notification of the Italian government, followed by due deference to Italian leadership and interests on these issues. He also favored

<sup>72</sup> Höpp, *Mufti-Papiere*, 22.

<sup>73</sup> PA: R29882, Büro des Unterstaatssekretärs, Irak, Bd. 1, Zusammenstellung für die Besprechung beim Herrn Staatssekretär am 9. Dezember 1940, Die deutsche Politik in Arabien.

<sup>74</sup> PA: R67482, Rundfunkpolitische Abteilung, Verbindungsmann RAM, Bd. 7, Aufzeichnung betr. Sitzung beim Herrn RAM über die Propaganda nach den unter Joche Großbritanniens stehenden Ländern, 22. Mai 1941.

<sup>75</sup> PA: R29539, Büro des St.S., Arabien, Bd.1, Aufzeichnung des U.St.S., Pol. Nr. 54, 4. Februar 1941.



in principle sending some weapons to Iraq, but recognized that finding a safe transport route for the weapons would be problematic. He approved of providing the Mufti in Baghdad with financial support, but only if Italy was in agreement. After ordering full cooperation with the OKW, von Ribbentrop approved immediate consultations with the Italian Foreign Ministry following the forthcoming talks with Haddad upon his arrival in Berlin. The Italian embassy in Berlin soon informed the German Foreign Office that Italy had approved sending some weapons to Iraq, as well as the provision of money for the Mufti in Baghdad. However, the government in Rome did not necessarily wish to push the Iraqi government into a war with Great Britain at that time, especially since British forces could easily take over the rest of Iraq and thus improve Britain's strategic position in the region.<sup>76</sup>

Still, Berlin wrestled with the conflicting issues of loyalty to the imperial interests in the Arab world of its Italian ally, and the demands of potentially useful, but as yet ill-defined, Arab allies. Aware of this conflict, Under State Secretary Woermann sought the advice of Otto Abetz in Paris regarding the same issues in Germany's relations with Vichy France.<sup>77</sup> Woermann's initiative was the result of recent deliberations in Berlin, probably instigated by Haddad's visit to Berlin as the Mufti's representative, over whether Germany should go beyond its weak and largely meaningless statement from the previous fall regarding the future of the Arab world, and move closer to the Mufti's demands for a formal Axis commitment to an independent Arab union. Woermann told Abetz that German commitments to Italy precluded the sort of action that the Mufti desired, and that it was likely the case with regard to Vichy French interests in Syria as well. Woermann even alluded to a similar situation for French Indochina and the imperial interests there of Germany's Japanese ally. Nevertheless, Woermann sought Abetz's advice on the likely impact on France and Syria of an official German statement of support for a future independent Arab union in the Fertile Crescent. Of course, Abetz was opposed to any official statement of German support for Arab independence.

On March 7, 1941, Woermann issued a lengthy analysis of, and suggestions for, future German policy toward the Arabs. The eighteen-page document emphasized from the very beginning Germany's most important single goal in the Arab world, namely the defeat of Great Britain, as follows: "The task reads: to work out a recommendation for the further handling of the Arab question, especially how this problem should be dealt with in conjunction with our goal to defeat England."<sup>78</sup> The report also confined its analysis to Saudi Arabia,

<sup>76</sup> PA: R29539, Büro des St.S., R29539, Arabien, Bd.1, Aufzeichnung des U.St.S., Pol. Nr. 137, 21. Februar 1941.

<sup>77</sup> PA: R29882, Büro des Unterstaatssekretärs, Irak, Bd. 1, Woermann/Berlin an DB/Paris, Fernschreiben, 25. Februar 1941.

<sup>78</sup> PA: R29539, Büro des St.S., Arabien, Bd.1, Aufzeichnung zur arabischen Frage, Pol.VII 123 g Rs., 7. März 1941.

Yemen, the various Arab territories on the rim of the Arabian Peninsula, as well as the states of the Fertile Crescent, which included Iraq, Palestine, Transjordan, Syria, and Lebanon. Egypt and the Sudan were recognized as Arab states that would be referred to in the report from time to time, while the other Arab states of North Africa, under French and Italian rule, naturally were omitted. In a summary of nine recommendations at the end of the document, the report first reaffirmed Italy's lead role in Axis policy in the Arab world; but it departed from past practice by asserting that Germany would undertake stronger initiatives in certain questions, albeit always in consultation with the Italian government. It also announced a stepped-up effort in German propaganda in the Arab world, as well as increased German intelligence activities, acts of sabotage, and efforts to foment revolts in Palestine and Transjordan. In addressing what had become the most urgent demand of the Mufti and some of his Iraqi supporters, the report called for further consideration of the possibility of a joint German-Italian political declaration. However, it would fall far short of meeting Arab hopes because it did not endorse a clear statement of German or Axis support for Arab independence. On the question of recognizing a future, unified Arab state or federation, Woermann did not raise any objections in principle, but nevertheless concluded: "A declaration fully in harmony with Arab wishes for a Greater Arab Empire based on a federation is, in view of the policies of Italy and other states, currently not possible."<sup>79</sup> It proposed further examination of the possibility of sending weapons to some Arab states, as well approval of financial assistance for the Mufti. Sensitive to Italian wishes, it also suggested caution in the matter of encouraging an Iraqi uprising against British forces stationed there, until such time as it would have a good chance of success. Finally, the report called for official German representation on the Italian Cease-Fire Commission in Syria, and German-Italian-French cooperation in expelling pro-*de Gaulle* French civil servants and military officers from Syria.

Thus in the spring of 1941, Germany was prepared to pursue some new military and intelligence initiatives in the Middle East, independent of the Italians, designed to bolster German and Axis military efforts against the British in the region. However, these initiatives were not meant to substantially enhance Germany's political role in the area, nor were they meant to secure in any way the future independence of the Arab states. It remained to be seen how the military significance of Rommel's *Afrika-Korps* for the Axis war effort in North Africa would affect Axis political strategy and policy toward the

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* Just a week before the circulation of this report, the German ambassador in Paris, Otto Abetz, had warned his colleagues in Berlin that any German declaration of support for an independent Greater Arab Empire would only help the strong pro-*de Gaulle* movement in Syria. He also warned that such a declaration would at the same time alienate the Vichy government, which would view it as a violation of the cease-fire agreement that recognized continued French authority in its colonies and mandates. See PA: R29539, Büro des St.S., Arabien, Bd. 1, DB/Paris an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 684, für Unterstaatssekretär Woermann, 28. Februar 1941.



Arabs. Moreover, military and other preparations for the massive assault on the Soviet Union tended to preclude much more in terms of Germany's military commitment beyond Rommel's current campaign in North Africa, plans for greater military intelligence in the region, and the shipment of some weapons to the Iraqi government and transfer of money to the Mufti's organization in Baghdad. Woermann, von Weizsäcker, and von Ribbentrop recognized this reality in their discussions on the Middle East in March, one that von Weizsäcker summed up with the statement: "How best to use the Arab movement against England depends on the greater problem of Germany-Russia."<sup>80</sup>

The German Foreign Office and German military intelligence did indeed come together in the spring of 1941 to plan for an expanded and cooperative intelligence effort in the Middle East. Admiral Wilhelm Canaris outlined the specific components of this joint effort in late March, which included the following: expanded intelligence gathering in the region, especially in Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt; sabotage in Palestine against power plants, pump stations for oil pipelines, factories, and electricity and water installations, as well as against English supply lines; the incitement of unrest in Palestine and Transjordan through the provision of weapons and money; and the search for ways to get weapons into Iraq.<sup>81</sup> Of course, such operations were not intended for Syria where Vichy France still exercised control.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, this heightened German intelligence agenda was to be carried out while providing the Italians with only the most general information, but not necessarily the details, of each specific activity. Nevertheless, these actions alone were deemed insufficient to break the British hold on the lands of the Fertile Crescent, Egypt, and the Arabian Peninsula. Again, as von Weizsäcker observed in his March 12 communication with von Ribbentrop, the only threat to Britain's position in the Arab world would be the breakthrough of an enemy great power.<sup>83</sup> The implication here, of course, was that Germany's military capabilities alone, and certainly not an Arab revolt, remained in the end the only hope for defeating Great Britain in the Middle East.

In early 1941, one significant indicator of a more or less continuing "business as usual" political approach from Berlin toward the Arab world involved something that would not have cost the German government much of anything in terms of military resources. For the second time in less than a year, in part in deference to the political and strategic interests of Italy and the Vichy

<sup>80</sup> PA: R29539, Büro des St.S., Arabien, Bd.1, Weizsäcker an den Herrn Reichsaußenminister, 12. März 1941.

<sup>81</sup> PA: R29539, Büro des St.S., Arabien, Bd.1, OKW, Amt Ausland/Abw., Nr. 526/41, g.Kdos. Abw.II/Ch., „Geplante Maßnahmen des Amts Ausland/Abwehr im vord. Orient, 25. März 1941.

<sup>82</sup> See for instance Woermann's memo to von Weizsäcker and von Ribbentrop in PA: R29539, Büro des St.S., Arabien, Bd.1, U.St.S. Pol.Nr.238, 26. März 1941.

<sup>83</sup> PA: R29539, Büro des St.S., Arabien, Bd.1, Weizsäcker an den Herrn Reichsaußenminister, 12. März 1941.

government in France, Hitler's regime virtually ignored the renewed request from the Mufti for a formal, unequivocal public declaration of Axis support for Arab national self-determination and independence. In fact, although the German Foreign Office had come to recognize the increasing importance of German political activity among the Arabs and the importance of the Mufti and his associates in that activity, it concluded that the Mufti was not the only Arab force through which it would work. Woermann noted in a memo to von Weizsäcker and others that: "It has been agreed that the main political route to the Arab world should be through the Mufti and his secretary, but that exclusivity should not be attached to this way."<sup>84</sup> The continued unwillingness of the Italians to sign on to such a declaration, of course, reflected the continuing incompatibility of Arab independence with Mussolini's imperial aims in the Mediterranean. In a sense, it also reflected Germany's commitment to respect those aims and to allow Italy to take the lead in policy matters in the region. Moreover, a declaration in support for complete Arab independence would also violate Germany's cease-fire obligations of June 1940 to Vichy France. These obligations included maintaining the integrity of the overseas French empire, and thereby denying support to Free French elements in Syria. However, rapidly changing events in the Middle East beginning in April of 1941 would increase pressure on the German government to alter its position, and to make some sort of formal commitment to Arab independence. For example, following the successful invasion of Syria and Lebanon by British and Free French forces in June 1941, the larger context of which is considered later in the chapter, Germany began to move in the direction of a clearer endorsement of Arab independence, albeit without ultimately following through.

Two events in the spring of 1941 stand out as key political defeats for the Axis powers in the Middle East, notwithstanding the initial military successes that German forces under Rommel would have in North Africa for the remainder of 1941 and much of 1942. These events were interconnected, with one coming on the heels of the other; together, they played a significant role in the ultimate defeat of the Axis powers in the Middle East and North Africa. The first was the collapse of the short-lived pro-Axis coup d'état in Iraq in April and May of 1941, followed by the successful British invasion of Vichy-controlled Syria and Lebanon in June.

In the fall of 1940 and winter of 1941, Britain was alarmed at what it viewed as the pro-Axis sympathies of important members of the Iraqi government, including Prime Minister Rashid Ali al-Gaylani.<sup>85</sup> Besides putting pressure on the Iraqi government to sever relations with Italy, the British government also

<sup>84</sup> PA: R29539, Büro des St.S., Arabien, Bd.1, U.St.S. Pol.Nr. 240, Woermann an St.S., Botsch. Ritter, Ges. Von Rintelen, LR Kramarz, LR Schlobies, 26. März 1941.

<sup>85</sup> See Majid Khadduri, *Independent Iraq, 1932–1958: A Study in Iraqi Politics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 159–205; and Hirszowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, 105–111.

tried to dissuade the Iraqi government from reestablishing diplomatic relations with Germany and purchasing German weapons. The British were also uncomfortable with the relationship between some members of al-Gaylani's government and the Mufti of Jerusalem who had been living in exile in Baghdad since October 1939. While some important Iraqi officials, such as General Nuri Said, were pro-British, and in fact wanted Iraq to end its neutrality by declaring war on the Axis powers, al-Gaylani and some others at that time appear to have favored maintaining Iraqi neutrality in the war and friendly relations with both Germany and Italy. In brief, there appears to have been a contentious mix of opinion within the Iraqi government toward the two sides in the war. In any case, the combination of political in-fighting and instability within the Iraqi bureaucracy, coupled with the wartime presence of the British in Iraq and its role in this domestic political uncertainty, and the diplomatic activities of the Mufti from Baghdad, ultimately led to Rashid Ali al-Gaylani's successful but short-lived coup on April 1 and April 2, 1941.

An Iraqi request for arms from the Axis had been conveyed through the Italian embassy in Baghdad in December 1940.<sup>86</sup> It asked mainly for captured English weapons and ammunition that would be more compatible with the British arms already used by the Iraqi military. The al-Gaylani government also made inquiries to Japanese diplomats in Teheran about possible arms purchases. When these December initiatives received little if any response from Rome or Berlin, al-Gaylani and his supporters in the Iraqi government attached their request for arms assistance to the Mufti's initiative with Hitler in January 1941. To reiterate, the Mufti's January 20 letter to Hitler, delivered in Berlin by his private secretary Kemal Haddad, stressed among other things the readiness of the Arabs to take up arms against the "common enemy," Great Britain. By late January and early February 1941, things had changed dramatically for the worse for the Axis powers since the fall of 1940. The magnitude of Britain's military victory over the Italian army in Egypt and Libya in the winter of 1940–1941, coupled with Italy's simultaneously humiliating defeat in Greece, and the commitment of significant German military forces to North Africa in order to avoid a total Axis collapse in the region, placed the Iraqi request for arms support in a new context. More importantly, Germany could no longer avoid playing a greater role in the formulation of Axis policy toward the Arabs. The rather meaningless Axis references to Arab national self-determination, contained in the joint German-Italian declaration of October 23, 1940 and in Axis propaganda, along with an earlier reluctance to supply weapons to Arab nationalists, specifically to the Mufti and to the Iraqi government, would have to be reexamined in Berlin.

In wartime Berlin, Fritz Grobba still had considerable influence in the German Foreign Office with regard to Iraq and the Arab world. Long an

<sup>86</sup> Hirszcwicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, 108–109.

advocate for a greater German role in the Middle East, Grobba tended to support the idea that the Mufti was respected and influential throughout the Arab world, particularly in Iraq. In his mid-February 1941 report on discussions with Kemal Haddad, the Mufti's private secretary, Grobba attached the following observation, the author of which is unknown, on al-Husayni's influence: "Through his superior intelligence and his multiple personal activities, he has achieved in the northern Arab countries (Iraq, Syria, Palestine and Transjordan) such a significant position that he is recognized today as their spokesman."<sup>87</sup> With the war in North Africa hanging in the balance in the first half of 1941, Germany had few options in the Middle East, beyond the Palestinian Mufti of Jerusalem living in exile in Baghdad since 1939, and some of the pro-Axis members of the Iraqi government, among them Rashid Ali al-Gaylani. Britain, however, was increasing its military strength in and around Iraq, and appeared to be relatively strong in Palestine and Transjordan. In Egypt, British reinforcements were moving into the country to resist Rommel's threat from Libya, and the Egyptian government seemed generally supportive of the British war effort. In Saudi Arabia and the Red Sea there appeared to be no threat to the British position, while the continued rule of Vichy France in Syria and Lebanon precluded any Axis support for Arab nationalism there. Thus, with the presence of the Mufti and al-Gaylani, along with their supporters and organizations in Baghdad, the only Arab state that appeared to be open in 1941 for Axis political and military inroads was Iraq.

Because of its geography, Iraq's future role in German plans for the Fertile Crescent was inextricably linked to the situation in Syria. The only feasible route in wartime for the shipment of weapons from Germany or Italy to Iraq, by air or by sea, was through neighboring Syria. Turkey wished to preserve its neutrality, the Soviet Union would soon be at war with Germany, and Iran would be partially occupied by British and Soviet troops beginning on August 25, 1941. In any case, Germany started to receive specific requests in late January 1941 from some Iraqi military commanders and from Rashid Ali al-Gaylani via Italian diplomats in Baghdad and the Italian Foreign Ministry in Rome. The Italian ambassador in Berlin handed one such request to Under State Secretary Woermann on January 27.<sup>88</sup> At that time, the Iraqis assumed that the shipments could reach Iraq via the Soviet Union, provided Turkey and Iran remained out of the war. The request called for light machine guns with ammunition, tanks, anti-aircraft batteries, anti-tank weapons, mines, and gas masks. While the Iraqis preferred captured British arms that would match their own British-provided weapons, they indicated that they could adapt their needs

<sup>87</sup> PA: Büro des RAM, Aufzeichnung (Geheim), (no date). It is likely that Grobba himself authored this comment, and that this view was generally shared in Abteilung VII, the Near East department in the German Foreign Office.

<sup>88</sup> PA: R29619, Büro des St.S., Irak, Bd. 1, Aufzeichnung Woermanns, U.St.S. Pol.Nr. 12, 27. Januar 1941.

to German and Italian weapons if need be. By early March, however, the Foreign Office in Berlin realized that it would be difficult to substantially arm the Iraqis. Abteilung VII was informed by the OKW that it possessed only small amounts of captured British weapons and that what it did have had been put aside for possible future operations in Ireland.<sup>89</sup> The OKW also stated that the requirements of the German military made the new production of arms for other countries very difficult, but that nevertheless weapons of German caliber could be found for shipment to Iraq. The main problem, however, was finding a possible transport route over which to send the weapons that Iraq wished to purchase. The Soviet Union would not permit such transports through its territory, while the German embassy in Ankara reported that Turkey would not permit the transport of weapons bound for Iraq through its territory. The Turks would permit the transit of goods officially declared as destined for Iran or Afghanistan, but this would in the opinion of Abteilung VII prove to be too complicated.<sup>90</sup>

In April, there were several new developments that had a significant impact on Germany's strategic position in the region. Perhaps most importantly, another military coup d'état occurred in Baghdad in which the Axis-leaning former Prime Minister Rashid Ali al-Gaylani and his nationalist supporters seized power.<sup>91</sup> At that time, Iraq was the only Arab state besides Libya in which Germany and Italy had any chance of retaining or gaining a foothold from which to militarily threaten Britain's position in the Middle East. A few days later, on April 6, the Germans launched their invasion of the Balkans through Yugoslavia toward Greece. Finally, on April 9, the German Foreign Office in Berlin began to push Hitler for the shipment of arms to al-Gaylani's new pro-Axis government. Woermann sent a memorandum to von Ribbentrop and von Weizsäcker expressing his impatience with Italian timidity and indecision in the matter of supplying arms to the new Iraqi government. He recommended that the Italian government inform Prime Minister al-Gaylani that Germany and Italy were following his actions with the greatest sympathy, that they advised the prime minister to begin armed resistance against England as soon as circumstances permitted and success seemed assured, and that Germany and Italy intended to begin supplying Iraq with arms as soon as the problem of finding suitable transport routes to Iraq was overcome.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>89</sup> PA: R29619, Büro des St.S., Irak, Bd. 1, Aufzeichnung Ripkens "Prüfung der Möglichkeiten und Wege für Waffenlieferungen nach dem Irak," HaPol 100/41, 6 März 1941.

<sup>90</sup> Hirszowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, 115.

<sup>91</sup> For good overviews of Iraqi domestic political issues, institutions, and personalities involved in the April 1941 Baghdad coup, see Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, (complete); and Hirszowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, chap. 8.

<sup>92</sup> PA: R29619, Büro des St.S., Irak, Bd. 1, Woermann an von Ribbentrop und von Weizsäcker, U.St.S. Pol.Nr. 289, 9. April 1941.

Woermann further stipulated that Germany and Italy should be ready to provide any financial support that the new Iraqi regime might need.

However, two weeks later, on April 25, the German embassy in Rome conveyed to Berlin the contents of a note from the Italian ambassador in Baghdad to the Italian Foreign Ministry. The Italian ambassador described a meeting he recently had with al-Gaylani and the Mufti in Baghdad.<sup>93</sup> Al-Gaylani described the influx of British troops from India into Iraq, and Britain's intention to topple his government. He expressed his frustration with the apparent Axis reluctance to heed his calls for immediate arms assistance before the outbreak of fighting between British and Iraqi forces. Furthermore, al-Gaylani asked that a German general staff officer be sent secretly to Baghdad, and that German and Italian Arabic-language radio broadcasts to the Middle East be intensified to counter British radio broadcasts. He asked that Germany vigorously promote the message about Iraqi determination to resist Britain's reoccupation of Iraq and that the Axis powers were determined to provide full support for Iraqi resistance. The following day, however, Woermann reported that a representative of the OKW told him that Hitler had determined it was too late to assist the government in Baghdad in view of the arrival in Iraq of substantial numbers of British troops, including two divisions of Indian troops. Woermann, however, contested that assessment, arguing that in fact far fewer British troops than was previously reported had landed in Iraq and that: "The situation today, according to the most recent reports of the Italian ambassador in Baghdad, is such that German weapons assistance for the Iraqi government and army is fully welcome."<sup>94</sup> It is difficult to ascertain whether the problem was Italian indifference, German uncertainty, the lack of a German presence, diplomatic or otherwise, in the Iraqi capital, or some combination of all three.

By the end of April, the German Foreign Office expressed frustration that, in the absence of diplomatic relations, it had been difficult to communicate directly with Iraqi officials. What communication there was came and went mostly through the Italian embassy in Baghdad via Rome, or somewhat more directly through the German embassy in Ankara. With this in mind, von Ribbentrop jumped into the fray on April 27 to try to sort things out through communications with the German embassies in Ankara and Rome. He instructed the embassy in Ankara to ask the Iraqi ambassador to Turkey to either take it upon himself to engage in discussions about German arms assistance for Iraq, or to have the government in Baghdad send someone to Ankara to do so.<sup>95</sup> He further stipulated that the Foreign Ministry intended

<sup>93</sup> PA: R29619, Büro des St.S., Irak, Bd. 1, DB/Rom an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 907, Streng geheim, 25. April 1941.

<sup>94</sup> PA: R29619, Büro des St.S., Irak, Bd. 1, Aufzeichnung Woermanns, U.St.S. Pol.Nr. 350, Über Büro RAM für Sonnleithner, 26. April 1941.

<sup>95</sup> PA: R29619, Büro des St.S., Irak, Bd. 1, Ribbentrop/Sonderzug an DB/Ankara, Telegramm Nr. 345, 27. April 1941.

to send Fritz Grobba, the former German ambassador to Iraq, to Ankara to discuss the situation with the appropriate Iraqi representatives. Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop advised that the Italian government should only be told that Berlin was attempting to establish separate contacts with the Iraqi regime, but that it should not be given details. His instructions to the German embassy in Rome were twofold: to convey to the Iraqi government through the Italian embassy in Baghdad Germany's assurances of full sympathy for the current Iraqi government, the Iraqi army, and the Iraqi people in their struggle against England, and that the Baghdad government could expect further communications shortly; and to inform the Italian government that Germany was ready to provide financial assistance to the government in Baghdad, and that it would consider the matter of providing weapons and munitions.<sup>96</sup> In other words, Germany could not yet formally commit itself to provide arms assistance to the al-Gaylani government in Iraq without first securing Hitler's approval. Of course, none of this activity included suggestions for an official public commitment by Germany and Italy to support complete Arab independence after the war.

On the same day that von Ribbentrop contacted the embassies in Ankara and Rome, he also sent a detailed message to Hitler requesting permission to begin the process of supplying arms and money to the al-Gaylani government in Baghdad. He informed Hitler that the Iraqis were especially interested in German air support should hostilities break out between the Iraqi army and British forces already in and near Iraq. He also said the weapons were available, largely from stocks that had been reserved for Iran and Afghanistan, as well as French weapons available in Syria through the Italian Control Commission there. He also informed Hitler that plans for German air support for Iraq were being prepared and coordinated with the Luftwaffe. Further military intervention on the part of the Axis would likely have to take place via Syria, something that would depend on future German-French relations. But von Ribbentrop also mentioned the caution with which Germany should proceed in Iraq before any outbreak of violence between the Iraqis and the British: "Under no circumstances should the Iraqi government be induced into an open conflict against England unless it is certain that, with the help of the Axis, Iraq is strong enough to be able to hold its own against the English."<sup>97</sup> On May 3, von Ribbentrop received the approval of General Wilhelm Keitel, chief of the OKW, as well as the full support of Hitler for military assistance to the Iraq government.<sup>98</sup> That same day, he suggested to Hitler that Fritz Grobba be secretly sent to

<sup>96</sup> PA: R29619, Büro des St.S., Irak, Bd. 1, Ribbentrop/Sonderzug an DB/Rom, Telegramm Nr. 346, 27. April 1941.

<sup>97</sup> PA: R28865, Büro des RAM, Irak, Bd.-, Notiz für den Führer Betr. Vorgänge im Irak, Ribbentrop/Wien, 27. April 1941.

<sup>98</sup> PA: R28865, Büro des RAM, Irak, Bd.-, Der Chef der OKW (Keitel) an RAM, F.H.Qu., 3. Mai 1941; and Notiz für den Herrn Reichsaussenminister, 3. Mai 1941.



Baghdad with a small staff to establish contact with the Iraqi regime and to help instigate an Arab revolt against the British in the Fertile Crescent that would assist the efforts of Rommel's forces in North Africa. To avoid the kind of publicity that would surround his return to Baghdad, Grobba was to travel under the name of Franz Gehrcke. Hitler approved, and Grobba with several assistants left Berlin on May 7. Along with several fighter aircraft, Grobba and his staff arrived in Baghdad on May 11.<sup>99</sup>

Hitler's Directive No. 30 (*Weisung Nr. 30*) on the Middle East of May 23, 1941 is instructive both for its timing as well as for its content.<sup>100</sup> By that date, the battle between British and Iraqi forces had been underway for almost three weeks, and the complete defeat of the Iraqis and overthrow of al-Gaylani's regime was about a week away. Yet the content of Hitler's directive might lead one to conclude that Germany's intervention in Iraq was meant to be both timely and decisive. After a long statement about the natural alliance between the Arab liberation movement and the German Reich against England, and the strategic importance of Iraq to an Axis victory, Hitler announced: "I have therefore decided to move developments in the Middle East forward through support of Iraq."<sup>101</sup> In the firm belief that the forthcoming Operation Barbarossa would be brief and successful, Hitler suggested that after its victory in Russia, Germany would then be in a position, if needed, to eliminate the British from the areas west of the Suez Canal. The directive goes on to describe the military and civilian agencies responsible for Germany's forthcoming presence in Iraq, the role of the German Luftwaffe, the delivery of weapons from and through Syria, continued cooperation with Italian military officials in Iraq, and a somewhat revised statement for German propaganda purposes in the Arab world.

A special military mission, with the code name "Sonderstab-F" and a staff of more than forty, was set up in Sunion near Athens. Under the command of General Helmuth Felmy, the task of Sonderstab-F was to oversee German military support for Iraq against the British, and to establish contact with and support for Arab organizations, and to use them in support of later German military operations in the Middle East.<sup>102</sup> Hitler reiterated the necessity for cooperation between the Foreign Office in Berlin and the OKW in crafting German propaganda in the region, and suggested: "The basic idea for propaganda: The victory of the Axis will bring to the lands of the Middle East liberation from the English yoke and with it the right to self-determination.

<sup>99</sup> Hirszowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, 157–158.

<sup>100</sup> BA-MA: RW4-535, Der Führer und Oberste Befehlshaber der Wehrmacht, OKW/WFSt/Abt. L (Iop) Nr. 44772/41 gK Chefs., Weisung Nr. 30: Mittlerer Orient, 23. Mai 1941. This Directive, No. 30, is also printed in Domarus, *Reden*, Bd. IV, 1719–1720.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> See NARA: MS/P-207 (Felmy), complete. See also Mallmann and Cüppers, *Halbmond und Hakenkreuz*, 91–93.



Whoever loves freedom will join the front against England.”<sup>103</sup> Aside from the fact that it was already too late for the sort of significant German military and political intervention that might tip the balance against the British in Iraq, Hitler’s statement about winning the right to “self-determination” for the Arabs did not necessarily commit Germany to real Arab independence after the war. In fact, the only reality that it did reflect was Hitler’s apparent acceptance, in late May 1941, of possible military advantages for the Axis in a widespread Arab uprising against the British in the Fertile Crescent.

On May 2, the Iraqi ambassador in Ankara notified the German embassy there that fighting had broken out that day between Iraqi and British troops, and that the government in Baghdad had broken off diplomatic relations with London.<sup>104</sup> He also asked the German embassy to request the immediate sending of Fritz Grobba with assistants to Baghdad, and the reestablishment of German-Iraqi relations. In terms of needed military assistance, the Iraqi government asked specifically for air support to prevent further landing of British reinforcements in Basra in southern Iraq, not far from the northern tip of the Persian Gulf. German air support was also needed to clear the British from Iraqi airfields. The same urgent requests for immediate German diplomatic, financial, and military assistance were made by Iraqi officials via the German embassy in Teheran.<sup>105</sup> Perhaps the most realistic and sobering assessment of the situation in Iraq and the possible repercussions for the German war effort came from the German embassy in Ankara during those early days in May 1941.<sup>106</sup> Hans Kroll, the First Counselor in the German embassy in Ankara, held meetings attended by the Iraqi ambassador and Turkish officials to discuss the situation in Iraq. Kroll noted the pessimism of the Iraqi ambassador who expressed fears that for military and domestic political reasons, and because German assistance had not yet arrived in the needed quantities, Iraq would not be able to hold out against the British. Kroll observed that the Iraqis underestimated the organizational and transport difficulties of providing the necessary assistance. He also reported that Turkey was uneasy about the conflict in Iraq, expressed its preference for an end to hostilities, and offered to mediate a diplomatic solution. Kroll also pointed to the importance of prestige in the eyes of the Arab people in the context of the conflict in Iraq.

<sup>103</sup> Mallmann and Cüppers, *Halbmond und Hakenkreuz*, 91–93.

<sup>104</sup> PA: R29619, Büro des St.S., Irak, Bd. 1, DB/Ankara an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 487, Ganz besonders dringend, 2. Mai 1941.

<sup>105</sup> PA: R29619, Büro des St.S., Irak, Bd. 1, DG/Teheran an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 328, 4. Mai 1941; and Telegramm Nr. 336, 5. Mai 1941.

<sup>106</sup> PA: R29619, Büro des St.S., Irak, Bd. 1, DB/Ankara an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 504, 6. Mai 1941.

From Rome as well, the German embassy sent similarly worrisome reports based on information sent by the Italian embassy in Baghdad to the Italian Foreign Ministry.<sup>107</sup> Iraqi morale was reported as low due to falling confidence in the Iraqi military in the face of growing British military power in Iraq, and little if any visible support from the Axis powers. Indeed, on May 1, at the start of the fighting between British and Iraqi forces, the German High Command (OKH) had issued a very negative report on the military strength and preparedness of the Iraqi army, even with the modest military support it had already received from Italy and Germany, and warned: “However, without foreign support, primarily weapons and munitions as well as financial means, Iraqi resistance will soon suffer defeat.”<sup>108</sup>

It was clear even before the middle of May that Vichy-controlled Syria would have to be the primary route for German military assistance to reach Iraq. The Foreign Office in Berlin also pressured the Vichy government to allow the immediate transfer to Iraq of French military equipment stored in Syria.<sup>109</sup> On May 8, German Ambassador Abetz informed the Iraqi ambassador to Vichy France that, in spite of technical difficulties, the first German air transports would likely begin their journey to Iraq the following day, and that the delivery of weapons would soon follow.<sup>110</sup> On May 9, several German fighter aircraft accompanying Grobba on his way to Baghdad did indeed land in Aleppo, Syria. Abetz mentioned in his note that he did not tell the Iraqi ambassador about the recent agreement, known as the Paris Protocols, which had just been concluded between Germany and Vichy France regarding, among other things, the shipment of German arms to Iraq via Syria. By May 5, the Vichy government had agreed in principle to turn over to Iraq French arms stored in Syria since the cease-fire agreement in June of the previous year, and to permit German aircraft to use Syrian airfields on their way from Europe to Iraq. On May 6, orders from Vichy went out to the French High Commissioner in Syria, General Dentz, to permit German aircraft to land in Syria. These operations were to be kept secret from the British which, of course, would prove to be an impossible task. Further discussions took place at a meeting between Vichy Vice-Premier Admiral Darlan, Hitler, and von Ribbentrop at Berchtesgaden on May 11 and 12, which led to the Paris Protocols of May 23.

The Paris Protocols considered a number of areas for broadening French-German collaboration, in part within the context of the situation in Iraq.

<sup>107</sup> PA: R29619, Büro des St.S., Irak, Bd. 1, DB/Rom an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 1059, 9. Mai 1941.

<sup>108</sup> BA-MA: R2-1767, Oberkommando des Heeres, Generalstab des Heeres, Nr. 1714/41 geh., “Vorläufige kurze Orientierung über den Irak,” 1. Mai 1941.

<sup>109</sup> PA: R29619, Büro des St.S., Irak, Bd. 1, U.St.S. Pol.Nr. 366, Woermann an RAM, St.S., Botschafter Ritter, 3. Mai 1941.

<sup>110</sup> PA: R29619, Büro des St.S., Irak, Bd. 1, DB/Paris an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 1430, 9. Mai 1941.

The Protocols reiterated Vichy France's agreement to send to Iraq war materials stored in Syria, and to allow the landing and refueling of German and Italian aircraft in Syria and Axis use of Syrian ports, roads, and railways for shipments to Iraq. The agreement also provided for the training in Syria of Iraqi soldiers with French arms, the sharing of French intelligence with the OKW, and the joint defense of Syria and Lebanon in the event of a British attack. In return, the Axis agreed to the rearming of French forces in Syria beyond the limits imposed by the cease-fire agreement.<sup>111</sup> The British, of course, very quickly learned of Germany's use of Syria as a transit route to Iraq for Axis officials and arms assistance. This set the stage the following month for the British and Free French invasion and occupation of Syria and Lebanon, the same month that the German invasion of the Soviet Union commenced.

It would appear to be self-defeating for the Vichy government to do anything that might help an independent Arab nationalist regime in neighboring Iraq, especially one that was playing host in Baghdad to the more pan-Arab nationalism of the exiled Mufti of Jerusalem. Vichy France was determined to maintain the French empire; a victorious and truly independent Iraq, along with a strengthened pan-Arab movement under the Mufti operating out of Iraq, would be an obvious threat to continued French control over Syria and Lebanon. Nevertheless, nothing in Axis policy in Iraq in 1940 and 1941 indicated any degree of support for a greater Arab union or state in the Fertile Crescent. As indicated earlier, both the Italians and the Germans had refused to formally and unequivocally commit to Arab independence and unity anywhere in the Middle East by June 1941. Moreover, Germany had clearly recognized its own interest in supporting the continuation of French colonial rule in Syria, Lebanon, and North Africa, and remained the only great power supporter of the Vichy regime and its determination to retain the French overseas empire more or less intact. Finally, German support for Vichy rule in Syria and Lebanon was clear in late 1940 and through the first half of 1941 when Berlin began to assert a somewhat stronger voice in the formulation of Axis policy in the Fertile Crescent, specifically in Iraq and Syria. Any apparent contradictions between that support and German recognition of Italian imperial ambitions in the Mediterranean region, and more frequent but consistently vague and non-committal statements about the common interests of Germany, the Axis, and the Arab people in the Middle East, could be overlooked so long as the war continued and Britain remained undefeated.

At the end of 1940, as part of a somewhat more assertive role in Axis policy in the Middle East following Italy's recent collapse in Egypt and Libya, the German Foreign Office sought a greater role in the International Armistice Commission in Syria that was dominated by thirty-eight Italian military officers

<sup>111</sup> See Hirszowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, 159–161; and Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 99–100.

and a support staff of twenty civilians. In the fall of 1940, Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop instructed Werner-Otto von Hentig, the former head of its Near East Department (Abteilung VII), to travel to Syria with a stop in Turkey. His function would be to assess the situation in Syria and Lebanon, including the threats posed by the British and the Gaullists to continued Vichy control. In conveying the foreign minister's instructions to von Hentig, State Secretary von Weizsäcker cautioned him that he was expected "...to learn about the situation in Turkey and in Syria, without becoming actively involved."<sup>112</sup>

In January and February 1941, von Hentig visited Syria where he met with leaders and other individuals from Arab and pan-Arab nationalist groups, activities that were not appreciated by the Vichy authorities. Much of the ground work in establishing contacts with Syrian and Lebanese Arab leaders had been done by Rudolf Roser, a member of the Abwehr who had been sent to Beirut in the late summer of 1940 as a German member of the Armistice Commission.<sup>113</sup> Needless to say, German activities in Syria and Lebanon only heightened French concerns, particularly as von Hentig pushed French High Commissioner General Dentz to restore some of the self-governing authority that the Arabs had possessed before the war. In late February, and again in early April 1941, after he had returned to Berlin, von Hentig wrote reports summarizing the strategy he pursued during his mission in Lebanon and Syria. He noted that he had tried to rally Syrian and Lebanese Arabs to support the Vichy administration as the best defense against the British and Gaullist threat, and as the best guarantee for their future independence.<sup>114</sup> He also suggested the creation of a formal German representation in Syria and Lebanon, and concluded that General Dentz had come to accept his approach toward the Arabs. In a follow-up note in early April, von Hentig further observed that while French authorities in Syria had come to see the wisdom of some of his suggestions, the Italians firmly opposed any degree of autonomy for the Arabs: "This is natural, for an independent Syria is incompatible with their firmly-held hopes to establish themselves in the country."<sup>115</sup> Although von Hentig argued

<sup>112</sup> See IfZ: Nachlaß Werner-Otto von Hentig, ED 113/26, Weizsäcker/Berlin an von Hentig (im Amt), Pers. H 14307, 23. Oktober 1940. See also Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 95–98.

<sup>113</sup> Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 92.

<sup>114</sup> See NARA: T-120, Roll 735/351282, "Syrische Reise," Berlin, 2. April 1941. It is not clear for whom Hentig's early April report was intended. See also IfZ: Nachlaß Werner-Otto von Hentig, ED 113/26 & 34, "Groß-Arabien und die Lage in Syrien," 26. Februar 1941; Von Hentig, *Mein Leben*, 337 ff; and Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 98.

<sup>115</sup> NARA: T-120, Roll 735/351280-281, "Syrische Reise," Berlin, 4. April 1941. For yet another report on von Hentig's trip to Syria, see IfZ: Nachlaß Werner-Otto von Hentig, "Reise durch Syrien Januar 1941," Persönliches zum Sachlichen des amtlichen Berichts. Autofahrt mit George Malouf, Kawas Schoffoer und Herrn Roser von der Waffenstillstandskommission, n.d. In this undated report, von Hentig informs his superiors in Berlin that there are significant opportunities for the Axis in Syria and Lebanon, and that Italian colonial ambitions must be rejected.

that the German position must be made clear to the Italians, Under State Secretary Woermann was reluctant to confront the Italians on this issue so soon after their defeats in North Africa. In other words, the Foreign Office in Berlin was not ready to accept von Hentig's suggestion that Germany make a less ambiguous public commitment to Arab independence in Syria and Lebanon, and perhaps beyond, in exchange for short-term Arab support for the Vichy regime and the Axis powers for the duration of the war.

This by no means put to rest the matter of Syria and Lebanon in Germany's wartime Middle East policy, for von Hentig's early April report on Syria coincided with al-Gaylani's coup in Iraq. If Berlin's attention shifted somewhat eastward to Iraq beginning in early April, Syria and Germany's complex relationships with Vichy France, Italy, and Syrian Arab nationalists remained central to the deliberations of German policy makers due primarily to Syria's geography. Britain's growing military strength in and near Iraq to the east and in Palestine to the south, particularly in light of Axis hopes in North Africa with the arrival of Rommel and the Afrika-Korps, cast Iraq and its new regime in a considerably more important light in Axis military and political calculations. Again, Syria would have to play a pivotal role since Syria was the only feasible route through which significant Axis military support might reach Iraq. Although desirous of remaining neutral in the war, the government in Vichy nevertheless submitted to German pressure to allow passage of German equipment and personnel through Syria to Iraq. From the German embassy in France, Rudolf Rahn and several colleagues arrived in Syria on May 10, 1941 with the task of overseeing the movement of aid through Syria to Iraq.

Not surprisingly, it was not possible to keep the movement of German aircraft and supplies to Iraq via Syria a secret from the British. Indeed, the British government quickly learned about the very first flights of German aircraft through Syria on May 10, and immediately confronted the Vichy government with the possibility of a conflict with British forces to the south and west. From Beirut, Rahn reported to Berlin on May 12 that the British Consul-General inquired with General Dentz about the landing of several German aircraft in Syria, to which Dentz responded with an evasive answer.<sup>116</sup> Rahn also reached an agreement with Dentz for the transfer of significant stores of French weapons and munitions in Syria to al-Gaylani's forces in Iraq for use against the British.<sup>117</sup> Moreover, Rahn reported that Dentz put Syria on a state of alert and concentrated troops on the southern border with British-controlled Palestine. He also observed that while he thought French forces would resist any British attack, he doubted that they would cooperate with the German Luftwaffe. In an earlier telegram that same day, Rahn had described the misgivings expressed by French authorities in Damascus over the arrival of

<sup>116</sup> PA: R29619, Büro des St.S., Irak, Bd. 1, Rahn an AA/Berlin, Telegramm (Geh.Ch.V.) ohne Nummer, (Ankunft 17.20 Uhr), 12. Mai 1941.

<sup>117</sup> See Rahn, *Ruheloses Leben*, 154–157.



PHOTO 5.5. Rudolph Rahn (no date).  
Courtesy Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts Berlin.

German aircraft and their tendency to linger on the ground pending further instructions for their continuation to Iraq.<sup>118</sup> Rahn reported that, fearing an English attack, Dentz protested the situation to the Germans, complained that the fuel consumption of the German planes was excessive, and threatened to withhold fuel in the future. Indeed, the situation only seemed to become more problematic as the days passed. A few days later, he reported that during a trip to Iraq he was able to arrange for the shipment of needed Iraqi food and fuel supplies for Syria, but that relations between Dentz and Rahn's staff and German officers in Syria remained tense. Rahn noted: "His concern above all was directed against connections between German army personnel and Arab agitation."<sup>119</sup>

<sup>118</sup> PA: R29619, Büro des St.S., Irak, Bd. 1, Rahn an AA/Berlin, Telegramm (Geh.Ch.V.) ohne Nummer, (Ankunft 16.40 Uhr), 12. Mai 1941.

<sup>119</sup> PA: R29619, Büro des St.S., Irak, Bd. 1, Rahn an AA/Berlin, Telegramm (Geh.Ch.V.) Nr. 16, 15. Mai 1941. That same day from Baghdad, Grobba expressed concern after having met Rahn that needed and expected arms were not arriving from Syria, and that friction between German military representatives and French officials in Syria continued to exist. See PA: R29619, Büro des St.S., Irak, Bd. 1, Gehrcke/Bagdad an AA/Berlin, Telegramm (Geh.Ch.V.) Nr. 22, 15. Mai 1941.

On May 16, with minimal German assistance having entered Iraq via Syria in the less than a week since it started, the Foreign Office in Berlin drew up a summary of Germany's current and future military support for Iraq.<sup>120</sup> The memorandum cited a series of discussions that had taken place between the German Foreign Office and the OKW with the purpose of introducing a skeptical military establishment to the political necessities and possibilities of operations in Iraq. This effort apparently had involved communications between von Ribbentrop and Hermann Göring. The report stressed the burden born by the Luftwaffe to date in transporting materials to Iraq via Syria, in the absence of a more desirable land route through Turkey. It pointed mainly to Luftwaffe actions in Iraq, as well as plans to bring in German weapons specialists to help train Iraqi troops and some general staff officers. Finally, the report mentioned plans to move a German merchant ship currently docked in Iran into the Shatt al-Arab, the waterway from the northern tip of the Persian Gulf to the southern Iraqi port city of Basrah, and to sink it there in hopes of disrupting Britain's ability to supply its troops in Iraq. In sum, the volume of military assistance was not particularly significant, due in part to the limits of air transport via Syria, and reflecting the German assumption that the Iraqi army would have to bear the brunt of the fighting. With Operation Barbarossa set to begin in a month and efforts to strengthen Rommel's Afrika-Korps under way, it is not surprising that Hitler had relatively few human and material resources to spare for Iraq.

Between May 20 and 24, discussions took place in the German embassy in Paris between German and Vichy French officials, among them the German General Walter Warlimont. At issue was Germany's request to the Vichy government for support for Germany's efforts against Britain in Iraq, North Africa and, in the long term, in West and Equatorial Africa. Agreements were reached regarding Iraq/Syria and North Africa, while the third area was put off until the following week. In reporting the results of the Paris meetings to Berlin, German Ambassador Abetz referred to preliminary agreements with Admiral Darlan that had set the stage for the final agreement of May 24.<sup>121</sup> The May 24 agreement came one day after Hitler's Directive No. 30 formally authorizing Germany's military commitment to an anticipated Iraqi defeat of Great Britain. With regard to Iraq and Syria, the Vichy government agreed to: sell to Iraq three-quarters of the stocks of French war materials still in Syria; allow German and Italian aircraft landing rights in Syria as well as refueling capabilities, and the German Luftwaffe use of an airport north of Aleppo; allow German use of Syrian harbors, roads, and rail lines for the transfer of war materials to Iraq; train Iraqi soldiers on Syrian soil in the use of French weapons; transfer to

<sup>120</sup> PA: R29619, Büro des St.S., Irak, Bd. 1, Aufzeichnung LR Kramarz Betr.: Stand der militärischen Unterstützung für den Irak, Pol. I: 1352, 16. Mai 1941.

<sup>121</sup> PA: R29619, Büro des St.S., Irak, Bd. 1, DB/Paris an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 1577 (vom 23.5.), 24. Mai 1941.



Germany French intelligence information regarding British forces and military moves; and finally to agree to further German requests for support for the war effort in Iraq. Similar kinds of French logistical support for Axis operations in North Africa were also part of the agreement. In return, Germany committed itself, pending the agreement of Italy, to revise the military provisions of the armistice agreements of the summer of 1940 in ways that would strengthen France militarily. Details of any such revisions were not included in the report. Finally, Abetz indicated that the subject of open French support for the Axis, which would likely entail formal French entry into the war against Britain and possibly America, was not part of the discussion.

Notwithstanding this apparent agreement between the Axis powers and Vichy France for “secret” cooperation against Britain in the Fertile Crescent and North Africa, it was merely a matter of days before military realities on the ground made it, along with Hitler’s Directive No. 30, irrelevant. On May 29, Grobba sent a desperate telegram from Baghdad describing Britain’s military assault on the Iraqi capital.<sup>122</sup> He described the rapid departure of Germans from Baghdad and of German military officials on planes from Mosul in northern Iraq. He also relayed al-Gaylani’s desperate appeals, albeit in vain, for massive German Luftwaffe support in the defense of Baghdad, and argued that at a minimum the city of Mosul must be defended if there was to be any hope for the Axis in the Fertile Crescent. That same day, Rahn reported from Syria that General Dentz refused to agree to allow German military officials in Syria to appear in uniform in public. Dentz feared that the public exposure of Franco-German military cooperation would be a further inducement for the British to attack Syria and Lebanon.<sup>123</sup> Pleading for instructions from Berlin, Rahn warned that the situation in Syria was beginning to unravel: “I fear. . . serious danger for our only resupply line and weakening of position and loyalty of the High Commissioner.”<sup>124</sup>

From Rome, the German embassy conveyed to Berlin information from the Italian embassy in Baghdad via the Rome Foreign Ministry that painted an even bleaker picture for the Germans and their belated and inadequate efforts in Syria and Iraq in 1941. The Italian ambassador reported on May 28 that al-Gaylani was extremely bitter toward the Axis powers as Britain stood poised to take complete control of Iraq. The Iraqi prime minister pointed to the failure of Germany and Italy to deliver anything close to the level of assistance

<sup>122</sup> PA: R29619, Büro des St.S., Irak, Bd. 1, Gehrcke/Bagdad an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 151 (Verschlußsache), 29. Mai 1941.

<sup>123</sup> Ribbentrop supported Dentz’s instructions two days later with an order to Rahn in Syria that Luftwaffe aircraft in Syria were to initiate no military action against the British, and that German officers in Syria and Lebanon were not to be seen in uniform in public. See PA: R29764, Büro des St.S., Syrien, Bd. 1, Ribbentrop an Rahn, Auf Nr. 91, 31. Mai 1941.

<sup>124</sup> PA: R29619, Büro des St.S., Irak, Bd. 1, Rahn an Ribbentrop, Telegramm Nr. 71, 31. Mai 1941.



they had promised, and that what they did deliver was too late and too little to make a difference. The Italian ambassador described his conversation with al-Gaylani as follows: “Gaylani appeared to be very bitter. . . In his view German help has been rushed and sparing, and he is beginning to fear that Iraq may be viewed as Germany’s unassuming toy that it does not want to seriously play. He also told me that he had expected much more from Italy.”<sup>125</sup> Prime Minister al-Gaylani also stated that the French weapons from Syria had not been terribly useful and they had arrived too late. In general, he complained that Iraqi troops essentially had to fight a defensive war against the British due to a lack of suitable weapons, a defensive effort that British forces easily overcame.

On May 31, al-Gaylani’s forces surrendered and his coup in Iraq was finished.<sup>126</sup> From Paris the following day, the German embassy reported that the Vichy government was already bracing for a likely British attack on Syria and Lebanon, and requesting that German planes and personnel fleeing Iraq via Syria not linger in the French Mandates.<sup>127</sup> Moreover, both the Vichy and German governments went to great lengths to deny the presence of significant numbers of German troops and other personnel in Syria.<sup>128</sup> In any case, British troops and the Free French forces invaded Syria and Lebanon on June 8 and ultimately defeated General Dentz and his forces after several weeks of fighting. As French forces in Syria initially tried to resist the British attack, the Vichy regime let Berlin know that they would appreciate logistical support from the Germans, and even recommended German air attacks against Haifa in Palestine, but that they did not want German troops to enter Syria to resist the British invasion.<sup>129</sup> When Germany offered to mount air attacks on British ships in Syrian coastal waters, the French responded that while such attacks might be needed in the future, such German intervention at that time could be counterproductive by provoking automatic British attacks against Morocco

<sup>125</sup> PA: R29619, Büro des St.S., Irak, Bd. 1, DB/Rom an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 1260 (Im Anschluss an Nr. 1227 vom 27.5.), 31. Mai 1941. In his May 31 diary entry, Joseph Goebbels seemed to confirm Germany’s less than total commitment in Iraq when he wrote: “In Iraq the situation is not very good. . . Yet, we are not responding to it at the moment.” See Frölich, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, Teil I, Bd. 9, 31. Mai 1941.

<sup>126</sup> The collapse of al-Gaylani’s government and his flight from Baghdad prompted elements of the population and al-Gaylani’s security forces to take revenge on the city’s Jewish community. Known as the *Farhud*, almost 200 Baghdad Jews were murdered, and there was considerable looting and destruction of Jewish property in Baghdad. After two days, British and Iraqi forces intervened to stop the violence. See Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 103–106.

<sup>127</sup> PA: R29764, Büro des St.S., Syrien, Bd. 1, DB/Paris an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 1690, 1. Juni 1941.

<sup>128</sup> See for example von Ribbentrop’s note to the German embassy in Ankara in PA: R29764, Büro des St.S., Syrien, Bd. 1, Ribbentrop an DB/Ankara, Telegramm Nr. 535, 11. Juni 1941.

<sup>129</sup> PA: R29764, Büro des St.S., Syrien, Bd. 1, DB/Paris an AA/Berlin, für Reichsausienminister, Telegramm Nr. 1761, 11. Juni 1941.

and French northwest Africa.<sup>130</sup> As the situation was rapidly deteriorating for French forces in Syria, Rudolf Rahn advised Berlin on June 20 to suggest to the Vichy government that collaboration with Arab nationalist groups, Palestinians, Kurds, and Druse might improve chances of holding out against the British.<sup>131</sup> However, in view of Vichy's clear determination to hold on to the French colonial empire, this was not likely to happen.

On July 11, von Ribbentrop informed Woermann that the Vichy government had accepted a British offer to General Dentz in Syria, through the American Consulate-General in Beirut, for a cease-fire in Syria and Lebanon.<sup>132</sup> He also noted that while the Reich had advised Vichy not to accept the offer, it was up to the French to decide how they wanted to proceed. The Vichy government accepted the British offer nevertheless, and terms of the cease-fire amounted to a French surrender of control over Syria and Lebanon. British troops were to occupy Syria and Lebanon, and all ports, airports, and aircraft, communications installations, etc. would come under British control.<sup>133</sup> Thus, German and Italian efforts in Syria and Iraq in the spring and early summer of 1941 were crushed. They had amounted to too little, too late, as Axis strategy and aims in the Arab states west of the Suez Canal, never clear to begin with, collapsed. In Paris in early May, as the al-Gaylani government in Iraq was about to fall, German Ambassador Abetz told Rahn: "The situation looks bad. We encouraged the Arabs to resist the English invasion, without understanding that such a resistance was only feasible with our help."<sup>134</sup> Italy ceased to be a factor in the Mediterranean region as a whole, and specifically in the Arab lands along the eastern and even the southern Mediterranean rim, in spite of Rommel's temporary victories in Libya and Egypt in late 1941 and 1942. Moreover, already on May 16, Italian forces had been forced to surrender in Ethiopia. All that was left of the Axis position in Africa and in the Arabic-speaking world was Rommel's military campaign in Libya and Egypt. Germany alone, and not Italy, would from June 1941 on be the determining factor in Axis policy; and June 1941 was the month that Hitler launched the invasion of the Soviet Union.

Following the British victories in Iraq and Syria in May and June 1941, German Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop, in a July 20 telegram to various

<sup>130</sup> PA: R29764, Büro des St.S., Syrien, Bd. 1, DB/Paris an AA/Berlin, für Botschafter Ritter, Telegramm Nr. 1789, 16. Juni 1941.

<sup>131</sup> PA: R29764, Büro des St.S., Syrien, Bd. 1, DB/Paris an AA/Berlin, für Botschafter Ritter, Telegramm Nr. 156, 20. Juni 1941.

<sup>132</sup> PA: R29764, Büro des St.S., Syrien, Bd. 1, Ribbentrop an Woermann, Telegramm Nr. 643, 11. Juli 1941.

<sup>133</sup> PA: R29764, Büro des St.S., Syrien, Bd. 1, Welck/Wiesbaden an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 211, 14. Juli 1941. This telegram from the German Armistice Commission in Wiesbaden amounts to a comprehensive list of the provisions in the armistice agreement regarding Syria and Lebanon.

<sup>134</sup> Rahn, *Ruheloses Leben*, 152.

state and party agencies, suggested a slight adjustment in German policy toward the Arabs. He observed that Germany had previously been prevented from unequivocally supporting Arab independence due to Vichy determination to maintain France's control over all of its colonies, and Hitler's decision to curry favor with the French by avoiding the imposition of harsh peace terms.<sup>135</sup> He further stated that with the recent British occupation of Syria, that argument had been significantly weakened, and he advised the recipients of his telegram as follows: "I request, therefore, that in future propaganda matters with regard to the Arab question, we support the wish of the Arabs to achieve unlimited freedom."<sup>136</sup> He also called for Italian cooperation in this effort. Of course, general public statements in German propaganda broadcasts in support of "unlimited freedom" (*uneingeschränkte Freiheit*) did not necessarily mean that Germany in fact had committed itself to real Arab sovereignty and independence from foreign rule. Nor were Rahn's suggestions in a meeting with Syrian nationalist leaders in Beirut in early May that the French Mandates in Syria and Lebanon would end after the war necessarily meaningful.<sup>137</sup> It is possible that given the significance of the inherent contradictions between Arab independence and Italian ambitions in the region, von Ribbentrop's suggestion on July 20 implied a possible change in the Reich's approach to Axis cooperation and policy in the Middle East. Nevertheless, German support for al-Gaylani in Iraq did not constitute support for the idea that all Arab states deserved independence, especially given the fact that al-Gaylani's government never sought more than the independence of Iraq alone. Moreover, German support for Vichy France in Syria and Lebanon, as such purely out of wartime military necessity, was in opposition to obvious Arab nationalist interests and independence in any form. The true test of Nazi Germany's stance on the national self-determination and independence of all Arabs would come in its relationship with the Mufti of Jerusalem and his followers, as well as with al-Gaylani, after they fled from Iraq during the latter's defeat by the British in May 1941, and eventually made their way to Berlin by the fall of that year.

<sup>135</sup> PA: Büro des St.S., R29539, Arabien, Bd. I, Ribbentrop Telegramm Nr. 684, 20. Juli 1941.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>137</sup> See Rahn, *Ruheloses Leben*, 160.

## The Axis and Arab Independence, 1941–1942

### ARAB LEADERS IN WARTIME BERLIN

In some of the recent literature on the Third Reich and the Arab world, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Amin al-Husayni is portrayed as an Arab equivalent to Hitler or to other top Nazi party officials. He sometimes appears as the spokesperson for a singular Arab world in North Africa and the Middle East during the Second World War, a role he in fact never tired of claiming for himself. Some of the recent literature also implies that al-Husayni's hatred of Jews was a reflection of a historically and deeply rooted, cultural and political anti-Semitism among the Islamic-Arab population. Of course, his embrace of Nazi Germany, its leadership and policies, in particular with regard to the Jews before and during the Second World War, is certainly well documented and undeniable.<sup>1</sup> That he did come to understand, accept, and support the Nazi genocide against the Jews in Europe is clear, even if in reality he did not speak for all Arabs. His own particular views and aims were not necessarily a reflection of a uniform, monolithic Arab nationalism, which given its many variations and movements then and now, did not exist.<sup>2</sup> It should also be remembered that al-Husayni was one of the relatively few primary contacts that Hitler's government was able to establish with Arab notables and leaders

<sup>1</sup> See most recently Rubin and Schwanitz, *Nazis, Islamists*.

<sup>2</sup> Again, see the growing body of scholarly literature from the past decade or so by scholars in the field of modern Middle Eastern history on the topic of the Arabs and National Socialism, referred to in the Introduction, among them: Stefan Wild (ed.), *Die Welt des Islams*, Special Theme Issue: "Islamofascism"? 52 (2012); Achcar, *The Arabs and the Holocaust*; Litvak and Webman, *From Empathy to Denial*; Gershoni and Nordbruch, *Sympathie und Schrecken*; Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*; and Höpp, Wien, and Wildangel (eds.), *Blind für die Geschichte?*. See also the essays in the special edition of *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 37 (2011). See also most recently Rubin and Schwanitz, *Nazis, Islamists*, 175ff.

and with Arab nationalism in general during the war years. This was possible, moreover, because the Mufti and a few other Arab leaders were able to escape the Middle East and to live in Berlin as exiles for much of the war, while most of the Arab world remained outside of Axis control and influence. For the purposes of this study, the Mufti and other Arab exiles in Berlin together constitute a useful lens into the vicissitudes and ultimate intent of German Middle East policy during the Second World War. However, they are perhaps somewhat less so in any effort to fully understand the larger complexities of Arab attitudes toward Hitler, National Socialism, and the Holocaust.

As stated in the Introduction, this study does not attempt to offer an analysis of, and general conclusions about, the reception of National Socialism and its policies among the Arab populations of the Middle East and North Africa before and during the Second World War. It does, however, consider the attitudes and activities of Amin al-Husayni and the few other Arabs during their exile in Berlin and Rome in some detail, particularly between the fall of 1941 and the end of the war. Because of their exile in Berlin and in Rome during the war years, from late 1941 to 1945, there exists a substantial documentary record in German and other European languages that provides insight, particularly into the Mufti's views and activities. More important for this study, the relationship between those Arab exiles and their host governments in Berlin and Rome sheds considerable light on the real intent and policies of the German government during those years. Therefore, this chapter will address the wartime relationship of the two most important Arab personalities living in exile in Berlin and Rome, Amin al-Husayni, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, and Rashid Ali al-Gaylani, the Iraqi nationalist and leader of the short-lived coup in Baghdad in April 1941, with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. This relationship will be examined within the important context of al-Husayni and al-Gaylani's activities in Berlin and Rome beginning in November 1941. From the perspective of specifically German interests and aims in the Middle East from January 1933, through their arrival in Rome and Berlin in the fall of 1941, to their increasing isolation and eventual irrelevance in Nazi policy following the collapse of the Axis in North Africa in 1943, al-Husayni and al-Gaylani remained figures whose usefulness and role in German Middle East policy was strictly controlled, limited, usually uncertain, and relatively brief.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, among the relatively small group of Arab exiles living and operating in Berlin and Rome during the war, Nazi authorities would quickly learn that political and cultural outlooks and goals even among this relative handful of Arabs were varied, and anything but homogenous.

The German Foreign Office in Berlin was the state agency in charge of overseeing al-Husayni, al-Gaylani, and other Arabs in exile in wartime Berlin.

<sup>3</sup> See for example Peter Wien, "Arabs and Fascism: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives," in *Die Welt des Islams* (Special Theme Issue on 'Islamofascism'), 52 (2012): 332–333.

The records of the Foreign Office in Berlin clearly demonstrate its operational assumption that the exiled Arab community was at a minimum divided into two distinct political groups, each under the control of its own leader. In April 1942, for example, the diplomat Erich von Granow, at the time stationed at the German embassy in Rome, sent to the Foreign Office in Berlin a list with brief biographical sketches that he had composed of individual Arabs living in both Berlin and Rome who were working with either the Mufti or with al-Gaylani. He described the two groups as living and working separately from each other: “The clearly visible division of the Arabs in Berlin into two camps, the one around the Grand Mufti and the other around Rashid Ali, is even more pronounced in Rome. . . .”<sup>4</sup> Von Granow also describes important professional, generational, ideological, and cultural differences between the two groups, differences that reflected not only those between the two leaders themselves, but also the considerable diversity of the larger Arab world. Most of all, he contrasted the more secular and western inclinations of al-Gaylani and the generally older people around him with the more Islamic and pan-Arab tendencies of the Mufti and a somewhat younger group of people in his camp. Indeed, the German embassy in Rome had responded a week before to complaints from the Mufti about Arab comments in Berlin that were critical of the Mufti and his positions, criticism that was allegedly supported by Fritz Grobba in the German Foreign Office. Von Granow’s response from Rome reflects some of the frustrations among German officials with the differences in Arab opinion and objectives that were prevalent just in Berlin and Rome: “I didn’t let these remarks go unanswered, and replied right away that ambassador Dr. Grobba along with all German civil servants involved in this matter were driven by purely objective motives to achieve a fair balance between the often conflicting views and wishes of the Arabs.”<sup>5</sup>

Muhammad Amin al-Husayni, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, was clearly the more well-known and infamous of the two main Arab leaders living in exile in Berlin and Rome during the war. He was born into an influential and wealthy land-owning family from Jerusalem in 1895. By the nineteenth century, members of the al-Husayni family had become prominent religious leaders, jurists, and educators active in Ottoman and local Palestinian government. Following the First World War, al-Husayni championed pan-Arab nationalism and independence, and was an ardent opponent of the two central elements of the postwar settlement in the Middle East, namely, the Anglo-French Mandates in the Fertile Crescent and the Jewish National Home in the Palestine Mandate. Indeed, he had spoken out against Jewish immigration and settlement in

<sup>4</sup> Zentrum Moderner Orient/Berlin (hereafter ZMO): Nachlaß Höpp, 1.27, Gesandtschaftsrat Dr. Granow (Rom) an das AA/Berlin, “Arabische Mitarbeiter Raschid Ali el-Gailanis und des Grossmuftis,” 14. April 1942.

<sup>5</sup> ZMO: Nachlaß Höpp, 1.27, Gesandtschaftsrat Dr. Granow (ROM) an das AA/Berlin, “Beschwerde des Grossmuftis über des arabischen Rundfunksprecher Yunis Bahri,” 8. April 1942.

Palestine even before 1914. A devout Muslim who did not separate religion from politics, al-Husayni initially favored an Arab state that would join Palestine and Syria upon the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918; but postwar Anglo-French determination to control the Fertile Crescent, as well as the implementation of the 1917 Balfour Declaration's promise of a Jewish National Home in Palestine, frustrated his hopes. Mindful of British power, he chose initially to focus his political activities on opposing Zionist efforts in Palestine rather than on immediate resistance to British rule.<sup>6</sup> He helped organize demonstrations in early 1920 throughout the Palestine Mandate against the Jewish National Home. When these demonstrations turned violent and the British sought to arrest him, he fled first to Damascus and then to Transjordan. Herbert Samuel, the first British High Commissioner in the new Palestine Mandate, and a determined advocate of an accommodation between Jews and Arabs there, granted al-Husayni a pardon and allowed him to return to Palestine. In April 1921, al-Husayni succeeded to the position of Grand Mufti of Jerusalem.

Disputes over the control of religious sites in Jerusalem led to Arab violence that soon engulfed Palestine in 1928–1929. This violence was soon followed by the Arab revolt and general strike that broke out in April 1936 and lasted until the summer of 1939. Between his elevation to the office of Mufti in 1921 and the outbreak of the Arab revolt in 1936, al-Husayni had actually discouraged violence and sought cooperation with British authorities in hopes of derailing Zionist efforts to build up the Jewish National Home. He also tried to use his religious authority to promote the Palestinian national cause and, in particular, his own political position in the larger Arab world. Although he was not directly involved in the outbreak of the Arab general strike and revolt in Palestine in April 1936, the Mufti soon came to support violence against Britain and, particularly, against the Jews in the wake of Britain's efforts to suppress the revolt. He denounced the Royal (Peel) Commission's July 1937 plan to partition Palestine into nominally independent Arab and Jewish states. As the violence in Palestine intensified after publication of the partition plan, and fearing arrest by the British authorities, al-Husayni fled to Lebanon in October 1937, from which he tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to continue leading the revolt. Like the Zionist movement, but obviously for very different reasons, he rejected Britain's May 1939 White Paper that would have guaranteed a permanent two-thirds Arab majority in a future, independent Palestinian state. The outbreak of war in Europe in September forced him to leave Lebanon for Iraq, which had gained nominal independence in 1930 when Britain formally ended its Iraq Mandate and direct control. Rapid German victories in Europe in 1939 and 1940 led al-Husayni to conclude that an Axis victory over Britain and France was imminent and the likely key to finally ending both British

<sup>6</sup> See Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem*, 33–49.

domination of much of the Arab world and the Jewish National Home in Palestine. From Baghdad he continued to seek Axis diplomatic and material support in 1940 and 1941 for a regional Arab revolt against Britain, as outlined in the previous chapter. He encouraged the Germans to send armed forces to Iraq after al-Gaylani's pro-Axis seizure of power in a Baghdad coup in April 1941. However, al-Gaylani's short-lived coup, crushed by British forces a month later, forced the Mufti to flee to Iran, from which he eventually made his way via Turkey to Italy, and then to Germany, in the fall of that year.

As observed in earlier chapters, the Mufti had established contact with German consular officials in Palestine not long after Hitler's assumption of power in 1933. His sporadic contact with German Consul-Generals Heinrich Wolff and Walter Döhle in Jerusalem between 1933 and his move to Lebanon in 1937 did not yield the public endorsement and material support from Germany that he had hoped to obtain for the Arab cause in Palestine and in the larger Arab world. With regard to Palestine, Nazi policy before the war was based on maintaining the geopolitical status quo in the region and, particularly, on promoting the emigration of Jews from Germany to Palestine. As concluded in the previous chapters, the small amount of German financial support for the Arab revolt that reached Palestine via other Arab states beginning in mid 1938 was meant merely to distract Britain from the crises in central Europe rather than to actually promote Arab independence in Palestine. That support never approached the level he had hoped to receive from Berlin. As previously noted, this support was something about which British officials in Palestine and the Fertile Crescent were aware, but that did not seem particularly worrisome to the British government. Beyond recognizing a recent upswing in German interest and activity in Palestine, the British government, responding to questions in Parliament about German activities in Palestine in December 1938, had concluded: "...we have no direct proof of financial assistance being given to the Arabs from German sources, in the same way as there is no evidence of the supply of arms..."<sup>7</sup> This response in Parliament seemed to recognize German activity in Palestine as part of a general increase in German propaganda throughout the Arab world, as part of Berlin's effort to distract Britain and France from the situation in central Europe. It is difficult to know what role if any al-Husayni played in those German activities in Palestine in 1938 and 1939 from his exile in Beirut, especially since he was living in an area that was still under direct French mandatory rule. But it is certainly clear that prior to the outbreak of war in 1939, the Nazi regime remained firmly committed to the continuation of Jewish emigration from central Europe to Palestine, and had not yet committed itself to altering or otherwise compromising the imperial positions of Britain and France in the Middle East.

<sup>7</sup> NAL: FO371/21871-E7394, HMG answer to question from MP Mander, December 14, 1938.



It has already been observed that the British Colonial Office had concluded in September 1939, shortly after the outbreak of war, that the Mufti was interested in reaching some sort of compromise agreement with Britain over Palestine. One source in the Colonial Office reported on September 30 that, “The Mufti was anxious to reach a settlement with the British government on the basis of Anglo-Arab peace in Palestine. . . .”<sup>8</sup> That same report also noted that the Mufti was not yet tied to Germany, and that, “The Mufti had emphatically explained that he would not support Nazi aggression against the democracies and that he was prepared to make an immediate declaration of loyalty to and support for Great Britain in order to stop the Nazi allegation that the Arabs were sympathetic to Hitler.”<sup>9</sup> Almost two months later, British officials in the Colonial Office reported that the Mufti had recently expressed his suspicion that German interest in Palestine was based more on creating difficulties for the British in the region than on consideration and support for the interests of the Arab people. Citing what it termed as “reliable” intelligence, a November 14, 1939 report by the Eastern Department described a November 7 meeting in Baghdad involving al-Husayni and other Palestinian Arabs at which they further discussed a possible joint Arab appeal to the British for an end to hostilities in Palestine.<sup>10</sup> The report referred to the Mufti’s disillusionment with the Germans, particularly with the realization that German interests in Palestine had been based more on creating difficulties for the British than on any sympathy or support for Arab interests. Regarding al-Husayni, the report noted: “He admitted that until Germany had made an unprovoked attack on Czecho-Slovakia he had believed that German interest in Palestine was genuine; but he had been misled and he regretted it. He now knew that all European Powers were imperialist and he warned his followers against the danger of falling between two stools if they continued to trust Germany.”<sup>11</sup>

Al-Husayni’s influence on events in Palestine and among Arab leaders after the outbreak of war in September 1939 and his move from Beirut to Baghdad the following month was apparently on the wane, according to the Colonial Office in London. In November 1939, it described his loss of prestige among Arab leaders as a result of his failure to reach an agreement with the British over Palestine, his lack of funds, and his new and dependent status in exile in Iraq.<sup>12</sup> He was in an Iraq that was at least nominally independent, a member of the League of Nations, and governed by Iraqi leaders, many of whom shared in varying degrees his aims to end European domination of the region and the Jewish National Home in Palestine. Indeed, the Colonial Office concluded that “. . . the Mufti, it appeared, was less concerned with carrying on the rebellion than with regaining his lost prestige; it was for that reason that shortly

<sup>8</sup> NAL: KV2-2084, Colonial Office, CX/88500, September 30, 1939.      <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> NAL: KV2-2084, Colonial Office, Eastern Department, No. 167, November 14, 1939.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> NAL: KV2-2084, Colonial Office, Eastern Department, No. 161, November 6, 1939

before coming to Iraq he had expressed his anxiety to receive a visit from some highly placed British official, with whom he could discuss the basis of an agreement with the British government.”<sup>13</sup>

Once the war in Europe spread to the Mediterranean and the Arab lands of North Africa and the Middle East following Italy's entry into the war in June 1940, Germany naturally became more directly involved in the politics of Axis-Arab relations. This was inevitable, despite Hitler's ideological and geopolitical focus on Europe and an invasion of the Soviet Union, his conviction that the Mediterranean and the Arab world constituted Italy's natural sphere of interest, and that Berlin should therefore defer to Rome in all Axis policy decisions. Following his apparent failure to make a deal with the British regarding Palestine in the fall of 1939, al-Husayni's efforts to forge a formal alliance of sorts between Nazi Germany and an ill-defined, idealized pan-Arab nationalist movement under his leadership were strictly limited by his dependent status as an exile living in and working from an Iraq that was still very much under British influence. In the end, therefore, his efforts were ineffective. His main ambition with regard to Germany and Italy between the fall of 1939 and his arrival in Rome and Berlin two years later was to secure from Hitler and Mussolini formal public declarations of support for the sovereignty and independence of the Arab people. He failed to achieve this goal, and would continue for the most part to come up empty-handed in this endeavor from his exile in Berlin for the rest of the war. The other point that the Mufti vigorously pursued with the German government between 1940 and the end of 1941 was to convince the Nazi regime that he spoke for all Arabs, and that he alone could mobilize the full weight and power of the Arab world in support of the Axis war effort in North Africa and the Middle East. In the few examples of his written correspondence with German officials from his Baghdad exile in 1940 and 1941, but especially in his considerable correspondence with the German and other European governments after his arrival in Berlin, al-Husayni never tired of reiterating his central leadership role in the Arab world. As he would do so often in his Berlin exile, his New Year's greetings to Reich Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop on January 1, 1942 claimed that he spoke for the all Arabs: “The entire Arab people share my wishes and enter into the struggle on the side of the Axis powers, as therein it sees the guarantee for its freedom and its future.”<sup>14</sup>

Living in exile in Baghdad for the first two years of the war, it is difficult to know the extent of al-Husayni's influence in, or direct communication with, the rest of the Arab world. Britain and France exercised direct control over the mandates in Palestine/Transjordan and Syria/Lebanon respectively, while Britain still retained considerable influence in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq, albeit in different ways, with relatively little difficulty. As for the rest of North

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*     <sup>14</sup> Höpp, *Mufti-Papiere*, 32.

Africa, Germany's real and would-be allies, Italy, Vichy France, and Spain, were governing powers obviously opposed to the Mufti's ambitions of Arab sovereignty and independence. Moreover, as observed in the previous chapter, the Mufti's main links to the Axis powers since the beginning of the war had been through Italy and its embassy in Baghdad or through the Iraqi embassy in Ankara. Iraq had severed relations with Germany when the war in Europe began. This was so even as late as January 1941 when, for example, al-Husayni organized the second trip of his private secretary, Kemal Haddad, to Italy and Germany in search of aid for, and recognition of, Arab independence. Under State Secretary Ernst Woermann described a conversation with Giuseppe Cosmelli of the Italian embassy in Berlin about Italian relations with the Mufti in Baghdad and past and future Italian financial support for al-Husayni in the Iraqi capital and in Palestine. On January 24, Cosmelli reiterated to Woermann his government's opposition to Arab unity and independence in the Fertile Crescent. He also described the Mufti's determination to become the supreme leader of a unified Arab nationalist movement. Cosmelli told Woermann that the Mufti had warned Italian officials in Baghdad not to accept requests for cooperation and support from other Arab sources in the Middle East, or in exile in Europe: "He asked that all such attempts should be rejected and that all communications with the Arab world should be exclusively through him or his secretary Teffik al-Shakir [Kemal Haddad]." <sup>15</sup>

Between May and November 1941, al-Husayni was on the run again, and therefore not in a position to play much of a role in Arab politics and efforts to solicit support from Germany and Italy. <sup>16</sup> On May 29, as the al-Gaylani coup in Baghdad was crushed by the British, al-Husayni was forced to flee Baghdad without his family to Iran where Riza Shah granted him political asylum. However, his position there was by no means secure, especially after the start of Operation Barbarossa on June 22. With the presence of a large number of German technicians and officials in Iran, and the possibility that Iran might have to serve as a conduit for the shipment of supplies from the west to the Soviet Union, the Shah rejected Anglo-Soviet demands that he expel the Germans. British and Soviet forces then crossed into Iran and occupied much of the country on August 25, encountering little if any resistance. The Shah abdicated in favor of his son, Muhammad Riza, who was more inclined to cooperate with the British who were seeking al-Husayni's arrest. Therefore, the Mufti was once again forced into hiding and had to find a way out of the country. Although not welcome in Turkey, he managed to escape across the Iranian-Turkish border in late September with the assistance

<sup>15</sup> PA: R29764, Büro des St.S., Syrien, Bd. 1, Aufzeichnung Woermanns, U.St.S. Pol.Nr. 5, 24. Januar 1941. For instance, Cosmelli also told Woermann of the Mufti's request to block a planned trip by Mousa al-Alami from Beirut to Europe in the quest for Axis support for the Palestinian Arabs.

<sup>16</sup> See Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem*, 96–98.

of a Japanese diplomat, but without a Turkish visa or permission. It was clear that the only safe place for him would be Italy or Germany, so he immediately traveled to Istanbul with the help of Italian diplomats in Turkey. From there he made his way to Italy via Bulgaria in October.<sup>17</sup> After meeting with Mussolini in Rome on October 27, he traveled to Berlin, where he arrived on November 6, 1941.<sup>18</sup> Three weeks later, on November 28, al-Husayni had his infamous meeting with Hitler at the Reich Chancellery, at which he renewed his efforts to secure the full support of Hitler's Germany and its Italian ally for a postwar settlement based on the end of European colonial rule in any form in the Arab lands, and on the elimination of the Jewish National Home in Palestine.

Similarly, Rashid Ali al-Gaylani had fled from Baghdad to Teheran with the collapse of his short-lived regime and, like the Mufti, faced an uncertain and increasingly difficult situation in Iran as the British attempted to apprehend him as well. With Turkish and then German assistance, he made his way to Turkey, and from there he was flown to Germany on November 21, 1941.<sup>19</sup> Al-Gaylani would become part of the small group of Arab exiles in Berlin that would seek to mobilize Arabs in the Middle East and North Africa in support of the Axis war effort, and at the same time to secure the full commitment of Hitler's government to Arab independence once Great Britain and the United States were defeated. In Berlin, however, al-Husayni and al-Gaylani had a relationship that was beset with conflicts over questions of leadership and ultimate Arab goals in the Middle East. Most importantly, while the Mufti would always see himself as the leader of a large, new postwar pan-Arab and Islamic state with borders that were as yet undefined, al-Gaylani seemed content to pursue the much less ambitious goal of regaining his position as leader of a more secular, independent Iraq.

#### THE ELUSIVE AXIS DECLARATION

Hitler was still committed to winning the war in the Middle East and North Africa in the fall of 1941, despite the recent Axis losses in Iraq and Syria. Convinced that victory in eastern Europe was certain by the end of the year, he wrote to Mussolini on October 29 that because the campaign in the Soviet Union had been virtually won, Germany was now in a position to begin

<sup>17</sup> See Gensicke, *Der Mufti von Jerusalem*, 54–55, 74 ff; and Mallmann and Cüppers, *Halbmond und Hakenkreuz*, 105. See also Grobba, *Männer und Mächte*, 249.

<sup>18</sup> For details on the eventual size of the Mufti's circle in Berlin between November 1941 and the end of the war, as well as its costs to the Nazi government, see Rubin and Schwanitz, *Nazis, Islamists*, 177.

<sup>19</sup> See Hircowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, 208–209. For more on the role of the German Abwehr in al-Gaylani's escape, see Paul Leverkühn, *Der geheime Nachrichtendienst der deutschen Wehrmacht im Kriege* (Frankfurt a.M.: Bernard & Graefe, 1957), 167 ff.

transferring some German military units to North Africa.<sup>20</sup> A month later, Ciano wrote about meetings in Berlin with Hitler, von Ribbentrop, and Göring at which Hitler talked about the “immediate objectives” in the war in the Soviet Union, one of which involved an “attack on the Caucasus” that would enable German troops to cross into Iran, Iraq, Syria and Palestine, and: “. . . lead to the conquest of one of the key positions of the British Empire: Egypt.”<sup>21</sup> On November 6, 1941, the same day that the Mufti arrived in Berlin, the Under State Secretary’s office in the German Foreign Office issued a comprehensive assessment of the situation in the Middle East following the recent Axis setbacks in Iraq and Syria.<sup>22</sup> It is likely that the impetus for this assessment was the recent losses in Iraq and Syria, combined with the rapid successes of the German military assault on the eastern front and, possibly, the Mufti’s arrival in Berlin. The report described the losses in Iraq and Syria the previous June and July, along with the Anglo-Soviet occupation of significant parts of Iran that summer, as serious setbacks for Germany. With the exception of Turkey and Afghanistan, it described the region as having become: “. . . militarily and politically a closed area of English power. . . ,”<sup>23</sup> a negative reality because the area would soon become a major battleground in the war. The thinking here was, no doubt, centered on what the Germans had come to believe would be the inevitable success of their campaign against the Soviet Union. This would entail the movement of victorious German forces from the Ukraine south through the Caucasus and into Iran and then the Arab Fertile Crescent from the north and the northeast. This thrust would then meet up with Rommel’s Afrika-Korps moving into the region from the southwest following an anticipated German victory in Egypt.<sup>24</sup> The assessment concluded: “The main goal will be the permanent exclusion of England from the Near Eastern area, and the permanent securing of German influence over the oil resources there.”<sup>25</sup>

With this in mind, the assessment went on to make specific recommendations that were placed under the heading of what it termed “the Arab Question” (*die arabische Frage*). Arab nationalism would finally have to be harnessed in such a way that the Arab population would rise up as one, and join in the approaching Axis military assault on British hegemony in the Middle

<sup>20</sup> Mallmann and Cüppers, *Halbmond und Hakenkreuz*, 103. After a meeting with Hitler at the Führer’s main headquarters on October 25, Count Ciano conveyed to Mussolini this same positive assessment that Hitler had given him, albeit with a somewhat more balanced or nuanced description of the difficulties still facing German troops on the Russian front. See Muggerridge, *Ciano’s Diplomatic Papers*, 454–460.

<sup>21</sup> Muggerridge, *Ciano’s Diplomatic Papers*, 463. In these papers, Ciano places the meetings between November 24 and 27, 1941.

<sup>22</sup> ZMO: Nachlaß Höpp, I.26, Aufzeichnung über Fragen des Vorderen Orients, Politische Abteilung, U.St.S. Pol. Nr. 959, 6. November 1941.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*      <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* See also Mallmann and Cüppers, *Halbmond und Hakenkreuz*, 89–90.

<sup>25</sup> ZMO: Nachlaß Höpp, I.26, Aufzeichnung über Fragen des Vorderen Orients, Politische Abteilung, U.St.S. Pol. Nr. 959, 6. November 1941.

East. Without naming individuals, it referred to remarks by Arab leaders calling first and foremost for: “. . . a new political declaration from Germany regarding the independence of the Arab lands. . .”<sup>26</sup> It cited Arab dissatisfaction with the weak Axis statement of October 1940 and with the somewhat stronger, but unofficial, private, and strictly verbal statements from the Foreign Office in Berlin to the Mufti in Baghdad and to others in the spring of 1941.<sup>27</sup> The assessment then stipulated that: “A new political declaration from Germany and Italy on the independence of the Arab lands now seems unavoidable, as failure to do so is an obstacle to cooperation with the Arabs based on trust. . .”<sup>28</sup> Finally, it warned that a stronger declaration on Arab independence was all the more urgent because Britain appeared to be on the verge of making new promises to the Arabs, implying that those promises would likely include Allied support for full Arab independence after the war. Indeed, with the backing of the British government on the eve of the British-led invasion of Syria and Lebanon in June 1941, General Georges Catroux of the Free French Forces had already declared the end of the Syrian and Lebanese Mandates and the independence of Syria and Lebanon.<sup>29</sup> That Germany and Italy had refused to that point to issue such a public declaration, and the reality that Germany’s erstwhile Vichy ally no longer governed Syria and Lebanon, were likely on the minds of German Foreign Office officials when the Mufti arrived in Berlin in November. Nevertheless, despite the fact that Vichy France was for all intents and purposes no longer relevant, at least in the eastern Mediterranean area, Italian interests and ambitions remained a factor, even if somewhat diminished, in German strategic considerations.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> These few examples of German and Axis intent even included somewhat clearer verbal support for Arab independence, but still refrained from formal, official, and public declarations. See for example the April 30, 1941 telegram from von Ribbentrop to the German embassy in Teheran, authorizing it to inform the Egyptian ambassador there of the following: “Especially with regard to Egypt, the Führer has already declared that Germany has no territorial aspirations in the Arab lands, but in fact – and here he is in agreement with the Duce – he wishes for the independence of Egypt and the entire Arab world.” See PA: R27322, Handakten Ettel, Erlaß des RAM, Arbeitsexemplar, Bd.-, RAM an DB/Teheran, Telegramm Nr. 197, 30. April 1941.

<sup>28</sup> ZMO: Nachlaß Höpp, 1.26, Aufzeichnung über Fragen des Vorderen Orients, Politische Abteilung, U.St.S. Pol. Nr. 959, 6. November 1941.

<sup>29</sup> See Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 103–104; and Hircowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, 187–188. Both Nordbruch and Hircowicz caution that this propaganda did not necessarily reflect the intended imperial policy of de Gaulle’s government in exile, nor for that matter the policy of the British government. For instance, in May 1941 the British air force had dropped leaflets over Damascus with an appeal not to the Arab population of Syria but apparently to the French population in the Syrian Mandate. The message in the leaflet was: “Frenchmen of the Levant, for four days German aircraft have violated Syrian airspace and have occupied its airports. The armistice that has placed you in chains is broken. The hour has come to liberate you from servitude to the enemy. Take up your weapons and liberate the land that France has entrusted to you with honor. General Catroux.” See PA: R29764, Büro des St.S., Syrien, Bd. 1, Rahn an AA/Berlin, Telegramm ohne Nr., 15. Mai 1941.

Nor had an otherwise active wartime radio propaganda campaign aimed at the Arab world included any sort of formal German commitment to Arab independence. In May 1941, Gerhard Rühle of the Radio Political Department (Rundfunkpolitische Abteilung) in the German Foreign Office submitted a comprehensive review of Germany's radio propaganda broadcasts in the Arab lands of North Africa and the Middle East to Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop.<sup>30</sup> Rühle reported that, according to reports received from German diplomats, agents, as well as from Arabs with contacts in Germany, German radio broadcasts from Berlin and Athens were well regarded in the Arab world. He also described the contents of those broadcasts as including: readings from the Koran; news from the region with a clear anti-British slant; an emphasis on German military strength; discussion programs that dealt with Arab history and literature, with emphasis on Arab heroes from the past; discussion programs with Islamic religious content and the role of Islam in resistance against foreign domination; and recorded music as a means of promoting popular interest in the radio broadcasts. Rühle also suggested that should Germany formally call via radio for a full-scale Arab uprising, the radio programming would require a heightened anti-English content to include a goal of ending British control of the entire Middle East, Britain's past broken promises to the Arabs, Koran readings that emphasize struggle against oppressors, poetry readings that stress freedom and independence and the struggle against foreign powers, and the playing of nationalist music. It is interesting to note that Rühle seemed to echo the causal relationship between an Arab revolt and a real Axis commitment to Arab independence, reiterated time and again by the Mufti and other nationalists, with the observation that: "A call for the struggle for independence and freedom will undoubtedly be successful if German consent can be given."<sup>31</sup> He seemed well aware that German policy in the Middle East had not previously included unequivocal public support for Arab independence.

Amin al-Husayni's main goal in his meeting with Hitler on November 28 was to obtain from the German government the hitherto elusive goal of a clear public declaration in support for the national self-determination and independence of the Arab people. He was certainly aware of Berlin's renewed interest in mobilizing the Arabs behind the Axis war effort in light of Hitler's confidence in victory in the Soviet Union, and following the setbacks in Iraq and Syria. On November 12, the Mufti met with Fritz Grobba who was collecting information on the Arab nationalist movements and organizations.<sup>32</sup> He gave

<sup>30</sup> PA: R67482, Rundfunkpolitische Abteilung, Verbindungsmann RAM, usw., Bd. 1, Aufzeichnung betr. die Rundfunkpropaganda in dem arabischen Raum (Rühle), dem Herrn Reichsaussenminister weisungsgemäss vorgelegt, 5. Mai 1941.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> PA: R27324, Handakten Ettl, Großmufti, Bd.-, "Mitteilungen des Großmufti über die arabische Nationalpartei," Grobba an U.St.S., e.o. Pol. VII 7863 g/41, 12. November 1941.



Grobba information about the Arab National Party, of which the Mufti had been elected president at the beginning of the Palestine revolt in 1936, and on the leading personalities within the party from Iraq, Palestine, Transjordan, Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. Al-Husayni emphasized that while he had been recognized as the spiritual leader of the Arab struggles in Iraq, Palestine, and Syria between 1936 and 1939, it was the party with himself as its leader that was responsible for the unrest in those three Arab states. He also reiterated to Grobba his intention to secure a clear and formal declaration of support for Arab independence from the German government in return for the full and active support of the Arab people for the Axis. Grobba observed: "After an agreement with the German and Italian governments on a declaration to the Arab lands, he is prepared to establish communications with the Arab people that would be correctly understood and followed by these and especially by all party members. He will naturally place the entire party and its influence at the disposal of the joint German-Arab struggle against the English."<sup>33</sup> Again, as he would so often do from Berlin, the Mufti presented himself to Nazi authorities as the undisputed leader of, and spokesperson for, all Arabs, and in that role, as an indispensable key to an Axis military victory in the Middle East and North Africa.

At his meeting with Hitler on November 28, al-Husayni was unable to secure the desired commitment and formal declaration of German support for Arab independence.<sup>34</sup> After expressing the Arab world's admiration for Hitler and Germany, and its gratitude for Hitler's previous expressions of sympathy for the struggle of the Arab people under the yoke of foreign domination and against the Jews in Palestine, the Mufti once again requested a formal declaration from Germany in support of Arab independence. Hitler responded to the Mufti: "Germany is committed to an uncompromising struggle against the Jews. Naturally, part of that is the struggle against the Jewish National Home in Palestine, which is nothing more than a power base for the destructive influence of Jewish interests."<sup>35</sup> After alluding briefly to the insufficiency of Axis support in Iraq earlier that year, the only justification Hitler could come up with for refusing to agree to a clear declaration was Vichy France and Syria. Notwithstanding the fact that Vichy no longer controlled Syria and Lebanon, Hitler reasoned that a declaration "...would strengthen those elements in France which were under the influence of de Gaulle..."<sup>36</sup> He stated that it would be interpreted as a call for the complete dissolution of the French empire, and could move the Vichy government over to the English side in an effort to save whatever parts of the empire that might still be saved. Hitler gave al-Husayni yet another vague verbal commitment, namely that once German troops arrived at the southern exit from the Caucasus, Germany would give the

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* See also Grobba, *Männer und Mächte*, 251-256.

<sup>34</sup> See Hirsacowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, 214-221.

<sup>35</sup> ADAP: Serie D, Bd. XIII/2, Nr. 515. <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*





PHOTO 6.1. Hitler receives the Mufti Amin al-Husayni in Berlin (November 1941).  
Courtesy Bundesarchiv, Berlin.

Arab world assurances that their liberation was at hand. At that meeting, Hitler also appeared to have in mind the systematic extermination of the Jews in Europe that was just getting under way, and the intention to expand the “final solution” to the significant Jewish populations of the Middle East and North Africa. Perhaps looking to the Mufti to possibly assist in organizing some form of Arab participation in the anticipated mass murder of the Jews of the Middle East, Hitler asserted: “The German goal would then be the destruction of the Jews living in the Arab territories under British protection.”<sup>37</sup> Hitler, in mentioning that al-Husayni would have to speak to the Arab world with the most important voice, might have been hinting that the Mufti would be responsible for calling on his fellow Arabs to assist the Germans in the destruction of the Jews in the Arab world: “It would be his [the Mufti’s] duty to unleash his secretly prepared Arab action.”<sup>38</sup> There can be no doubt that the Mufti,

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* See also Shlomo Aronson, *Hitler, the Allies, and the Jews* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 41.

perhaps beginning with this meeting, would soon become aware and supportive of the Nazi destruction of the Jews in Europe.<sup>39</sup>

After the meeting, Hitler claimed to understand the Arab wish for a formal, public declaration of support, and tried to placate al-Husayni with suggestions that it would eventually come in the not too distant future, perhaps when Axis forces were on the verge of achieving military victory in the Middle East. The Mufti's alternative suggestion that a formal statement be made that would be kept secret was also rejected by Hitler as unnecessary, with the assertion that he had in fact just given al-Husayni such assurances. Following his meeting with the Mufti, and against the advice of some in the German Foreign Office, Hitler apparently ordered that the question of issuing a formal declaration of support for Arab independence be dropped for the time being. Grobba disagreed with Hitler's decision because he believed that the Arabs could be a valuable ally in the war against Britain in the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>40</sup> Again, in his memoirs Grobba bemoaned the fact that the cost to Germany of such a declaration would have been minimal, and the return potentially significant, and he believed that without such a declaration, the Arabs would do nothing to assist Germany's war effort. Moreover, he also wrote that Hitler's obsession with the war in the Soviet Union had blinded him to the importance of the war in the Arab lands and a potentially positive role that an Arab uprising against Britain would play. Besides Operation Barbarossa, which was entering a critical phase in Hitler's timetable by late November, it is also possible that his focus was on the commencement of genocide against the Jews in Europe, and possibly its future application to the Jews of the Arab lands of North Africa and the Middle East. Again, this might be understood from some of his comments to the Mufti during their meeting. Of course, Hitler's concerns about the North African interests of his ally Mussolini and the Vichy regime in France surely played a role in his thinking as well. Indeed, the British Foreign Office's observation of domestic German media coverage of the Middle East from January 1941 through August 1942 demonstrate the durability of Hitler's belief in the continuation of the imperial positions of Italy and Vichy France in the Arab world.<sup>41</sup>

In late January 1942, Erwin Rommel began his offensive from Libya eastward into Egypt, one that would bring German and Italian forces as far as El-Alamein by early July. This initially successful Axis military thrust in North

<sup>39</sup> See for example Rubin and Schwanitz, *Nazis, Islamists*, 184–189.

<sup>40</sup> According to Fritz Grobba, he and Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop, present at the meeting between Hitler and the Mufti, both supported the latter's request to Hitler for a public declaration. See Grobba, *Männer und Mächte*, 256–257. In a follow-up meeting with von Ribbentrop the next day, the German foreign minister, notwithstanding his own views on the issue, nevertheless reaffirmed Hitler refusal to issue the desired declaration. See also Gensicke, *Der Mufti von Jerusalem*, 62.

<sup>41</sup> See NAL: FO898–184, Summary of Comments on German Broadcasts in Germany, January 1941–August 1942 (entire file).

Africa during the first half of 1942 provided the backdrop for an intensification of Arab efforts in Berlin and Rome to secure a firm commitment from the Axis powers to support postwar Arab national self-determination and independence. Yet, the activities and movements of al-Husayni, al-Gaylani, and the other Arab notables in Berlin and Rome were strictly controlled and limited by the German and Italian governments, leaving little room for independent initiative and activity. Those activities were therefore limited for the most part to their own internal rivalries, their necessary participation in Arabic language propaganda broadcasts to the Arab world, the limited success and ultimate futility of forming Islamic military units for the German war effort, and the ongoing but ultimately futile campaign to secure a public commitment from Germany and Italy for Arab independence.

In February 1942, Ciano wrote in his diary that Berlin rather than Rome was taking the lead in resisting the Arab call for a public declaration of support for Arab independence. Of course, this was a position that the Italian government naturally supported. That von Ribbentrop had in fact recognized al-Gaylani as the future prime minister of Iraq at a December 16, 1941 meeting in Berlin was certainly not equivalent to a formal German declaration, public or private, of German recognition of Arab or even Iraqi independence in the future.<sup>42</sup> Following a meeting with al-Gaylani in Rome, Ciano wrote in his diary on February 10: “The Germans are prudent and do not wish to sign any pact with him [al-Gaylani] for the present.”<sup>43</sup> A week later, following al-Gaylani’s meeting with Mussolini, Ciano observed: “The Duce kept him guessing because for some time the Germans have indicated their opposition to gestures of this sort.”<sup>44</sup> He also noted Mussolini’s rationale, one that mirrored Hitler’s during the latter’s meeting with the Mufti in Berlin the previous November, namely that a declaration should not be made in any case before Axis military forces: “. . . are close enough to the Arab countries for the words to be immediately followed by deeds.”<sup>45</sup> Of course, when Mussolini uttered these words to al-Gaylani in February 1942, just as when Hitler said more or less the same thing to al-Husayni three months earlier in Berlin, Axis forces and Vichy France still controlled a significant part of the Arab world, namely the Arab states of North Africa east of Egypt. Of course, this rationale would seem to contradict

<sup>42</sup> See Grobba, *Männer und Mächte*, 260.

<sup>43</sup> Gibson, *The Ciano Diaries 1939–1943*, 446. In this diary entry for February 10, 1942, Ciano refers to al-Gaylani as “Prime Minister,” indicating that the German and Italian governments were in agreement on his future title in an as yet undetermined form of Iraqi state.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 450.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* On April 14, and again on May 3, Ciano referred in his diary to the Japanese proposal for a tripartite declaration of support for the independence of India and Arabia. He also noted that while Mussolini was favorably disposed to the Japanese idea, the Germans were not. See *Ibid.*, 473, 480. The Japanese proposal, which would surface again in 1942, will be considered in detail later.

the aims of the Axis propaganda campaign to mobilize Arab opinion and a popular uprising against the British position in the Middle East.

By 1942, it appeared that Hitler's government had not yet determined precisely what a postwar Arab world would look like in terms of satisfying its own interests and the interests and ambitions of Italy, Vichy France, and Spain. What does seem clear by early 1942, however, is the reality that both the Axis powers on the one hand, and Arab exiles in Europe such as al-Gaylani and al-Husayni on the other, were having a conversation about the future of the Arab states of the Fertile Crescent, the Arabian Peninsula, and Egypt, one that for the most part tended to ignore Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco at that time. Under State Secretary Woermann seemed to confirm this scenario at least as far as the German government was concerned in a December 26, 1941 memorandum to the Near East Department (Abteilung VII) when he observed: "In our Arab policy, we have paid careful attention to differentiate between the Arabs of the Middle East and the Arabs of North Africa. Our Arab policy is not directed toward the territories west of Egypt. In the interest of our policies toward Italy, France, and Spain, we have no interest at the moment in promoting Arab nationalism in North Africa"<sup>46</sup>

Despite the loss of Syria and Lebanon to the British and the Gaullists in the early summer of 1941, German refusal to publicly commit itself to Arab independence through 1942 and 1943 was still conditioned by some of the same perceptions of the previous year. The Nazi government continued to insist on the need to support the Vichy French government in the hope of securing its cooperation against the British and the Americans. Thus, despite Woermann's December 26, 1941 memorandum, Germany did have a policy of sorts toward the North African Arabs west of Egypt. On February 23, 1942, Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop issued a directive on Arab policy and France, one that was based on reports from German Ambassador Otto Abetz in Paris, from Consul-General Auer in Casablanca, and from Consul-General Pfeiffer in Algiers. Five days later, Under State Secretary Woermann issued a follow-up memorandum on von Ribbentrop's directive, emphasizing its conclusion that Germany and Italy should not issue a declaration that dealt in any way with the question of Arab independence at that time.<sup>47</sup> Woermann does indicate that in the matter of a public declaration and its timing, the German Foreign Office was thinking specifically about British-occupied Syria and Lebanon, and not French North Africa. In any case, the former mandates of Syria and Lebanon were not necessarily more important than French North Africa to the Vichy French government. Any policy on France and the Arabs of necessity had to be about French North Africa as well.

<sup>46</sup> ADAP: Serie E, Bd. I, Nr. 59.

<sup>47</sup> ZMO: Nachlaß Höpp, 1.26, "Aufzeichnung zur Weisung des Herrn Reichsaußenministers vom 23. Feb. 1942 über arabische Politik und Frankreich," U.St.S., Pol. Nr. 154, 28. Februar 1942.

Woermann agreed with the advice of Abetz that it was not a good time to issue a public declaration of support for Arab independence, even if Syria did not revert back to French control after the war. Although not explicitly stated by Abetz, Woermann writes that in order to avoid compromising German wartime interests that were related to France, "...the Syrian question would be settled as part of a comprehensive settlement of the outstanding issues between France and the Axis powers, or at a time in close proximity to such a settlement."<sup>48</sup> Woermann also mentions that the British, American, and Egyptian governments had already declared their support for Syrian and Lebanese independence after the war. On the other hand, Woermann referred to statements by Auer and Pfeiffer that even if the Axis issued a declaration on Syria, it would not necessarily have an impact on French North Africa. In his conclusion, Woermann accepted Abetz's argument about the importance of timing in any declaration, and that the time had not yet come: "Regarding the timing, I agree with Ambassador Abetz that, in terms of German-French relations, it is not at the moment advantageous..."<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, Woermann's comments also reveal increasing doubts that such a declaration would, in the end, have an adverse effect on Germany's conduct of the war: "The assumption that the issuance of a declaration now could have a decisive influence on our relations with France or on our entire war effort would be an exaggeration of its significance."<sup>50</sup>

Another factor influencing Germany's decision regarding a possible declaration in support of Arab independence was Turkey. The Nazi regime scrupulously supported Turkish neutrality during the war. It had been clearly aware of Turkish sensitivity to the German invasion of the Balkans and Greece a year earlier, in the spring of 1941, as demonstrated in Hitler's March 1, 1941 note to the Turkish president, İsmet İnönü. In that letter, Hitler sought to reassure İnönü that the forthcoming German military push into southeastern Europe was in no way intended to compromise the territorial and political integrity of the Turkish Republic, and that Germany possessed no territorial ambitions or interests in the region. He further assured the Turkish president that German troops would leave the area once the British threat was removed. Hitler concluded by expressing his confidence that: "...the territorial adjustments after this war will never result in contradicting the aims of Turkish policy, but just the opposite, in a closer understanding of the two states."<sup>51</sup> This was also an indication that Berlin recognized Turkey's strategic interest in any final settlement of the "Arab Question" in general, certainly with regard to the states just across its southern border in the Fertile Crescent. Indeed, the possible postwar territorial changes that Hitler alluded to in his letter to İnönü likely included the Arab states just south of Turkey, particularly parts of Syria that Turkey had

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*    <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*    <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> PA: R29935, Büro des USt.S., Türkei, Bd.-, Auswärtiges Amt, Chiffrierbüro Nr. 128, 1. März 1941.

claimed since the end of the last war. Some mention of this was made in the previous chapter with regard to the events in Iraq and Syria in the spring and early summer of 1941. On June 18, 1941, the German and Turkish governments signed a Treaty of Friendship in which each country pledged to respect the other's borders and territorial integrity and to resolve all questions in a friendly manner.<sup>52</sup>

Franz von Papen, the German ambassador in Ankara, had always advised his superiors in Berlin that any future reorganization of the Arab states should take into account first and foremost the vital interests of neighboring Turkey. With German hopes for victory in Egypt and in the Caucasus, and an eventual meeting of victorious German armies somewhere in the Fertile Crescent, and based on von Papen's previous advice, Woermann further advised von Ribbentrop on March 12, 1942 that: "In any promises now regarding the shaping of the Arab space, we should not go any further than necessary in order to lend a helping hand to our Arab friends and to find a population ready to cooperate with us when we march in."<sup>53</sup> Woermann suggested that a possible secret note to al-Gaylani alone promising him German support for his reinstatement as head of a new Iraqi government would be acceptable because even that would not happen until sometime in the future. He also suggested that a similarly secret statement to the Mufti about an intended declaration on the independence of the Arab lands might also be appropriate. But he was clear in recommending that: "The issuing of a public declaration about the independence of the Arab lands is better left unsaid for now. . .,"<sup>54</sup> especially given the potential problems that a declaration might create for relations with both Turkey and with France. Finally, Woermann noted that at the appropriate time the question of the organization of the Arab area will be a part of the discussions that Germany and Italy will have with Turkey, and that: "Before then, we must also clearly determine if and perhaps which border adjustments can be offered to the Turks."<sup>55</sup>

In the spring of 1942, Germany and Italy received a suggestion from their Japanese ally that the tripartite powers issue a joint declaration of support for the independence of India and Arabia. In this initiative, Arabia was not specifically defined, but it presumably included the Fertile Crescent, the Arabian Peninsula, and perhaps Egypt. According to Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop, Hitler agreed to a joint declaration only with regard to India; he also noted that Hitler opposed making even the declaration for India public.<sup>56</sup> Mussolini

<sup>52</sup> PA: R29935, Büro des USt.S., Türkei, Bd.-, Deutsch-türkischer Freundschaftsvertrag, 18. Juni 1941.

<sup>53</sup> ZMO: Nachlaß Höpp, 1.26, "Aufzeichnung über die Türkei und die arabische Frage," Woermann an RAM, Pol. Nr. 176, 12. März 1942.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*     <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> PA: R28876, Büro des RAM, Vorderer Orient, Bd.-, Ribbentrop, Notiz für den Führer, 16. April 1942. See also Gibson, *The Ciano Diaries 1939–1943*, 473, 480–482.

approved in principle a declaration about Indian independence, provided it remained more of a propaganda piece than a substantive independence declaration. The German Foreign Office had in fact been in contact with Subhas Chandra Bose, a member of the Indian National Congress who had arrived in Germany in April 1941 in search of German support for Indian independence from British rule. Von Ribbentrop too was supportive of a statement on Indian independence,<sup>57</sup> but he argued that one was in fact not necessary for the Arab lands at that time. He reasoned that while Japanese forces were close to India's borders, Axis forces were not yet close enough to the borders of the Arab Middle East to justify such a declaration. In reality, of course, this was not the case given the presence of Rommel's troops in Libya, an Arab state, and their close proximity to both Egypt and French North Africa in April 1942. It also indicates that to the extent that the German government considered giving its public support for the idea of Arab independence as an option, the Arab states of North Africa were obviously not part of that consideration.

Hitler, however, remained apprehensive, even about a joint declaration for India alone, and notified von Ribbentrop on April 17 that he preferred to postpone a final decision until he had a chance to discuss the matter in person with Mussolini in their forthcoming meeting in Salzburg later that month.<sup>58</sup> At that meeting, Hitler and Mussolini did agree in principle to such a declaration for both India and Arabia, but again that "... both governments took the position that the right time for such a declaration had not yet come."<sup>59</sup> Again, the Germans and the Italians put off the decision about a formal declaration for the Arab world by taking the position that the military situation in the Middle East did not yet warrant such a step. They reasoned that such a step would run the risk of failing to stir the local population to action against the British without a clear indication that Axis armies were poised to defeat the British war effort. There appeared to be no consensus in Berlin regarding the Arab argument that such a declaration would fan the flames of Arab revolution against the British, and thereby substantially assist the Axis military effort. Hitler and Mussolini concluded in Salzburg:

Both governments would take the position that such a declaration should be issued when the military position of the "Tripartite Pact" powers in the Indian Ocean and the Near

<sup>57</sup> See ADAP: Serie E, Bd. I, Nr. 266, 289, and Bd. IV, Nr. 50.

<sup>58</sup> PA: R28876, Büro des RAM, Vorderer Orient, Bd., Notiz für Herrn Reichsaußenminister, Führerhauptquartier (Hewel), 17. April 1942. In his memoirs, Walter Schellenberg, a personal aide to Heinrich Himmler in the Reich Security Main Office Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA), asserts that Hitler told Bose that he was not interested in India and that the question of Indian independence should be left to Japan. See Walter Schellenberg, *The Schellenberg Memoirs* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1956), 298. Bose left Germany for Japan in 1943.

<sup>59</sup> PA: R28876, Büro des RAM, Vorderer Orient, Bd., Ribbentrop an DB/Rom, Für Botschafter Macksensen oder Geschäftsträger, 2. Mai 1942.



East is so strong that a general uprising in both lands can be expected, and that this can be led by immediate and active military interventions of the Tripartite Pact powers under all circumstances to a successful conclusion.<sup>60</sup>

The German and Italian governments informed Japan in early May that they agreed in principle to a Tripartite Pact power declaration in support of Indian and Arab independence, but that now was not the time.<sup>61</sup>

Meanwhile, both al-Husayni and al-Gaylani continued to pressure the German and Italian governments to issue a clear, formal statement, public or private, in support of Arab independence. While in Rome again for discussions with the Italian government in April 1942, both Arab leaders wrote yet another appeal to von Ribbentrop and Ciano to issue such a declaration. The letter, dated April 28, was written to von Ribbentrop in German and to Ciano in Italian. It referred once again to the trust the Arab people had placed in the Axis powers to end the suffering of the Arabs under British oppression and the willingness of the Arab people to participate in the struggle against the common enemy, Great Britain, until final victory. In return for joining the Axis war effort, al-Husayni and al-Gaylani made the following appeal:

We ask now the German government to declare its readiness to guarantee to the Arab lands currently suffering under British oppression all possible support in their struggle for liberation, to recognize the sovereignty and independence of the Arab lands of the Near East currently suffering under English oppression and their unity if the participating states so desire, as well as to agree to the elimination of the Jewish National Home in Palestine.<sup>62</sup>

The letter concluded with the expressed willingness of both al-Husayni and al-Gaylani to accept a written statement that would for the time being remain secret.

On May 5, Woermann responded to al-Husayni and al-Gaylani with two separate telegrams, each with its own intent, regarding the position of Germany on the question of Arab independence. In his message to al-Gaylani, Woermann recalled May 2 as the anniversary of the Iraqi declaration of war against England, recognized al-Gaylani's renewed struggle against the British, and implied that Germany supported an independent state of Iraq: "The Arabs remain in each locale true to their obligation to struggle to the very end, for the realization of their independence and complete freedom and to the expulsion of the English from their land."<sup>63</sup> It is likely that Woermann was referring only to Iraq in what appeared to be an endorsement of its "independence and complete freedom." In his note to al-Husayni, however, sent on the

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> PA: R28876, Büro des RAM, Vorderer Orient, Bd., Ribbentrop, Notiz für den Führer, Stellungnahme zum Vorschlag des Duce zur Indien-Erklärung, 14. Mai 1942.

<sup>62</sup> Höpp, *Mufti-Papiere*, 39–40. The Italian version of this letter can be found on pages 40–41.

<sup>63</sup> ZMO: Nachlaß Höpp, 10.21.026, Woermann an al-Gaylani, Nr. 1888, 5. Mai 1942.





PHOTO 6.2. The Mufti Amin al-Husayni and Rashid Ali al-Gaylani in Berlin on the first anniversary of the coup in Iraq (April 1942).  
Courtesy Yad Vashem, Jerusalem.

same day and also in commemoration of the first anniversary of Iraq's declaration of war against Britain, there is no mention at all of Arab independence. Instead, Woermann played on the Mufti's own tendency to present himself as the leader and spokesperson of all Arabs by referring to the respect and trust

that the Arabs had placed in him and for his struggle against the English and the Zionists. Woermann wrote that the Arabs: "...renew their obligation of loyalty to the death in the struggle against these two enemies of Arab unity, under the correct leadership of your eminence."<sup>64</sup> It appeared, therefore, that the German Foreign Office was, by May 1942, finally prepared to extend a confidential promise of German support for at least Iraqi independence to al-Gaylani, while continuing with general expressions of solidarity with the Mufti as the leader of the Arab people, all without a clear commitment to independence for the rest of the Arabic-speaking world. In the spring of 1942, with Rommel's drive into Egypt progressing and German forces on the eastern front not far from the northern Caucasus, Iraq seemed to loom once again as a central factor in Hitler's strategic plans for the Middle East.

In an exchange of letters between al-Gaylani and von Ribbentrop on May 14, 1942, the latter finally extended Germany's clear but confidential endorsement of Iraqi independence. In his letter, al-Gaylani reaffirmed the solidarity of the Iraqi people with the Axis powers and their determination: "...to free their own country from British domination and to secure their independence."<sup>65</sup> Al-Gaylani assured von Ribbentrop that he understood for the time being the necessity for a confidential statement, although he did not state why he had accepted the necessity for secrecy. Von Ribbentrop wrote to al-Gaylani on the same day that the German government had complete trust in him and the Iraqi people to fully support the goals of the Axis powers and that: "Germany, in full agreement with Italy, considered one of these goals to be the complete independence and full sovereignty of Iraq..."<sup>66</sup>

Al-Gaylani had been trying privately to conclude some sort of special treaty or agreement with the German and Italian governments since February 1942. Since he knew Fritz Grobba well from Grobba's years as the German Ambassador in Baghdad during the 1930s, al-Gaylani proposed a preliminary treaty between Germany and Iraq, one that would allow further agreements regarding future military cooperation, a new Iraqi currency, German oil concessions in Iraq, and German advisors in the new Iraqi government.<sup>67</sup> He made a similar suggestion to the Italian government during his visit to Rome in mid

<sup>64</sup> ZMO: Nachlaß Höpp, 10.21.026, Woermann an al-Husayni, Nr. 1888, 5. Mai 1942

<sup>65</sup> PA: R27828, Handakten Ritter, Briefwechsel des RAM und des Grafen Ciano mit dem Großmufti und Gailani, Bd.-, Raschid Ali El-Gailani an den Herrn Reichsminister des Auswärtigen Joachim von Ribbentrop, 14. Mai 1942.

<sup>66</sup> PA: R27828, Handakten Ritter, Briefwechsel des RAM und des Grafen Ciano mit dem Großmufti und Gailani, Bd.-, Ribbentrop an Seine Exzellenz Herrn Ministerpräsidenten Raschid Ali El-Gailani, Berlin, 14. Mai 1942.

<sup>67</sup> PA: R27332, Handakten Ettl, Kaukasus Länder, Länder des arab. Raumes im Nahen Osten, Ägypten, Sudan, Tunis, Bd.-, Der Bevollmächtigte des Auswärtigen Amtes für die arabischen Ländern (Grobba), Abschluß eines Rahmenvertrages mit Raschid Ali el-Gailani, 10. Februar 1942. Grobba sent this report to von Ribbentrop, State Secretary von Weizsäcker, and Under State Secretary Woermann from Rome.

February. Grobba, who was in Rome during the mid-February meetings of al-Gaylani and the Mufti with the Italian government, was supportive in principle of such a preliminary treaty, noting that it had not been possible before because such treaties are normally concluded only between two or more sovereign governments. However, both Berlin and Rome had already decided that they would support some sort self-governing Iraqi state with al-Gaylani as its prime minister after the war. Therefore, German Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop, along with the Italian government, joined Grobba in support of such an agreement.

In a meeting in Rome on February 18, Mussolini told al-Gaylani that Italy recognized him as Iraq's prime minister and would support such a preliminary treaty with Iraq.<sup>68</sup> According to Grobba's February 20 report from Rome, and perhaps unexpectedly, al-Gaylani then asked Mussolini for Italian recognition, publicly or in secret, of the independence of Iraq and all of the Arab lands. Mussolini, of course, responded in generalities about his admiration for al-Gaylani and Italian sympathy for the Arab people and their struggle against the British, but he could not agree at that time to such a declaration, public or secret. Mirroring the German position on a declaration of support for Arab independence, Mussolini told al-Gaylani, according to Grobba: "An official declaration would only come into question when the Axis powers are closer to Iraq; but it may be possible to issue a letter."<sup>69</sup> Presumably, a "letter" would contain some sort of general, unofficial, and secret statement on Arab independence. However, Mussolini cautioned al-Gaylani that he would first have to reach an agreement on this issue with his German ally. Of course, the Axis powers would first have to make a final determination about the level of influence and control that they ultimately would seek in the Arab world, including specifically in Iraq, something that neither Italy nor Germany had as yet defined. Moreover, another complicating factor was al-Gaylani's assertions that the future Iraq would take possession of Kuwait, as well as control over the waters of the Shatt al-Arab,<sup>70</sup> claims that would likely complicate future Axis relations with Iran and Saudi Arabia.

<sup>68</sup> PA: R27332, Handakten Ettel, Kaukasus Länder, Länder des arab. Raumes im Nahen Osten, Ägypten, Sudan, Tunis, Bd.-, Der Bevollmächtigte des Auswärtigen Amtes für die arabischen Ländern (Grobba), Empfänge Gailanis durch Graf Ciano, den König, und den Duce, Nr. 4, 20. Februar 1942.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* For Ciano's conversations with al-Gaylani in Rome, see again his diary entries for February 10 and 18, 1942 in Gibson, *The Ciano Diaries 1939–1943*, 446, 450.

<sup>70</sup> The Shatt al-Arab is the river in southern Iraq, formed at the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which then flows for about 200 kilometers into the northern Persian Gulf. The southern half of the Shatt al-Arab was, and remains today, the international border between Iraq and Iran.

## ANTICIPATION OF VICTORY: FALL 1942

When it became clear in Berlin that the German army would not achieve final victory in the Soviet Union by the end of 1941, plans for victory in the East had to be moved forward to 1942. German military planners placed particular emphasis on the southern front where Army Group South had been able to hold on to a coherent defensive line by the winter of 1941–1942, where the weather conditions would be conducive to earlier military operations in 1942, and where the important and highly coveted oil resources in the Caucasus could become available to Axis forces.<sup>71</sup> In 1942, therefore, the Germans still envisioned a victorious German army in the Caucasus, poised to enter the Arab Fertile Crescent from the northeast before ultimately meeting up with Rommel's victorious troops moving into the region from Egypt. This, they believed, would end Britain's dominant position in the Middle East.

Rommel's offensive against Egypt was well under way by the end of May 1942. The Foreign Office in Berlin began to make the necessary political plans for the Arab states that would parallel the military campaigns and the anticipated victories both in Egypt and in the Soviet Union. On May 14, Grobba, who had been appointed Plenipotentiary in the Foreign Office for the Arab Lands, along with German Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop and the commander of Sonderstab F in Greece, General Helmuth Felmy, met to begin the political planning for the eventual German military advance into the Arab lands of the Fertile Crescent.<sup>72</sup> The meeting reiterated the general hostility among Arabs toward Great Britain and Arab sympathy and support for Germany. The reason for this positive situation, they believed, was the effectiveness of German propaganda, controlled by the Foreign Office with the positive participation of the Mufti and al-Gaylani, in cultivating these attitudes among the general Arab population. They fully expected German propaganda and additional planned public statements from the Mufti and al-Gaylani to stimulate Arab unrest and revolts against the British when German troops arrived in the vicinity of the Fertile Crescent. This condition had been largely absent throughout the Arab states since the beginning of the war. In this context, it seems clear that the participants at the meeting were talking only

<sup>71</sup> Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 408–410. Weinberg provides the most complete assessment of the merging of German military strategies in the southern sector of the Eastern Front and in North Africa and the Middle East. For more specifically on German interest in the oil resources of the Caucasus, see for example PA: R27651, Handakten Luther, Vortragsnotizen, Bd. 30, Der Vertreter des Auswärtigen Amtes beim AOK, Nr. 66, "Das Erdöl von Maikop und die Raffinerie von Krasnodar," Wirtschaftsbericht, 16. August 1942, and Bericht Nr. 27, Betr. Erdöllage im Kaukasus, 5. September 1942.

<sup>72</sup> PA: R27332, Handakten Ettl, Kaukasus Länder, Länder des arab. Raumes im Nahen Osten, Ägypten, Sudan, Tunis, Bd., Gesandter Dr. F. Grobba, Inhalt der Besprechung des Herrn RAM mit dem Gesandten Grobba und dem General d. Fl. Felmy am 14. Mai 1942, "Die politische Vorbereitung des deutschen Vormarschs nach den arabischen Ländern."

about the Arab states of the Fertile Crescent. They also talked about the incorporation of about 130 Arab volunteers, mostly prisoners of war, who were training under Sonderstab F near Athens, along with another fifty Arab students in Germany and a number of Arabs from French North Africa who would be added to this special German-Arab *Lehrabteilung* (training unit). The main task of this *Lehrabteilung* would be to form and train a new Iraqi-Arab army, one in which volunteers from Syria and Palestine would also eagerly enlist. Moreover, von Ribbentrop, Grobba, and Felmy discussed an agreement with Italy that an additional Arab Legion would be formed in Italy, starting with some 250 Arab prisoners of war and an already existing Arab training unit that consisted of about twenty men. The purpose of this Arab unit, they agreed, was: “. . .to serve less as a fighting unit than for use as a propaganda mechanism to persuade more Arabs to come over to the Axis side.”<sup>73</sup> However, the meeting closed with the realization that while there was agreement regarding the establishment of an Iraqi government under al-Gaylani, there remained the need for Germany, Italy, the Mufti and al-Gaylani, and other Arab leaders to determine just how the reorganization of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Transjordan should proceed. There was no mention at all of Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, or the rest of Arab North Africa as this planning process was getting under way.

On May 31, von Ribbentrop put together an outline of the tasks that the German Foreign Office would oversee as part of this combined effort.<sup>74</sup> He first defined the Arab states involved as those in the Fertile Crescent, all of which were under British control at that time, and where the two victorious Axis armies were supposed to meet. These included Iraq, Transjordan, Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon. There was no mention of the territories in the Arabian Peninsula or North Africa. Von Ribbentrop stated in his plan: “The task of German foreign policy is to support the cause of Arab liberation through the utilization of all anti-English elements and to bring about the establishment of national Arab governments in close cooperation with our Axis partner Italy.”<sup>75</sup> He continued that there was agreement that a new government in Iraq would be formed by al-Gaylani, but that some sort of an agreement would have to be reached among the German and Italian governments, al-Gaylani and al-Husayni, and other recognized Arab leaders with regard to the other states in the Fertile Crescent. To oversee these anticipated issues, a special office (*Dienststelle*) was to be set up in the German Foreign Office under the direction of Grobba, with other specialists in Middle Eastern affairs. The tasks of Grobba’s office included organizing German propaganda in the region to

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* See also NARA: MS/P-207, Felmy, 11–13. Felmy also expressed his concerns regarding religious, regional, and tribal differences and conflicts among the Arab recruits.

<sup>74</sup> PA: R28876, Büro des RAM, Vorderer Orient, Bd., Ribbentrop, Die Länder des arabischen Raumes, 31. Mai 1942.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

stimulate an Arab revolt against the British, and working closely with the Mufti and al-Gaylani in Berlin. It also took on the task of coordinating efforts with General Felmy's Sonderstab F in Sunion near Athens, in consultation with the Mufti and al-Gaylani in Berlin, to recruit Arab volunteers for the previously mentioned German-Arab *Lehrabteilung*. This unit would in turn raise and train a new Iraqi-Arab army, under the supervision of the military's Sonderstab F. Clearly, the new *Dienststelle* under Grobba, and generally the attention of von Ribbentrop and the Foreign Office in Berlin in the summer of 1942, were focused on the conquest of the Fertile Crescent, and specifically the return to power of al-Gaylani in Iraq. The fate of the rest of the Fertile Crescent, of the relative roles of Mufti and al-Gaylani in that region, the role of Italy, and indeed the fate of the rest of the Arabic-speaking world were left unresolved in von Ribbentrop's May 31, 1942 memorandum.

Some of the omissions of the May 14 meeting and of von Ribbentrop's May 31 memorandum were at least partially addressed shortly thereafter in the summer of 1942 in an undated and unsigned German Foreign Office memorandum titled "Germany's Advance toward the Arab world" (*Vormarsch Deutschlands nach dem arabischen Raum*).<sup>76</sup> After the usual preliminaries about Arab popular enthusiasm for Germany, the memorandum, somewhat naively and simplistically, asserted that Egypt and Saudi Arabia had been friendly toward the British in the past only out of necessity, and that they would support German troops as they entered the Fertile Crescent. It also pointed to Germany's many friends in non-Arab Iran who were looking forward to Germany's arrival in the region. The document further outlines plans to establish an Iraqi government under al-Gaylani and a Greater Syrian government under al-Husayni, as well as a new Iranian government, once German troops occupied the city of Tiflis and the rest of Georgia in the Caucasus. These new governments in exile, having relocated along with Grobba's *Dienststelle* to the city of Tiflis, would issue calls to their people to rise up in support of the incoming German army. As was discussed at the May 14 meeting, plans were confirmed for the "formation of a new Iraqi-Arab army," (*Neuaufstellung der irakisch-arabischen Armee*) with three Iraqi divisions and an additional division composed of volunteers from Syria, Palestine, and Transjordan, under the command of Felmy's Sonderstab F and accompanied by German troops. Incredibly, the memorandum fantasized that the new German-Arab force would advance southwest toward the Suez Canal and south to the Persian Gulf, with the goal: "From Basra to establish contact with the Japanese heading toward Ceylon."<sup>77</sup>

<sup>76</sup> PA: R27332, Handakten Ettl, Kaukasus Länder, Länder des arab. Raumes im Nahen Osten, Ägypten, Sudan, Tunis, Bd.-, "Vormarsch Deutschlands nach dem arabischen Raum," (no date). It seems likely that the author was, again, Fritz Grobba, in his capacity as Plenipotentiary in the Foreign Office for the Arab Lands.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

The document also goes into some detail about a planned “New Order in the Arab Space” (*Die Neuordnung des arabischen Raumes*). It stipulates that: “. . . Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Egypt would remain independent states,” and that “Syria, Lebanon, Palestine und Transjordan would be united in a Greater Syrian state.” While the term “independent” is used to describe Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Egypt, states that had enjoyed varying degrees of self-government before the war, it is omitted from the statement about Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Transjordan. Moreover, Iraq would annex Kuwait, while Saudi Arabia would take Aqaba to its northwest, as well as Bahrain, Oman, and much of the southern coast of the Arabian Peninsula that had been under British control since the middle of the nineteenth century. Al-Gaylani would become prime minister and possibly chief-of-state in Iraq, with influence as well in Greater Syria, while the Mufti would, pending the support of other Syrian leaders, become the “Speaker” and possibly the head of state in a Greater Syria. The memorandum cautions that Germany and Italy would have to take great care to neutralize any rivalries between al-Gaylani and al-Husayni in this Arab “New Order.” It reaffirms that Italy would retain its political preferences, that Germany would retain all military preferences, and that in political matters Italy would obtain Germany’s agreement before undertaking any actions. In other words, the Axis powers might retain certain privileges and prerogatives in the Fertile Crescent not unlike those retained by Great Britain in Iraq and Egypt in 1930 and 1936, respectively.

Finally, the second part of this document reviews the specific responsibilities of Grobba’s position as Plenipotentiary for the Arab lands. The staff under Grobba consisted of Foreign Office civil servants with knowledge of the Middle East and its languages. Its task was defined as the political preparations for the German advance into the Arab lands and the implementation of German policy in the region according to the directives of the Foreign Office. Its previous tasks had included political and economic oversight of the Mufti and al-Gaylani in Germany, discussions with them related to the political, economic, and military issues between Germany and the Arab lands, and the preparation of terms for an eventual takeover of the internationally owned and London-based Iraq Petroleum Company. The document further defines the immediate tasks of Grobba’s office as: “Preparation for the establishment of Arab governments, participation in the preparations for the establishment of the Iranian government.”<sup>78</sup> It also refers to the need for negotiations regarding cooperation with the Saudi and Egyptian governments, and in particular: “Advising the Arab governments in the building of their new administrations and in the economic development of their lands, as well as efforts to exploit the riches of the Arab lands for the Axis powers’ conduct of the war.”<sup>79</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.      <sup>79</sup> Ibid.



On July 2, German Ambassador von Mackensen in Rome notified Berlin that Mussolini had approved the release of an Axis declaration of support for the independence of Egypt, and had requested German approval of the following public declaration. Translated in Rome from Italian into German, the proposed declaration read: “In the moment in which their armed forces are victoriously advancing in Egyptian territory, the Axis powers are joyously strengthening their firm commitment to recognize and secure the independence and sovereignty of Egypt. . . The policy of the Axis powers is guided by the principle ‘Egypt for the Egyptians.’”<sup>80</sup> However, less than half an hour later, von Mackensen again telegraphed to Berlin, this time including the general outlines of Italy’s preliminary plans for an Axis-occupied Egypt. These plans suggested the need for an Axis reorganization of the Egyptian government in such a way that: “. . . in view of its impact on the rest of the Arab world, the independent Egypt must be created to serve as a model regime.”<sup>81</sup> The “model” here likely reflected the Italian desire to establish a self-governing structure in Egypt not unlike the one established by the Anglo–Egyptian Treaty of 1936, one that would allow the Italians and the Germans to retain a political and military presence and authority in a postwar Egypt and throughout the Middle East. In any case, on the following day, July 3, two Arabic-language broadcasts from Berlin, one of which was from the Mufti himself, declared full Axis support for Egyptian independence and sovereignty.<sup>82</sup> Three days later, von Ribbentrop authorized the German ambassador in Rome to convey to Mussolini the German government’s approval of Italy’s political plans in Egypt, plans that von Ribbentrop noted reflected Germany’s position: “. . . that Italy has political primacy in Egypt.”<sup>83</sup>

At the end of August, al-Husayni requested a change in German plans to relocate Felmy’s operations at Sonderstab F, with its *Lehrabteilung* of trained

<sup>80</sup> PA: R27772, Handakten Ritter, Ägypten, Afghanistan, Albanien, Alexandrien, Bd.-, Von Mackensen/Rom an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 2455, 2. Juli 1942.

<sup>81</sup> PA: R27772, Handakten Ritter, Ägypten, Afghanistan, Albanien, Alexandrien, Bd.-, Von Mackensen/Rom an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 2456, 2. Juli 1942. See also von Ribbentrop’s May 29, 1942 eight-point strategy for German radio propaganda to Egypt in anticipation of a victory by Rommel’s forces in ADAP: Serie E, Bd. II, Nr. 250. Von Ribbentrop’s points contain all of the usual attacks on past British imperial rule in Egypt, its alleged economic exploitation of Egyptian resources, and Rommel’s pending liberation of the Egyptian people. It avoids the question of future Egyptian independence.

<sup>82</sup> For the texts of these radio broadcasts, see Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, 123.

<sup>83</sup> PA: R27772, Handakten Ritter, Ägypten, Afghanistan, Albanien, Alexandrien, Bd.-, Von Ribbentrop/Berlin an Von Mackensen/Rom, Telegramm Nr. 674, 6. Juli 1942. Ciano more or less confirms this Italian approach to Egypt in his diaries. See Gibson, *The Ciano Diaries 1939–1943*, 502–505. Communications between the German embassy in Rome and the Foreign Office in Berlin in 1942 indicate that there was lingering Italian distrust of Germany’s intentions in Egypt. See for example BArch: R901-68760, DB/Rom an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 3213, 28. August 1942. See also BArch: R901-68688, Neurath/Akrikakorps an AA/Berlin, Telegramm ohne Nummer, 24. Februar 1942.



Arab volunteers, from Greece to Tiflis in the Caucasus. He suggested moving the entire operation to Egypt instead. In his memorandum to Field Marshal Keitel of August 29, the Mufti had enthusiastically endorsed the plan to move Felmy's operation out of Greece, but objected to the idea of moving Arab volunteers, former prisoners of war, to Russia and the Caucasus. He wrote: "I have given these volunteers, who were former prisoners of war, assurances that they will serve in an Arab organization and be placed in Arab lands, and that the rumor that has been spread about sending them to Russia and the Caucasus is false enemy propaganda..."<sup>84</sup> Al-Husayni further argued that most of the volunteers were from Syria and Palestine, with only three from Iraq, and that: "Their move to Egypt would allow them to return almost immediately to their homes and to be among their own people..." and "...I am convinced that many Syrian and Palestinian Arabs, refugees and those living in Egypt, as well as many Egyptians, will gather in unity and join the struggle."<sup>85</sup> In an attached statement, also dated August 29, 1942 and clearly anticipating an Axis victory in Egypt, the Mufti reiterated his position that he wanted: "The establishment on Egyptian territory of an Arab central authority, the leadership of which would assume authority over all matters relating to cooperation..." and "The creation of regular Arab military units that would cooperate shoulder to shoulder with Axis troops."<sup>86</sup> Of course, he, the Mufti, would be in command of this new authority. Finally, as if the establishment of an Arab authority in Egypt under his direction was not enough to affirm his own position and his determination to secure Arab independence, the Mufti then suggested that weapons and munitions should be sent to Egypt, behind enemy lines, and then to Palestine, Syria, and Iraq, in preparation for a general Arab uprising against the enemy.

By the end of the summer of 1942, the Mufti's dissatisfaction with the planned move of Sonderstab F to the Caucasus rather than to North Africa reflected the continuing uncertainties in German policy in the Middle East, as well as the rivalry between al-Husayni and al-Gaylani for influence in Berlin and Rome. These uncertainties were echoed by General Felmy himself, who composed an unusually frank and highly critical position paper sometime in mid or late August that amounted to a fairly sharp critique of the German-Arab *Lehrabteilung* and its planned mission in the Caucasus and the Middle East.<sup>87</sup> He observed that the number of Arab recruits was small, with 24 Iraqis, 112 Syrians and Palestinians, and 127 Arabs from French northwest Africa. He also asserted that any new recruits would likely be Arabs from North Africa

<sup>84</sup> PA: R27325, Handakten Ettel, Großmufti, Bd.-, Amin El-Husseini, Großmufti, an Herrn Generalfeldmarschall Keitel, Chef des OKW, "Denkschrift über die Verlegung des Lagers Sunion vom 29.8.1942," 30. August 1942. Al-Husayni wrote this memorandum in Rome on August 29.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> ZMO: Nachlaß Höpp, 1.27, Stellungnahme zum Schreiben des Auswärtigen Amtes vom 5.8.42, Pol. VII 1034 g.Rs., Felmy, (no date).

rather than from the Fertile Crescent, the region his unit was supposed to enter at some point from the Caucasus. Felmy also expressed skepticism about exactly how much influence the Mufti and al-Gaylani had among the Arab populations in the Fertile Crescent, where they were supposed to rouse the population to revolt against the British. He decried the lack of clarity over future German vs. Italian leadership in the Middle East, once Axis armies entered the region from the Caucasus and from Egypt, and insisted that the command of any new Arab military units should rest primarily with Germany, and not with Italy. He also reiterated that the German-Arab *Lehrabteilung* was under the authority of the German army; it in no way constituted a separate “Arab legion.” Once again, he joined others in concluding that Germany’s alliance with Italy: “. . . on the one hand strengthens the distrust of the Arabs while on the other is effectively used in English propaganda.”<sup>88</sup> Felmy also makes an apparent reference to Germany’s unwillingness to formally declare its unequivocal support for Arab independence. He warns that Arab enthusiasm for the Axis is weakened because: “No one knows what kind of future the Axis powers are willing to guarantee for the Arab world,” and that the question many Arab leaders were asking themselves was: “How far will the Arab lands, or a part of them, be subject to Italian influence or Italian domination?”<sup>89</sup> Felmy closed with a call for a resolution of the leadership battle between al-Husayni and al-Gaylani, a clarification of German and Italian political responsibilities in the planning for the Arab world, and a greater contribution from the Arabs themselves in the common struggle.

The Mufti’s earlier attempt to change the eventual destination of Felmy’s Sonderstab F was in vain, as the German-Arab *Lehrabteilung* was already on its way to the Caucasus by the end of August.<sup>90</sup> In any case, Admiral Canaris and the Abwehr objected to any involvement of the Mufti in the activities at Sunion in Greece, and in the formation and use of the German-Arab *Lehrabteilung*.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*      <sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> By the time of its departure from Sunion in Greece for the southern front in the Soviet Union in late August 1942, the *Deutsch-Arabisches Lehrabteilung* actually consisted of 6,000 men with special weapons and training for eventual deployment in the Middle East, by way of the Caucasus. German soldiers made up 5,200 of its members, and some 800 were Arabs organized into four companies. One company consisted of Arabs from Syria, Palestine, and Iraq, and three consisted of Arabs from French North Africa. The four Arab companies were kept in a camp several hundred kilometers behind the lines on the southern front in the Soviet Union, where they remained in training without being deployed, while the German soldiers in the *Lehrabteilung* suffered heavy casualties in the northern Caucasus. In December 1942, with the tide of battle turning against the Axis in North Africa, the German Foreign Office and the OKW agreed to send the four Arab companies to North Africa, as the Mufti had originally demanded, where they were to be merged with a new Arab volunteer battalion that Germany and Italy considered forming in Tunis. However, the rapid Axis collapse in North Africa in 1943 precluded this formation. See PA: R27827, Handakten Ritter, Tunis, Ukraine, USA, Bd., Aufzeichnung betreffend deutsch-arabische Lehrabteilung. U.St.S. PoI, 20. November 1942; and Botschafter Ritter 25, 14. December 1942.

Walter Hewel, a Foreign Office liaison in Hitler's main headquarters, reiterated General Felmy's complaints about the lack of clarity for the mission of Sonderstab F in the Caucasus, made even more problematic in Hewel's view because: "...above all, one can never expect from the Arab side any meaningful participation."<sup>92</sup> Hewel also reiterated Felmy's concerns regarding Arab distrust of the Italians and their imperial ambitions in the eastern Mediterranean, and Arab fears that German loyalty to Italy would mean a betrayal of Arab hopes for independence. He warned again that the absence of clear Axis intentions regarding Arab independence and the reality that Arab distrust of Italy had made British promises of Arab independence a danger to the extent that: "They have given the Arabs, even if only out of pure opportunism, clear guarantees similar to Lawrence in the past."<sup>93</sup> He also argued that German propaganda about the struggle against the Jews only went so far with the Arabs, and that: "These words are of course attractive, but not enough politically to motivate the Arabs to complete and fanatical action."<sup>94</sup> He also repeated his fears that the rivalry between the Mufti and al-Gaylani would hinder the work of Sonderstab F, and that the Mufti would: "... as soon as possible go off into the desert, and from there implement his plans, namely to organize his resistance movement from Egypt."<sup>95</sup>

German expectations of imminent victory in Egypt and the Soviet Union in the second half of 1942 produced some activity that was in part an attempt to address these questions. However, the Foreign Office in Berlin remained at a loss over what to do about the increasing rivalry between al-Husayni and al-Gaylani for German and Italian attention, and their respective future roles in a postwar Arab world. Since the spring of 1941, both Germany and Italy had agreed that, at a minimum, the Mufti was the Arab leader above all others, including Arab elements in Palestine and Syria who opposed the Mufti, on whom Axis policy in the Arab world should rely.<sup>96</sup> On July 13, 1942, Woermann reported that each Arab leader had informed him of his views on the important issues and where each differed from the other. The Mufti claimed to have long been the leader of the Arab nationalist movement against the British and to have been the one primarily responsible even for the Iraqi coup of April 1941 that had briefly placed al-Gaylani in power in Baghdad. Woermann observed: "At that time, and then during their brief stay in Iran and

<sup>91</sup> PA: 61124, Politische Abteilung-Geheime Reichssache, Politische Lage in Arabien, Bd. 2, DB/Rom an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 3524, 17. September 1942.

<sup>92</sup> PA: R28876, Büro des RAM, Vorderer Oriend, Bd.-, (Hewel), Notiz für Herrn Gesandten v. Rintelen, 31. August 1942.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*    <sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*    <sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> See for instance Grobba's telegram from Baghdad, just before the final demise of al-Gaylani's coup at the hands of the British army, in which he reassured the Italian ambassador there that, despite his (Grobba's) close ties to al-Gaylani and his difficulties with the Mufti, the two Axis countries were in accord with regard to the Mufti. PA: R29884, Büro des U.St.S., Irak III, Bd.-, Gehrcke [Grobba] an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 93, 23. Mai 1941.

at the beginning in Germany and Italy, there had never been any doubt that al-Gaylani was subordinate to him.”<sup>97</sup> Woermann also noted that the conflict was also about al-Gaylani’s claim to be chief of state rather than prime minister in a new Iraq, a claim that the Mufti could not accept because he supported Iraq’s autonomy within, but not independence from, a larger unified Arab state in the Fertile Crescent. Woermann also observed that although the German and Italian governments recognized both al-Husayni and al-Gaylani as the two most important Arab leaders, in the end, they would turn to the Mufti as the primary Arab leader with whom they had to deal, assuming the two were unable to come to some sort of agreement between themselves. Finally, Woermann remarked that the Mufti favored a future greater Arab state that included Iraq, Transjordan, Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon, while al-Gaylani seemed to favor a loose federation of presumably independent states, with himself as head of an independent Iraq. Woermann concluded that these decisions need not be settled right away, but that the Axis powers would eventually have to come to some sort of agreement, especially since Mussolini did not like the idea of a large, unified Arab state. Woermann was of course referring to Italy’s claims of special Italian interests in all the Arab lands that bordered on the Mediterranean.

Al-Gaylani met with Hitler for the first time in July 1942 after complaining for months that he had not been granted such a meeting since his arrival in Germany the previous year. Woermann prepared some reference points in preparation for al-Gaylani’s first meeting with Hitler, which was also attended by von Ribbentrop. Al-Gaylani warned Hitler and von Ribbentrop about his difficult relationship with the Mufti, and that the latter believed that Hitler had already chosen him as the man “. . . who will ignite the movement in the Arab lands.”<sup>98</sup> Woermann then cautioned that since Italy’s views still had to be considered in the matter of Arab leadership, it would be wise for Hitler to avoid this question altogether for the time being. He urged both Hitler and von Ribbentrop to impress upon al-Gaylani that close cooperation between the two Arab leaders was in the interest of the Axis powers. Woermann also urged Hitler to avoid the question, if possible, of al-Gaylani’s office in the future Iraq, and that if it did come up in their discussions, that Germany could only recognize him as prime minister at that time. Any attempt by al-Gaylani to make secret agreements with Germany alone, without Italian involvement or knowledge, should be rejected, while his claims that Kuwait and parts of Iran must be annexed by Iraq should be politely heard, but remain undecided. Finally, Woermann suggested that al-Gaylani’s view that Iraq does not belong to Italy’s sphere of interest because it is not a Mediterranean land cannot be accepted. In other words, and notwithstanding von Ribbentrop’s promise of

<sup>97</sup> PA: R28876, Büro des RAM, Vorderer Orient, Bd.-, Aufzeichnung Woermann, 13. Juli 1942.

<sup>98</sup> PA: R28876, Büro des RAM, Vorderer Orient, Bd.-, Aufzeichnung Woermann, 14. Juli 1942.



PHOTO 6.3. Erwin Ettel (no date).  
Courtesy Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Berlin.

Iraqi independence two months earlier, the Foreign Office was once again proposing that no firm official commitments should be made to the Arab leadership in Berlin, and that polite, general, but noncommittal conversation should be the rule in official German contacts with those Arab leaders. With regard to al-Gaylani in the summer of 1942, Woermann suggested that the only formal initiative that Hitler should take toward the Iraqi leader was to express the following sentiment: “Gailani deserves an especially warm recognition for his struggle against England.”<sup>99</sup>

The competition between the Mufti and al-Gaylani was enmeshed within apparently conflicting points of view at the German Foreign Office as well; some favored the positions of the former, while others supported the latter. Erwin Ettel, the German ambassador in Teheran until August 1941, was one of several key German bureaucrats with expertise and experience in the Middle East.<sup>100</sup> He was assigned to oversee the Mufti in Berlin in 1942 and to work with him in policy matters. As mentioned earlier, Fritz Grobba, in charge of the special office (*Dienststelle*) for the Middle East, had already developed a relationship with al-Gaylani in Iraq prior to the collapse of al-Gaylani’s government in May 1941. At the end of August 1942, Ettel composed a report, the recipient of which is unknown, in which he disputed

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ettel, like many bureaucrats recruited into the German Foreign Office during the 1930s, had been an official in the *Auslandsorganisation der NSDAP*. He was *Landesgruppenleiter* in Italy before he joined the Foreign Office. See Conze et al., *Das Amt und die Vergangenheit*, 118.

Grobba's view that al-Gaylani was indispensable to Axis plans for the Middle East. Ettel argued that al-Gaylani, contrary to Grobba's claim, had been unable to unite all Iraqis, especially the Shias, under his authority.<sup>101</sup> Ettel's simmering dispute with Grobba also had the potential for disrupting German-Italian relations, as indicated, for example, in al-Gaylani's assertions to State Secretary von Weizsäcker in September 1942 that the Italians were in part responsible for the strained relations between himself and the Mufti.<sup>102</sup>

Sometime in early October, the Mufti sent a memorandum to Ettel complaining about Grobba's "negative role" in the cultivation of good relations between Germany and the Arabs since the 1930s. The undated memorandum, written in English, seems to be a litany of complaints based on Grobba's past contacts and relationships with other Arab leaders, particularly with Iraqis, and blames Grobba for the Mufti's poor relations with al-Gaylani.<sup>103</sup> On October 17, Ettel submitted a lengthy report to von Ribbentrop in which he was quite open and direct in his criticism of Grobba.<sup>104</sup> The Mufti's idea to recruit North African Arabs for a new legion of volunteer fighters, with the recruitment beginning in Italian-ruled Libya and then expanding into French North Africa, had been politely turned down by the Foreign Office in Berlin that fall. Grobba states in his memoirs that al-Husayni blamed him for this, and generally for trying to scuttle all of al-Husayni's efforts in the Arab world, even asserting that Grobba had been the primary cause of the conflicts among Arab leaders, particularly between himself and al-Gaylani.<sup>105</sup> Ettel referred to continuing Arab distrust toward Italy. He also referred to Arab discomfort with the German policy of recognizing Italy as dominant in the Middle East, and to the comments of unnamed Arab leaders that they would even prefer British rule over Italian rule. Ettel then praised the Mufti and his preference for Germany over Italy, as well as his realistic acknowledgement of the necessity for close German-Italian cooperation in Arab affairs. Ettel devoted the second half of his report to criticizing Grobba for everything, from damaging German-Italian cooperation in the Middle East to jeopardizing German relations with the Mufti by accusing al-Husayni of conspiring with Italy against German interests in the Arab world. Through Grobba's alleged hostility to the Mufti and to Italy,

<sup>101</sup> PA: R27325, Handakten Ettel, Großmufti, Bd., Aufzeichnung (Ettel), 26. August 1942. Ettel admits in the memorandum that Grobba favored recognizing the Mufti as the primary Arab advisor to the Axis powers, along with recognition that al-Gaylani would serve as the main connection with Iraq.

<sup>102</sup> PA: R27324, Handakten Ettel, Großmufti, Bd., Aufzeichnung von Weizsäcker, St.S. No. 533, 15. September 1942. Weizsäcker assured al-Gaylani that there were no political differences between Germany and Italy, and that both powers were cooperating on the Arab question in the closest possible way.

<sup>103</sup> Höpp, *Mufti-Papiere*, 80–85.

<sup>104</sup> PA: R27324, Handakten Ettel, Großmufti, Bd., Ettel an den Herrn Reichsaussenminister, 17. Oktober 1942.

<sup>105</sup> Grobba, *Männer und Mächte*, 301–302.

and his singular support for al-Gaylani, Ettel charged: “The national unity front of the Arabs living in the areas controlled by the Axis is being destroyed by the conduct of Dr. Grobba . . .,” and that: “The result of all of this is that today on German soil internal political struggles are being settled.”<sup>106</sup> Ettel, with the support of German Ambassador von Mackensen in Rome, recommended that von Ribbentrop replace Grobba with Curt Prüfer as head of the special *Dienststelle* in the Foreign Office, which von Ribbentrop did in October.<sup>107</sup>

Personal animosities and rivalries notwithstanding, Hitler’s government remained committed to al-Husayni as its natural and most effective Arab link to the Middle East and North Africa during the fateful months of the fall and winter of 1942–1943. In turn, and in recognition of his personal ambition to be the supreme leader in a new, postwar pan-Arab state, al-Husayni did all that he could, in spite of his virtual isolation from the Arab Middle East, to act as the bridge between the Axis powers and the other Arab states during these critical months of late summer and fall 1942 when Rommel appeared to be close to victory in Egypt. This was a function that the Foreign Office in Berlin had assigned to him in the early summer of 1942, one that al-Gaylani was neither able nor willing to perform. The Foreign Office in Berlin clearly viewed the Mufti as the better known and, therefore, the best qualified Arab spokesperson for Germany’s political efforts in the region during the summer and fall of 1942. The inevitable political implications of his role and office as an Islamic leader, coupled with his own personal political ambitions, meant that al-Husayni always looked beyond the relatively small confines of his native Palestine, and could only conceive of a unified Islamic-Arab state in most if not all of the Arab lands of the Middle East and North Africa. For instance, the Mufti did not limit his appeals in Axis propaganda efforts to the states of the Fertile Crescent, and often made appeals to the leading political and military circles in Egypt and Saudi Arabia to support the Axis war effort against a Great Britain that he portrayed as the friend of the Jews and the enemy of the Arab people.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, the combination of Rommel’s successful but short-lived military campaign in Libya and Egypt, combined with the

<sup>106</sup> PA: R27324, Handakten Ettel, Großmufti, Bd.-, Ettel an den Herrn Reichsaussenminister, 17. Oktober 1942.

<sup>107</sup> See Donald McKale, *Curt Prüfer: German Diplomat from the Kaiser to Hitler* (Kent, OH and London: Kent State University Press, 1987), 169–170. Like Grobba, Prüfer also opposed supporting the sort of pan-Arab nationalism and state that the Mufti had begun advocating, fearing that such an approach would harm Germany’s relations with neutral Turkey. For Prüfer, and for the German Foreign Office in general, maintaining Turkey’s neutrality in the war was a very high priority. See PA: 61124, Politische Abteilung-Geheime Reichssache, Politische Lage in Arabien, Bd. 2, Aufzeichnung Prüfers, über Woermann an Weizsäcker, 3. Dezember 1942. Grobba nevertheless continued to serve as the Foreign Office’s liaison with Rashid Ali al-Gaylani in Berlin.

<sup>108</sup> Höpp, *Mufti-Papiere*, 45–46, 55. See also PA: R27322, Handakten Ettel, Erlaß des RAM, Arbeitsexemplar, Bd.-, Aufzeichnung Ettel an RAM, 29. Juni 1942; and Telegram Nr. 182, Rintelen an Ettel, 12. August 1942.



Anglo-American landings in northwest Africa in the fall of 1942, only served to intensify al-Husayni's political rhetoric to, and developing ambitions in, the Arab states of North Africa. While the Mufti saw himself by the fall of 1942 as the future supreme leader of a large, pan-Arab and Islamic state with as yet undefined borders, al-Gaylani was interested first and foremost in being the supreme leader of a postwar, independent Iraq.

#### THE MUFTI AND NORTH AFRICA

Communications between the Foreign Office in Berlin and the SS in October reveal that by the middle of the fall of 1942, the Mufti had put himself on record as seeking the creation of an even larger pan-Arab state, one that, according to Walter Schellenberg of the SS foreign intelligence (Amt VI) in October 1942: "...should encompass the entire Arab area to its furthest extent, i.e. from the Persian Gulf to the Atlantic coast of Morocco..."<sup>109</sup> Schellenberg indicated that the Mufti was in Rome negotiating with Italian officials, trying to overcome the inevitable Italian resistance that these ambitions would generate. His October 20 report states that the Italians had naturally viewed with misgivings the Mufti's earlier stated goal of a much smaller independent Arab state in the Fertile Crescent, fearing that such a state would complicate Italy's relations with Saudi Arabia and Egypt, its interests in the Red Sea, and that it would be an obstacle to Italy's natural expansion in the Mediterranean area. Schellenberg observed quite realistically: "In Italy it appears they have not yet achieved final clarity about how one should deal with the entire pan-Arab problem."<sup>110</sup> He also cited Italian fears of possible future German interests and ambitions in the Middle East.

Schellenberg's observations accurately reflected the uncertainty that still existed in German and even Italian plans for the Arab world as they seemed

<sup>109</sup> PA: R27332, Handakten Ettel, Kaukasus Länder, Länder des arab. Raumes im Nahen Osten, Ägypten, Sudan, Tunis, Bd.-, Der Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD an AA/Berlin, z.Hd.v. Herrn Unterstaatssekretär Luther, VI C 13 B. Nr.- 42g, 20. Oktober 1942. During the establishment of the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) in the summer of 1939, Amt-III of the SD Main Office was renamed Amt-VI in the new RSHA. For more on SS foreign intelligence, the new Amt-VI, and the role of Walter Schellenberg, see Katrin Paehler, "Foreign Intelligence in a New Paradigm: Amt VI and the Reich Main Security Office (RSHA)," in *Secret Intelligence and the Holocaust*, ed. David Bankier (New York: Enigma Books, 2006), 273–300; and "Creating an Alternative Foreign Office: A Re-assessment of Office VI of the Reich Main Security Office," *Journal of Intelligence History*, 8 (2008): 25–42. See also Reinhard Doerries, *Hitler's Intelligence Chief: Walter Schellenberg* (New York: Enigma Books, 2009).

<sup>110</sup> PA: R27332, Handakten Ettel, Kaukasus Länder, Länder des arab. Raumes im Nahen Osten, Ägypten, Sudan, Tunis, Bd.-, Der Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD an AA/Berlin, z.Hd.v. Herrn Unterstaatssekretär Luther, VI C 13 B. Nr.- 42g, 20. Oktober 1942. On October 10, Al-Husayni had asked Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop to send him to North Africa so that he might help organize and lead Arabs in support of Axis forces in the region. See Höpp, *Mufti-Papiere*, 91–92.





PHOTO 6.4. Walter Schellenberg (September 1943).  
Courtesy Bundesarchiv, Berlin.

poised to achieve victory in North Africa and, via the Caucasus, eventually in the Fertile Crescent. However, aside from the obvious goal of military victory in North Africa and the Middle East and the establishment of several German air and naval bases in French northwest Africa,<sup>111</sup> the only clear political objectives in the Arab world that Hitler's regime had articulated through October 1942 was that Italian and French interests, in consultation with Germany, would take precedence over the general Arab goal of independence in some form in any postwar settlement. This was quite clear, of course, with regard to North Africa. The content of Schellenberg's October 20 memorandum to Martin Luther in *Abteilung Deutschland*, the Nazi party section in the German Foreign Office, was not forwarded to Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop and State Secretary von Weizsäcker until a month later. Luther commented on the content of Schellenberg's memorandum, and stressed the rather sudden expansion of the Mufti's ambitions into North Africa on the expectation that Axis forces under Rommel would soon achieve victory. Luther observed that "[Schellenberg's] communication talks a lot about the position of Italy, which is following the Grand Mufti's efforts with suspicion and mistrust,

<sup>111</sup> See Goda, *Tomorrow the World*, 16 ff.

including the Grand Mufti's hopes for German assistance for his plan to build a volunteer Arab Legion in North Africa. . . ."<sup>112</sup>

Al-Husayni was tireless in his efforts to influence Axis planning and policy in North Africa in the critical months of November and December 1942. In a November communication with Karl Kapp of the Information Department (*Informationsabteilung*) in the German Foreign Office, he sought to shape the content of German and Italian propaganda directed specifically at North African Arabs, one that had targeted the Jews and America as the enemies of the Arabs and of all Muslims. The Mufti suggested a shift in emphasis in Axis propaganda to a primary goal of achieving independence for the Arabs of North Africa.<sup>113</sup> In another November memorandum to Kapp, the Mufti bemoaned past German policy toward the Arabs of North Africa, particularly with regard to its avoidance of formally endorsing their independence. In Tunisia, for example, he asserted that sympathy for Germany, although still widespread, was nevertheless declining because of Germany's deference to Vichy French interests.<sup>114</sup> He reported the same development in Algeria, while noting British propaganda efforts against Vichy France that included Allied promises of independence after the war. This similarly undated memorandum to Kapp and the German Foreign Office concluded with a warning that the Free French were already in the majority among French citizens in North Africa, and that they would become even more dominant should the British counter-offensive against Rommel in Egypt succeed, and should British forces turn the tide of battle and approach Tripoli in western Libya. The Mufti made the following general conclusion: "Disappointment with Germany is great. In many areas, unrest and fear of the Italians and of the Spaniards rules. These are all factors that British propaganda knows how to exploit for its own purposes."<sup>115</sup>

On November 18, 1942, al-Husayni appealed to German Ambassador von Mackensen in Rome in his persistent effort to elicit a formal Axis declaration of support for Arab independence in North Africa. The memorandum, in English, once again tried to paint a negative picture of Germany's standing among North African Arabs due to its deference to French interests. He reasoned: "I have always appreciated the Axis point of view which aimed at preventing France from taking sides with the Allies; but the information I was receiving, had always made very doubtful the intentions of France to resist the Allies seriously. It was felt, also, that the Axis was gradually losing the sympathy of the Arabs in the Maghreb, (North Africa) owing to its policy of cooperation with France."<sup>116</sup> The Mufti further called for a new Axis policy in North Africa, one that included the formation of a "Maghrebi Liberation

<sup>112</sup> PA: Inland II-Geheim, Berichte und Meldungen zur Lage im und über den Nahen Osten, Bd.-, Vortragsnotiz, Luther, 17. November 1942.

<sup>113</sup> Höpp, *Mufti-Papiere*, 93–97. This document is undated.      <sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.      <sup>115</sup> *Ibid.* 102.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

Army” composed of North African Arab prisoners of war and workers in France, as well as North African Arab troops currently in the French army there. He reminded von Mackensen that North Africa west of Libya was not yet under Axis military control, and that it therefore posed a potentially serious problem for the Axis war effort. Nevertheless, he also suggested: “But the Axis can reverse this situation and obtain the above mentioned military advantages if it reveals its good intentions toward Maghreb by publicly promising the Maghrebis freedom and independence, and to assure them about that, by concluding with them a convenient treaty on a basis similar to those of the Anglo-Egyptian and Anglo-Iraqi treaties.”<sup>117</sup> The Mufti concluded his communication to von Mackensen with the unrealistic promise that if the Axis powers did what he was calling for: “. . . they will readily have an army of no less than half a million soldiers. . .” on their side, and that this would have the most positive effect on the Axis campaign in Egypt.<sup>118</sup>

Although Rommel’s offensive in Egypt came to within sixty miles of Alexandria by the end of June 1942, it had been unable to advance any further in the second half of the year. While Britain and the United States were able to rush significant reinforcements to Egypt, Germany and Italy were limited in their ability to resupply the Egyptian front due to enormous demands of the war in the Soviet Union.<sup>119</sup> Nevertheless, haphazard and often contradictory planning for the political reorganization of the Middle East and North Africa continued in Berlin and Rome through the fall of 1942. The three significant, interconnected, and outstanding issues facing the Nazi regime included: the ongoing and intense political rivalry between the Mufti and al-Gaylani regarding current and future Arab leadership; the future political geography of the Arab world; and the satisfaction of German, Italian, and French strategic and imperial interests in the region. In none of these areas was the Nazi leadership entirely certain about the directions it would take as it approached the decisive winter of 1942–1943 and Germany’s disastrous military defeats in Egypt and at Stalingrad. It tried to focus simultaneously on Europe, the military campaign and the political and racial reorganization of Eastern Europe, the extermination of the European Jews, as well as its mostly military effort in North Africa. Those defeats, of course, would render all notions of a “pincer”

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 108–109. With the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936 and the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930, Britain had granted the two Arab states a nominal independence that included alliances of the two Arab states with Great Britain, and continuing British military presence and prerogatives in those two countries.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.* These ideas and suggestions were apparently repeated in a document that the Mufti put together that same day, and then had translated into German. See PA: R29866, Büro des U.St. S., Nord-Afrika I, Bd.-, Abw, I H West/3, Nr. 5214/42 g. Kdos. Betr. Übersetzung einer Denkschrift des Grossmufti von Jerusalem am 18.11.42, 27. November 1942. It appears that the Mufti was prepared to accept a nominal independence, at least to start with, when he stated his readiness to live with an arrangement similar to the Anglo-Iraqi and Anglo-Egyptian models.

<sup>119</sup> Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 350–352.

victory in the Fertile Crescent, the heart of the Arab Middle East, impossible. They would preclude the necessity of reaching any final decisions on the basic political questions in the Arab world.

Amin al-Husayni's suggestion in the fall of 1942 that the states in the Fertile Crescent, the Arabian Peninsula, and North Africa be consolidated into one reasonably unified federation of Arab states was something new in his wartime political thinking. It likely reflected his expectation of imminent Axis victories in North Africa and in the Caucasus in the fall of 1942, expectations that only fueled his ambitions to become the creator and leader of a somewhat unified, Islamic, and pan-Arab state. The Mufti was aware of the likely opposition to his plans from the Axis powers, from France and Spain, as well as from other Arab leaders in the region, including al-Gaylani in Berlin. He had to contend with a continuing lack of clarity and, most of all, immediacy in German thinking with regard to the postwar political reorganization of the Arab world following an imagined Axis victory. With the two military campaigns, upon which any political reorganization of the Middle East and North Africa ultimately depended, coming to a head in the fall and winter of 1942–1943, the German government seemed content to avoid the sort of definitive political decisions that the Mufti and al-Gaylani were seeking, notwithstanding von Ribbentrop's May 14 secret letter to al-Gaylani promising German and Italian support at least for Iraqi independence. This reality, moreover, suited the Fascist government in Rome. However, with the Anglo-American landing in northwest Africa on November 8, 1942, and the simultaneous inability of Rommel's forces to sustain the German offensive in Egypt, the immediate military situation on the ground was uppermost on the minds of the civilian and military authorities in Berlin as their confidence in an imminent military victory began to erode.

The fall of 1942 proved to be pivotal in Germany's uneven wartime political strategy in the Arab world. It was a particularly tentative strategy in the Nazi regime's dealings with the exiled Arab leaders in Berlin. Of course, any German interests in the Middle East were dependent on an Axis military victory; however, Germany's primary focus on the Soviet Union meant that the resources necessary for a military victory in North Africa and the Middle East would be severely limited. Moreover, Berlin's continuing deference to the ambitions of its Italian ally, coupled with the perceived strategic requirements of its relationship with Vichy France and Spain, and constant pressure from al-Husayni and other Arabs in Berlin for an unequivocal Axis commitment to Arab independence and unity resulted in a dysfunctional policy that produced no political or strategic advantages for the Axis war effort in the region. Nazi propaganda was not nearly enough to compensate for this level of political uncertainty and confusion, let alone Berlin's continuing reluctance to openly support complete Arab independence. The mobilization of Arab nationalist opinion and political action in the form of uprisings behind Allied lines, presented to Hitler and Mussolini by the Mufti and others as both essential to an Axis victory and possible only with a clear, forceful, and public

commitment by the Axis to Arab independence, never materialized. It is also highly questionable whether an Arab revolt would have occurred even if Hitler and Mussolini had made such declarations in 1941 and 1942. With the possible exception of the Iraq coup in April and May 1941, the Arab world remained relatively quiet during the war years, in stark contrast to the years prior to 1939.

By the end of 1942, the tide of battle turned decidedly against the Germans, making Germany's often murky policy toward the Arabs and the Middle East increasingly inconsistent, a development that will be considered in the next chapter. Rommel's forces were stopped in Egypt in late October, and Anglo-American forces landed in Morocco and Algeria on November 8, 1942. Moreover, the Soviet Union's counteroffensive on the Volga in late November of that year ended any German hopes for entering the Middle East through the Caucasus, and set the stage for the massive German defeat at Stalingrad three months later. The New Year 1943 would begin on a very different note than the start of the previous year, which had followed the Mufti's recent arrival in Berlin and his meeting with Hitler in November 1941. In less than six months, Axis troops would be defeated in Tunis and expelled from North Africa in May 1943. The final end to any Axis presence in the Arab world relegated it even more than previously to the periphery of Germany's strategic interests and policies for the remainder of the war. It also produced a new and very different environment in which the Mufti and al-Gaylani had to function, one with altered priorities that would relegate them to increasing irrelevance.

## Collapse and Irrelevance, 1943–1944

### NORTH AFRICA, CONTINUITY, AND COLLAPSE

Through the fall of 1942, even with the Anglo-American landings in Algeria and Morocco in early November, Hitler maintained his opposition to the dismantling of the French colonial empire in North Africa and elsewhere. His opposition, while taking into account the imperial ambitions of his Italian ally, included a willingness to accommodate some adjustments in colonial boundaries after a victorious war. In his very long letter to Marshal Pétain of November 26, Hitler emphasized the common interests of France and the Axis powers in defeating Great Britain and the United States. With reference to France's colonial position in North Africa, Hitler reassured Pétain that the Axis powers would restore French colonial rule in North Africa:

Furthermore it is my unalterable decision to help France win back the colonial territories that, in spite all of their assertions to the contrary, were stolen by the Anglo-Saxons, and to do so with all of the means available to the Reich. It was neither the German nor the Italian intention to destroy the French colonial empire.<sup>1</sup>

On that same day, Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop sent a telegram to French Premier Pierre Laval in which he stated that one of Germany's main aims in North Africa was to win back for France its colonial empire, much of which had fallen under the control of Anglo-American forces by the end of November.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, at the end of 1942, as Axis forces were retreating in North Africa in the face of Anglo-American victories in both eastern and

<sup>1</sup> PA: R29866, Büro des U.St.S., Nord-Afrika I, Bd.-, Hitler/Führerhauptquartier an Marschall Pétain, Telegramm an die DB/Paris, 26. November 1942.

<sup>2</sup> PA: R29866, Büro des U.St.S., Nord-Afrika I, Bd.-, Ribbentrop/Berlin an Laval/Vichy, Telegramm an DB/Paris, Nr. 1652, 26. November 1942.

western North Africa, the constant stream of public statements emanating from the Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro (DNB) was meant to bolster French forces in North Africa in the hope that they would join the battle against the Allies. France, now certainly as much as Italy, was viewed by Hitler's government as a necessary source of support in the region by the end of 1942. These statements were based on the notion of defending France and the French empire against the Allies and the Jews, and the assertion that the German government had never demanded anything from France and never intended any harm to French interests. Rather, according to the oft-repeated line in these DNB reports, Germany always sought "The protection of the French borders and the African possessions of the European peoples."<sup>3</sup> Yet, on November 20, the German Foreign Office issued propaganda guidelines for broadcasts from Tunis in which "Everything that might lead to speculation about the territorial future is to be avoided."<sup>4</sup> In brief, nothing was to be done that might compromise German-Italian relations, or relations between France and Italy. The authority of the Vichy government in North Africa would be strengthened, and Axis troops in Tunisia were to be portrayed as friends of France and defenders of the French empire. At the same time, the propaganda would avoid direct references to Arab independence, and stress instead in very general terms, as in the past, an Axis commitment to friendship and cooperation with all Muslims in the common struggle against Anglo-American imperial ambitions and the Jews in North Africa.

Nevertheless, the German military did favor the Mufti Amin al-Husayni's November 18 suggestions in Berlin to organize and arm an Arab military unit in Tunisia and to incite an Arab insurgency behind enemy lines. This was intended as a means of support for the increasingly difficult military situation facing the Axis in North Africa at the end of 1942. On December 3, the OKW advised the Foreign Office in Berlin that it viewed with favor "...the mobilization of the Arab inhabitants of North Africa for the struggle against the English-American forces that landed in French North Africa, and from Tunisia to incite an extensive revolutionary movement among them and to activate Arab units to fight alongside the Axis powers."<sup>5</sup> The OKW referred to the

<sup>3</sup> PA: R29866, Büro des U.St.S., Nord-Afrika I, Bd.-, Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro Berlin, Nr. 315, 11. November 1942. The reference to "African possessions of the European peoples" likely reflects Hitler's inclination at that time to eventually accommodate French, Italian, Spanish, German, and perhaps even British imperial interests on the African continent after the war. There was certainly no room in this scenario for the Arabs or any other indigenous population in Africa to achieve real independence.

<sup>4</sup> PA: R29867, Büro des U.St.S., Nord-Afrika II, Bd.-, Fuschl Nr. 1621, Telco Nr. 1453, 20. November 1942.

<sup>5</sup> PA: R29866, Büro des U.St.S., Nord-Afrika-I, Bd.-, Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, Amt Ausland/Abwehr, Nr. 1945/42, geh.Kds.AusI.II A 2, an das Auswärtige Amt. 3. Dezember 1942.

Mufti's assurances that North African Arabs could be depended on to fight at the side of the Axis powers, but only "...if they receive assurances from the Axis regarding their freedom and independence."<sup>6</sup>

With its focus naturally on the problematic military situation, the OKW requested that the Foreign Office address this political issue, especially the matter of a promise to the Arabs, given what the OKW considered to be the potential importance of Arab cooperation. Just a few days later, on December 8, several officials from OKW intelligence met with al-Husayni in his apartment in Berlin.<sup>7</sup> At the meeting, the Mufti offered his services in any effort to rouse the people of Tunisia, Algeria, and French Morocco in support of the Axis war effort against the British and the Americans. He emphasized once again that his efforts would only bear fruit "...if the German government and the Axis issue a public declaration that French North Africa...is offered its freedom..."<sup>8</sup> The Mufti was again specific in his offer that, at a minimum, an independent North Africa could accommodate Axis military bases and generally an arrangement along the lines of Egypt after the Anglo–Egyptian Treaty of 1936. He suggested that if a public declaration was not possible at that time, a secret letter to the Bey of Tunis promising Tunisian independence would suffice for the time being. He offered to travel to Tunis immediately, which the Germans had occupied on November 10, in the company of Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, to join with the Bey and with other Arab officials there in an effort to organize uprisings in Algeria and French Morocco. The Abwehr officials at the meeting seemed to agree with the Mufti's assessment and recommended that he be included in future efforts from Tunisia to organize North African Arabs in support of the Axis military campaign. They also suggested using the same strategy, in agreement with the Spanish government, to organize from Spanish Morocco a revolt in French Morocco, also with the Mufti's assistance.

In the German Foreign Office, there were mixed views about the Mufti's recent suggestions to military intelligence, and the latter's initially supportive recommendations. Under State Secretary Ernst Woermann first reported on December 8 that Colonel Erwin von Lahousen, one of the Abwehr officers who took part in the meeting in the Mufti's apartment the previous day, had been informed by State Secretary Ernst von Weizsäcker that: "It is not possible to promise the Arabs of North Africa 'freedom and independence.' It would contradict the Führer's letter to Pétain, and it would also not be

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> PA: R29866, Büro des U.St.S., Nord-Afrika-I, Bd., Vortragsnotiz von Chef Amt Ausl/Abw. Für Chef OKW, Betr. Mufti / Französ.Nord-Afrika, 9. Dezember 1942.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* For more on the Mufti's persistent requests for Axis recognition of independence for North African Arabs, and his repeated offers to go to North Africa and personally organize the Arabs there, see his notes to German Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop and to Admiral Canaris of German military intelligence in December 1942 in Höpp, *Mufti-Papiere*, 120–122.



possible given our relations with Spain.”<sup>9</sup> After noting the significant efforts already undertaken by the Foreign Office in Berlin to arouse the North African Arabs, Woermann did state that the idea of sending the Mufti to Tunis and using him in this capacity was in fact acceptable to Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop as well as to the Italian Foreign Ministry. The timing for sending the Mufti to Tunis would, of course, depend on the needs of the military, and that the OKW would have to make the final decision. Finally, Woermann noted that the German Foreign Office had already advised the OKW that “. . . we are ready to support in every possible way the wishes of the OKW with regard to the Arab uprising.”<sup>10</sup> However, two days later von Weizsäcker pointed out that, among many of those involved in policy making for North Africa, there was growing reluctance to grant the Mufti his wish to come to North Africa to organize an Arab revolt. He mentioned the opposition of France and Spain, and Italy’s reluctance, as well as the reluctance of Admiral Canaris, Field Marshal Keitel, and even Hitler himself to bringing the Mufti to Tunis during the waning days of 1942.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, al-Husayni began the New Year 1943 with several new, formal attempts to convince the German Foreign Office in Berlin of the urgent necessity to publicly declare Axis support for the independence of the Arabs in northwest Africa. By the end of 1942, Germany and Italy had managed to formally endorse some measure of independence for Egypt and Iraq, albeit not officially or publicly. It mirrored Great Britain’s arrangements in those two Arab states in the 1930s, with special considerations for the interests of the two Axis powers. On January 16, in an obvious reference to the Arab states of French North Africa, the Mufti sent a memorandum to the Foreign Office in Berlin that warned of potential Arab support for the American forces in their midst, and suggested that the indigenous Arabs would prefer to join forces with the Axis “. . . if the inhabitants of North Africa are given assurances about their future and their freedom.”<sup>12</sup> He dismissed previous assumptions that the Axis needed French cooperation by making the argument that France had always fought against Germany in the past, and would continue to do so in the future. He warned the German Foreign Office that the French in North Africa had in fact been helping American forces there, that neither the Gaullists nor Vichy would give up the French colonial empire, and that

<sup>9</sup> PA: R29866, Büro des U.St.S., Nord-Afrika-I, Bd.-, U.St.S. Pol.Nr. 802 q Rs, Woermann, 8. Dezember 1942.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> PA: 61124, Politische Abteilung-Geheime Reichssache, Politische Lage in Arabien, Bd. 2, Von Weizsäcker an Von Ribbentrop, St.S. Nr. 719, 10. Dezember 1942. See also Hirszowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, 288–289.

<sup>12</sup> Höpp, *Mufti-Papiere*, 137–141. See also the Amin al-Husayni’s personal letter to Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop, written almost two weeks later on January 28, on pages 144–146. It contains more or less the same reasoning and appeal for an official German declaration of support for Arab independence.

only “...through recognition of the Maghreb can the Axis accelerate the disruption of Allied plans, for only then will it be possible to attract Islamic-Arab forces away from the ranks of the Allies over to the Axis...”<sup>13</sup> Finally, he suggested that while the Arabs of the Maghereb had been distressed by Axis reluctance to guarantee their independence in the past, they still retained sympathy for the Germany because it had defeated France, and because it continued to fight against the Jews and their Anglo-Saxon protectors who were their enemies and the enemies of their fellow Arabs and Muslims in the East. He stressed, however, that the Arabs of the Maghreb needed weapons and other war materials from the Axis and, most of all, political support for their national goals.

In late April 1943, an internal SS memorandum from SS-Gruppenführer Gottlob Berger to Heinrich Himmler included a copy of an April 20, 1943 statement from the Mufti to Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop. It is not clear exactly why the Mufti had given Berger a copy of his earlier, rather lengthy letter to von Ribbentrop, or what precisely the SS leadership’s interest in its contents might have been. Berger was Himmler’s liaison to Alfred Rosenberg’s Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories (Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete), and was also assigned as the SS liaison to the Mufti. In his brief note to Himmler that accompanied the copy of the Mufti’s long letter to von Ribbentrop, Berger called attention to the central point of the enclosed al-Husayni letter, namely that the question of a public declaration in support of Arab independence was more important than ever. Berger repeated the Mufti’s main argument that not only had Winston Churchill and the British government, the United States government, and the French government in exile made repeated and public declarations of support for Arab independence, but that Japan too had made a similar public statement endorsing the independence of India as well as all of the Islamic-Arab lands.<sup>14</sup> Berger emphasized the Mufti’s view that these public declarations had made a deep impression on Arabs and on all Muslims, and that al-Husayni considered “... a similar declaration by the Axis powers under the present circumstances to be useful and necessary.”<sup>15</sup>

In his actual letter to von Ribbentrop, the Mufti had outlined the main propaganda line of the Allies in North Africa, namely that while they, the Allies, had declared their full support for Arab independence, “...the Axis, after three and a half years of war, refuse to issue either a declaration or an official word with regard to the Arab lands of the Middle East and their future. In their [the Allies’] view, this situation reveals the true but not exactly positive

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>14</sup> ZMO: Nachlaß Höpp, 1.26, SS-Gruppenführer G. Berger an den Reichsführer-SS und Chef der Deutschan Polizei, Cd/HA/Be/Ra./VS-Tgb.Nr. 2674/43g., Betr. Schreiben des Groß-Mufti vom 20.4., 29. April 1943.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

intentions of the Axis toward these lands.”<sup>16</sup> Al-Husayni also admitted that in a May 5, 1942 exchange of confidential letters with von Ribbentrop, the German foreign minister had indeed mentioned German support for the independence of the Arab lands of the Middle East, along with the elimination of the Jewish National Home in Palestine. Nevertheless, he asserted that only an official, public declaration that reflected the contents of those letters, in support of Arab independence, would be enough to make the necessary impression on the Arab people in the military struggle with the Allies. He once again insisted that the past rationale of respecting French interests in Syria and Lebanon was no longer relevant, as both states were firmly under the control of Great Britain and the Gaullists, with their assurances of Syrian and Lebanese independence after the war. He concluded with a warning that the Allies, particularly the United States, were gaining support among the Arab population, and that this unfortunate trend had to be reversed. In an obvious reference to the collapsing Axis position in North Africa and, therefore, in the Arab world as a whole, something about which Gotthold Berger had reminded Himmler in his accompanying note, the Mufti warned: “Moreover, the collapsing front in the Arab lands should not lead to the postponement of a declaration, on the contrary, it should give the Axis cause to greater political action. . . Therefore I ask you to take advantage of this opportunity and immediately issue such a declaration.”<sup>17</sup>

From the Middle East, German military intelligence reported from time to time on the intense British propaganda campaign that had called for a unified and independent Arab state after the war, albeit with little if any comment on Arab reactions to this message.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, it is difficult to know exactly what al-Husayni actually knew or believed he knew about public opinion in the Arab lands of North Africa or elsewhere in the Middle East. He had, indeed, promoted himself in Berlin since his arrival there in November 1941 as the most important Arab leader with the most knowledge and understanding of Arab attitudes toward both sides in the war; it was obviously in his political interest to cultivate his image as the most important spokesperson for, and leader of, all Arabs. German military intelligence reports from the region in 1941 and 1942 suggest that while there was always a broad-based antipathy toward the British and the Italians for obvious reasons, and friendly attitudes toward Germany, there was little inclination among Arabs to organize a unified revolt in conjunction with the Axis campaign against the Anglo-Americans and the Jews. There were reports of periodic outbursts of unrest and violence in Syria and Palestine related to food shortages, a growing communist movement in Syria with ties to the Soviet Union, friction between British and Gaullist troops in Syria, continued Jewish immigration into Palestine in 1941 and 1942,

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* The Mufti’s April 20 letter to von Ribbentrop, with his attached suggestion for a declaration, is published in Höpp, *Mufti-Papiere*, 156–159.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>18</sup> See BA-MA: R2-1768, complete file.

and dissatisfaction over various Gaulist measures in Syria and Lebanon.<sup>19</sup> German intelligence even reported that periodic Syrian unrest was due to fears that an Axis victory might mean Italian control, that some of the unrest in Iraq was a result of rumors that Britain intended to create an autonomous Kurdish state, and that sabotage attempts against oil installations in Iraq were aimed at shutting off the flow of Iraqi oil to the Allied war effort.<sup>20</sup> Reports also described the various Bedouin tribes of Iraq as loyal to neither the current Iraqi government, nor to the Allies, nor to the Axis, while the Kurds in Iraq seemed somewhat favorably disposed toward the Iraqi government and the British for their support for Kurdish autonomy.<sup>21</sup> These reports may or may not reflect the realities of the situation on the ground at that particular time, but they do reveal how the Germans viewed those realities in 1942 and 1943. None of this suggests in any way that German intelligence believed that pro-Axis unrest or revolts were possible or even feasible. Therefore, the Mufti's assertions that an official public declaration of Axis support for Arab independence, something he had long sought from the German and Italian governments, was Germany's last and best hope for victory in the Middle East were probably unrealistic and, more importantly, never very convincing for Nazi leaders in Berlin.

German military intelligence in the Middle East in the fall and winter of 1942–1943 was clearly focused on military rather than political questions as the Axis fronts in Egypt and the southern Soviet Union began to collapse almost simultaneously. Germany had been determined to take the Caucasus in 1942, after failing to do so in 1941. Again, after securing control over that region's oil resources, and denying those resources to the Soviets, victorious German forces would pass through Turkey or Iran into the Arab Middle East, where they were supposed to meet up with Rommel's victorious army. However, the British 8th army began its successful offensive against Rommel's forces at El-Alamein in Egypt in late October 1942, and Anglo-American forces landed on the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts of French northwest Africa on November 8. These events forced the Axis to fight yet another two-front war, this one in North Africa, one that would rapidly culminate in the final defeat and expulsion of German and Italian troops from Tunis in May 1943. More significantly, the German southern offensive in the Ukraine had encountered stiffening Soviet resistance in September and October and was soon reversed by the Soviet counteroffensive that began in November 1942, ultimately leading to the crushing defeat and surrender of the Germans at Stalingrad in

<sup>19</sup> See for example BA-MA: RH2-1790, Auswärtiges Amt Nr. Pol. VII 959, Deutsches Vizekonsulat Iskenderun Nr. 539/42 v. 5.7.42, 24. Juli 1942. See also entire file.

<sup>20</sup> See for example BA-MA: R2-1768, Abwehrstelle Frankreich Nr. 5524/42 g.IH, 31. Juli 1942; and Abwehrstelle Belgrad, Tgb. Nr. 6358/10.42, 23. Oktober 1942.

<sup>21</sup> See for example BA-MA: R2-1769, Abschrift Istanbul, 25. Juli 1941; and Niederschrift des Abbas Hilmi vom 1. Dezember 1941, "The Leaders of the [Bedouin] Tribes."

early February 1943.<sup>22</sup> Of course, the enormous logistical demands of the German campaign in the Soviet Union would have a decisively negative impact on Axis military efforts in North Africa. In all of this, the issue of a public declaration of support for Arab independence, along with the idea to recruit and train Arab military units in North Africa, were unable to gain traction in Germany's increasingly precarious military situation as 1942 came to a close.

Much of the German military intelligence in 1941, and particularly in the summer and fall of 1942 and early 1943, related to British military activities and installations in the Fertile Crescent. It seemed to focus on the locations, capacity, and functioning of oil pumping stations, pipelines, and refineries, the electricity grid and installations, and other types of infrastructure, as well as questions about weather and climate. Much of the information was provided by unnamed Arab sources, and there seemed to be a particular German focus on oil facilities.<sup>23</sup> Various acts of sabotage against oil pipelines and other installations were reported as carried out by "unknown perpetrators" (*unbekannte Täter*), and the effectiveness of sporadic Italian and German air attacks on oil refineries and pipelines, along with British and American damage repairs and new facilities construction, were assessed. For example, through much of 1942, one agent identified as Agent A3181 was reporting on the construction of new British air bases in Syria; on American plans to build a naval base in the Persian Gulf from which to supply Soviet forces; on the changing strength of British military units in Iran, Iraq, and Syria, and British plans for a joint British-Arab brigade in Transjordan; on significant British and American road-building projects; and on Britain's natural preference for using Hindu rather than Muslim Indian troops in the Arab countries.<sup>24</sup> Another report from Agent D-89 in Iraq in August 1942 provided details on military fortifications, workshops, bomb and munitions dumps, camps for soldiers, harbor construction, airports, concentration camps for men and women, food shortages, demolition of houses for military purposes, and "terror groups."<sup>25</sup> Those "terror groups" were described as pro-German groups in Baghdad that engaged mainly in the printing and posting of presumably anti-British leaflets.

In North Africa through the fall of 1942, therefore, German intelligence exhibited relatively little interest in the political issues of Arab independence and unity, as intelligence reports seemed to focus mostly on the military situation. To the extent that these reports did take up political matters, specifically the position of the Axis with regard to Arab independence, they indicate very clearly that not much had changed in German thinking on that question. In the late summer and fall of 1942, they continued to emphasize the views of

<sup>22</sup> See Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 420–425, 447–455.

<sup>23</sup> See the many reports in BA-MA: RH2-1773 and 1779.

<sup>24</sup> See the relevant files in BA-MA: RW49-593.

<sup>25</sup> BA-MA: R2-1767, Nr. 5573/42 geh. I os/3, V-Mann D 89 von I Wi., Bericht eines vor kurzem angekommenen Freundes des V-Mannes aus Bagdad, 18. August 1942.

many that the destruction of British power in Egypt would mean the end of Britain's political dominion over the entire Middle East, along with expressions of disappointment that a weak and poorly armed Egyptian army could hardly be counted on to revolt against the British.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, given the relative speed with which Axis forces in North Africa collapsed in 1943, the reports were naturally focused on acute shortages of troops, equipment, and other supplies, as well as the ever-present need for local labor. By early 1943, the Germans were trying to meet severe labor shortages in North Africa and free up German troops for the front by organizing French and Arab workers, and Jewish forced labor. The Germans and Italians requested assistance from French officials in Tunis, and they called for the "formation of purely Arab gangs of workers"<sup>27</sup> (*die Aufstellung von rein arabischen Arbeiterkolonnen*) to engage in hauling equipment, maintaining roads, and other kinds of heavy labor. The Germans were also looking for Arabs to serve as "supplementary assistants" (*zusätzliche Hilfskräfte*) as truck drivers, cooks, and in other similar support functions.<sup>28</sup>

The landing of American and British troops in Morocco on November 8, 1942 was followed by the landing of German troops in Tunisia two days later. This forced the Axis to begin negotiations immediately with the Vichy government and French officials in Tunis for the deployment of Axis troops in Tunisia. Rudolf Rahn, appointed by von Ribbentrop as the German Foreign Office representative in Tunis, arrived there on November 15, and initiated talks in the Tunisian capital that centered on the problems of competing French, Italian, and Arab interests in the days immediately following the Anglo-American invasion in northwest Africa.<sup>29</sup> Rahn's initial concern was to prevent Vichy forces in Tunisia from turning against the Axis, and he reported that the talks between French and German officers were proving to be very difficult. French forces in Tunisia initially promised the Germans their full cooperation, and expressed a willingness to turn over to the Germans, but not to the Italians, the garrisons of Tunis and Bizerta. But on November 10, as twenty-three Italian fighter planes landed at El Aouina without permission, the French protested to the Germans and refused to provide the Italians with maintenance and supplies. According to Rahn, the Germans suspected that some of the French troops in Tunisia were inclined to go over to the American side in any case. Rahn also reported that ". . . I was told by the German military

<sup>26</sup> BA-MA: RH19-VIII, 245, Feindnachrichtenblatt: Stand 22. August 1942; and "Aufgaben der Marine bei der Besetzung Aegyptens," August 1942.

<sup>27</sup> BA-MA: RH19-VIII, 356, Sitzung, General von Arnim, mit Rahn, Heigl, Pomtow, Aschoff, Burandt, Fiedler, Rauff, Protokoll: Arbeiterfrage, 6. Januar 1943.

<sup>28</sup> BA-MA: RH19-VIII, 359, Oberkommando der Heeresgruppe Afrika, Abt. Ia/Id, Nr. 5724/43 geh., 18. April 1943.

<sup>29</sup> BA-MA: RH19-VIII, 358, Rahn, Aufzeichnung für General Nehring über die militärpolitische Vorgänge in Tunis vom 9. – 21. November 1942, Tunis, 21. November 1942. See also PA: R27767, Handakten Rahn, Ein- u. Ausgehende Telegramme 1942 and 1943, entire file; and Rahn, *Ruheloses Leben*, 197–198.

that the available German forces were not nearly enough to disarm the French division that controlled the key strategic positions [passes, bridges, etc.] or to force them to accept our will. . .”<sup>30</sup> In a separate report on the same day, Rahn also indicated that the Germans were trying to prevent Arab actions against the Jewish population and against the French civilian and military authorities, activities that might compromise the calm and order they believed was necessary for an effective defense against Allied forces.<sup>31</sup>

With these factors in mind, the German delegation in Tunis saw little alternative to further negotiations with French authorities there, along with appeals for support from the government in Vichy. On November 19, after German surveillance planes were shot at by French fighters, the Germans protested to the Vichy government, after which Marshal Pétain ordered the commander in Tunis to cease any hostile acts against the Axis. Apparently acknowledging that some in the French military in Tunis were indeed sympathetic to the Allies, Pétain issued the following radio broadcast to French forces in Tunis: “Generals in the service of foreign powers have refused to obey my orders. Generals, officers, junior officers and soldiers of the African army, do not obey these unworthy leaders. Once again, I command you to resist the Anglo-Saxon attack.”<sup>32</sup> Therefore, the Germans saw little alternative to more or less maintaining the status quo in their rapidly diminishing areas of control in North Africa.<sup>33</sup> In the city of Tunis, which Axis troops formally occupied in November 1942, German troops were ordered to cooperate with French authorities. By the middle of December, according to Admiral Canaris and German intelligence, Hitler had ordered German officials in Tunis to support Italy’s political leadership with regard to the question of building a movement for an Arab uprising in Tunisia. Moreover, Canaris stipulated that the Mufti’s demand that he be sent to Tunis would be approved, if at all, by German officials only if the Italians approved. However, Canaris also recognized that, “Any political promises or declarations from the Italian side to Tunisian nationalists will not be made.”<sup>34</sup> He further told the Foreign Office in Berlin that attempts by some to bring the Mufti to Tunis had been cancelled in any

<sup>30</sup> BA-MA: RH19-VIII, 358, Rahn, Aufzeichnung für General Nehring über die militärpolitische Vorgänge in Tunis vom 9. – 21. November 1942, Tunis, 21. November 1942. See also Hirszowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, 271.

<sup>31</sup> PA: R27766, Handakten Rahn, Ausgehende Telegramme, Bd., Rahn/Tunis an AA/Berlin, Telegramm ohne Nummer, 21. November 1942. Rahn indicated that this strategy was working, and that there was relative calm in Tunis in spite of Allied bombing raids.

<sup>32</sup> BA-MA: RH19-VIII, 358, Rahn, Aufzeichnung für General Nehring über die militärpolitische Vorgänge in Tunis vom 9. – 21. November 1942, Tunis, 21. November 1942.

<sup>33</sup> Rahn, *Ruheloses Leben*, 201.

<sup>34</sup> PA: R27827, Handakten Ritter, Tunis, Ukraine, USA, Bd., Abschrift Pol. I M 3423 gRs, Canaris, Aktenvermerk über die Maßnahmen des Amtes Ausl-Abwehr, die auf dem Abw. II-Gebiet in Franz.Nordafrika getroffen, bzw. Vorbereitet worden, 14. Dezember 1942.



case by the chief of the OKW, and that this decision had put an end to any German notions of starting an Arab uprising in Tunisia.<sup>35</sup>

Among the Germans, confusion prevailed over whether it would be worth bringing the Mufti to Tunis and materially backing the organization of an Arab uprising. From Rome, German Ambassador von Mackensen asked the Foreign Office in Berlin for the authority to formally request information from the Italian government regarding its Arab policies in order to better coordinate Germany's response in support of those policies.<sup>36</sup> Just after the new year 1943, von Mackensen was instructed by von Weizsäcker to defer to the Italians on all issues of a political nature, that for the time being there was a consensus in Berlin that the Mufti should not be sent to Tunis, and that the Bey of Tunis should be told that Germany fully supports the Italian position "...that the political and civilian sector should to a significant extent come under German and Italian authority."<sup>37</sup> In other words, by the beginning of 1943, Germany's position on the political issues of Arab independence and Italian political preeminence in North Africa had not fundamentally changed, even as the military position of the Axis powers was rapidly deteriorating. This was reaffirmed in a joint conference in Rome on January 2, 1943 at which the German representatives were instructed by Berlin to obtain agreement from the Italians to retain the French administration of Tunisia, under Axis supervision and control, at least for the time being.<sup>38</sup>

In a March 7, 1943 order to his troops in Tunisia, just two days before he succeeded Rommel as commander-in-chief of Axis forces in North Africa, General Hans-Jürgen von Arnim stipulated that security, order, and quiet must be maintained in the Axis-controlled territories of North Africa. He asserted that this would be possible only if the troops followed the orders of the military and political leadership, which stipulated that: "An involvement of troop commanders and their troops in the politics of the country is forbidden."<sup>39</sup> This approach by Berlin had already been summarized by Rudolf Rahn in his lengthy report of February 10, 1943 on the political situation in Tunisia.<sup>40</sup> While the report is replete with assurances of the friendly disposition of the Arab population toward Germany, it is also quite clear in presenting the Foreign Office's view that nothing should be done overtly that could compromise the political status quo. It argues that, to the extent that any sort of political

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> PA: R27827, Handakten Ritter, Tunis, Ukraine, USA, Bd.-, Telegramm Nr. 5197, Von Mackensen an den Herrn Reichsminister, 23. Dezember 1942.

<sup>37</sup> PA: R27827, Handakten Ritter, Tunis, Ukraine, USA, Bd.-, von Weizsäcker/Berlin an von Mackensen/Rom, Nr. 5240, Betrifft Deutsch-italienischer Meinungs-austausch betr. Tunis, 2. Januar 1943. See also Rahn, *Ruheloses Leben*, 204–205.

<sup>38</sup> Hirszowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, 283.

<sup>39</sup> BA-MA: RH19-VIII, 359, Oberkommande der Herresgruppe Afrika, Abt. A1A./Ic Nr. 471/43 geheim, 7. März 1943.

<sup>40</sup> BA-MA: RH19-VIII, 358, Aufzeichnung Gesandter Rahn, Tunis, 10. Februar 1943.



action was even possible under the current military circumstances, Germany's goals should include the following: maintenance of the French administration in the service of the Axis cause; the elimination of French officials suspected of Gaullist sympathies; the limiting of steps that might compromise French authority in any way, especially "...since France played the role of place holder for Italian interests in Tunisia;" the maintenance of the friendly attitude of the local population in the interest of labor needs for airports, harbors, streets, as well as for news outlets and barracks security, and the possible later recruitment of Arab volunteer units; the exercise of a calming influence on Muslim youth groups in the face of disappointments in the realization of their nationalist goals; and the involvement of Italian authorities in all internal political matters in a way that avoids any overt demonstration of Italian imperial claims in Tunisia, claims "...that could ignite a dangerous backlash on the Arab and French sides to the detriment of our war effort."<sup>41</sup>

Rahn's report is quite clear in its summary of Germany's wartime policy toward the issue of Arab independence, as well as its prognosis for the future. In his section labeled the "Arab Sector" (*Arabischer Sektor*), Rahn recognizes that generally positive Arab attitudes toward Germany were based not merely on feelings nurtured by anti-Semitic and anti-capitalist ideas, but also in the hope that they would soon achieve their national goals with German assistance. He also suggests that given the weakness in Germany's initial position in Tunisia, these Arab sympathies for Germany ought to be strengthened as much as possible and utilized in the Axis war effort. For instance, a recent French release of communist prisoners could be a positive model for the release of other Arab political prisoners, provided they and their popular following could be mobilized against the British and the Americans. In any case, Rahn warned, it would be necessary first to counter the enemy propaganda line "...that German troops have come to Tunisia only to deliver the country to their Italian allies."<sup>42</sup> For the Arabs, Rahn's memorandum recommended the following strategy: "In order to prevent a dangerous slippage in the mood, certain safety valves in the nationalist activities of the Arab Tunisians would have to be opened, without this leading to a damaging compromise of the existing protectorate system and the future position of Italy."<sup>43</sup> In other words, something would have to be done to mollify Arab nationalist hopes without actually doing anything to bring those hopes any closer to fruition.

In his section labeled the "Italian Sector" (*Italienischer Sektor*), Rahn reiterates the political problems in Tunisia and indeed in North Africa in general caused by Arab and French rejection of Italian imperial ambitions. In their efforts to maintain the wartime status quo in Tunisia, the Germans at times found it necessary to side with the French in their disputes with both the Italians

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* See also Rahn, *Ruheloses Leben*, 206–207.

<sup>42</sup> BA-MA: RH19-VIII, 358, Aufzeichnung Gesandter Rahn, Tunis, 10. Februar 1943.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

and the Arabs.<sup>44</sup> After detailing some of the points of conflict among the Italians, the French, and the Arabs in Tunisia, Rahn nevertheless concludes that the only significant policy difference between the two Axis powers in Tunisia concerned the recruitment and use of volunteer Arab military units. He writes of the Italians “. . .that in their opinion this would be dangerous and could promote a revolutionary movement in North Africa that would be directed temporarily against our enemies, but also later could fight against the Axis powers. . .”<sup>45</sup> Rahn further asserts that the Germans believed a political formula could be worked out that, after the defeat of the enemy, would still safeguard Italian interests. In his conclusions, Rahn states that internal political problems could be avoided if the Italians were restrained. He further argues that French influence in the administration, within certain limits, had to be maintained, and that Arab demands might be accommodated within the context of a continuing “protectorate” model. But he warns that the serious shortages of food and other necessities of life posed a real danger of unrest, revolts, and epidemics, problems that political measures would do little to remedy. Rahn concludes: “In the economic, political, and military areas, the securing of supplies and supply lines will in the end be decisive.”<sup>46</sup>

In a March 19 report to General von Arnim, Rahn described his recent conversations with Italian officials in Tunis in which it was agreed that, “The French administration necessary for the Axis war effort will be maintained and supported.”<sup>47</sup> Rahn also reported that he and the Italians had agreed to avoid the issue of future Arab or Tunisian independence. Falling considerably short of the Mufti’s persistent demands for a clear public declaration of support for Arab independence and unity, Rahn reported to von Arnim:

However, the Arabs should know that they will be supported in their struggle to free themselves from French control, and that Italy does not intend a diminution of the Tunisian state or the colonization of the land, but rather will seek a friendly arrangement that will assure equally Italian military and economic interests and the legitimate national demands of the Tunisian government and the Muslim population.<sup>48</sup>

Rahn also alluded to the now largely irrelevant German-Arab *Lehrabteilung* that had been transferred to Tunisia in January. Still technically a part of Felmy’s Sonderstab F in the southern Soviet Union, it was sent to Tunisia as part of plans for use in a possible general Arab uprising against the British, the Americans, and the Gaullists in North Africa. Perhaps in disbelief, von Arnim underlined the words “Arab uprising” (*arabische Aufstandsbewegung*) and

<sup>44</sup> Hirszowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, 282.

<sup>45</sup> BA-MA: RH19-VIII, 358, Aufzeichnung Gesandter Rahn, Tunis, 10. Februar 1943.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> BA-MA: RH19-VIII, 358, Gesandter Rahn, Notiz für Herrn Generaloberst von Arnim, 19. März 1943.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

noted in the margin: “What is this supposed to be?!”<sup>49</sup> (*Was soll das?!*) In any case, the North African territories under Axis control were rapidly shrinking in the winter and spring of 1943, as British forces raced through Libya from the east, and Anglo-American forces through Morocco and Algeria from the west, with both campaigns rapidly converging on Tunisia. By the middle of January, Allied troops were already established inside Tunisia. For Berlin, therefore, its continued reluctance to make a public endorsement of complete Arab independence and unity, along with a continuing if at times diminishing deference to Italian interests in North Africa, remained essentially unchanged in the winter and spring of 1943, even with the growing likelihood of military defeat in North Africa.

Berlin’s essentially “business as usual” approach in North Africa in 1943 included continuing efforts to accommodate French interests within a rapidly shrinking area of Axis control. With British forces in Tripoli by the end of January 1943, there was virtually nothing left of Italy’s prewar African empire in Libya, Ethiopia, and Somaliland. In all of this, Italian, French, and Spanish interests in North Africa would be rendered irrelevant to German policy by the end of the summer with the Axis surrender in Tunis on May 13, Allied landings in Sicily on July 10, followed by the overthrow of Mussolini two weeks later, and then the surrender of Italy on September 8. In this context, it is noteworthy that in December 1942 the German Foreign Ministry had decided to direct French propaganda from occupied France toward the French populations in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia.<sup>50</sup> Conveyed via radio from France and leaflets dropped from airplanes, the message included allegations of sexual assaults by American and English soldiers against French women, as well as Allied plundering of resources, particularly food, and the shipment of these resources to England. Other allegations included statements that the Allies planned to settle two million Eastern European Jews in North Africa, and to absorb North Africa, Madagascar, and Syria into their respective empires. Moreover, the propaganda from occupied France appealed to anti-Jewish sentiments among the non-Arab French populations in North Africa as well, especially condemnation of the lifting of Vichy’s anti-Jewish measures in North Africa by the Allies. Indeed, much has been written about how much of the propaganda emanating from Germany and directed toward the Arab populations of North Africa and the Middle East in the second half of 1942 and in 1943

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* Arab soldiers in the German-Arab *Lehrabteilung*, after more than a year of languishing in the Caucasus and the southern front in the Soviet Union, were moved to Sicily in November 1942, and then to Tunisia in January 1943. Joined by some additional Arab volunteers from North Africa and the Middle East, they engaged in limited military action for the first time in March, as the Axis position in Tunisia was nearing collapse. See NARA: MS/P-207 (Felmy), 25–32.

<sup>50</sup> PA: R102974, Pol.Abt. II, Richtlinien Monaco, Nordafrika, Niederlande, Bd., Notiz für den Herrn RAM, Vorschläge für französische Propaganda nach Nordafrika auf Grund der Anregung Lavals, 21. Dezember 1942.

was about the Jews and Zionism, and the usual anti-Semitic claims that the Jews were seeking to take over all of the Arab lands.<sup>51</sup> Finally, in January 1943, Hitler ordered that any French soldiers who surrendered to, or were captured by, Axis forces in the fighting in North Africa were not to be treated as prisoners of war, but that, “According to their wishes or based on their descent, these members of the armed forces can be sent home to France or can remain free in Tunisia.”<sup>52</sup> In all of this, little attention if any was paid to the questions of fomenting an Arab revolt, and Arab sovereignty and independence.

In the spring of 1943, as the military situation in North Africa continued to deteriorate, the Germans increasingly turned to futile propaganda efforts toward the French population and French and Spanish authorities in northwest Africa. In March, for example, the Foreign Office in Berlin directed the German embassy in Paris to mobilize the French government for the Axis propaganda campaign against the Allies in North Africa. Berlin reasoned that, “Over time it is not possible from the German side in North Africa to maintain and strengthen the position of the French government without it engaging itself fully in the matter.”<sup>53</sup> At about this time, Rahn put together a comprehensive propaganda plan for the German Foreign Office. His undated document with the title “Propaganda in North Africa” (*Propaganda in Nordafrika*) pitches Axis propaganda toward multiple targets, including Free French military forces with accompanying Arab units, the relatively large French and Spanish populations in northwest Africa, and their civilian and military authorities.<sup>54</sup> The message to French troops was mainly about nationalism, loyalty, and military honor. It stressed allegations of America’s betrayal of its promises to the French of North Africa, its purely selfish capitalist motives, and the need for European solidarity against Bolshevism and the Jews. To the Arabs, there were religious messages about preserving Islam, fighting against the Jews and Bolshevism, and defending the Arabs against alleged Anglo-American efforts to steal their resources and food. In particular, Rahn stressed the propaganda line of protecting Muslim women from predatory American and British soldiers. He also identified Spanish Morocco, as yet unoccupied by Allied troops, as an important place from which Axis propaganda materials might be smuggled into French Morocco and Algeria, and generally the need to convince

<sup>51</sup> See Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, chaps. 5 and 6.

<sup>52</sup> PA: R102974, Pol.Abt. II, Richtlinien Monaco, Nordafrika, Niederlande, Bd., Flugblatt „Offiziere, Unteroffiziere, Soldaten des Heeres in Französisch-Nordafrika,“ (no date). This leaflet was also printed in French, Italian, and Arabic. See also PA: R27827, Handakten Ritter, Tunis, Ukraine, USA, Bd., Telegramm ohne Nummer, an Nachr. Ausw.Amt., z.Hd. Botschafter Ritter, 8. Januar 1943. This telegram contained Hitler’s original order about treatment of captured French troops, and copies were also sent to the OKW and other state agencies.

<sup>53</sup> PA: R102974, Pol.Abt. II, Richtlinien Monaco, Nordafrika, Niederlande, Bd., AA/Berlin an DB/Paris, Telegramm, 17. März 1943.

<sup>54</sup> PA: R102974, Pol.Abt. II, Richtlinien Monaco, Nordafrika, Niederlande, Bd., Gesandter Rahn, Propaganda in Nordafrika, (no date).

Spanish officials in Tangiers that the Allies were a threat to Spain's position there. Finally, Rahn emphasized measures to exacerbate tensions between Arab soldiers and their Free French officers. Again, these and other efforts in German propaganda tended to assume the continuation of prewar French-Spanish colonial control, and posited nothing about the independence of Arab North Africa.

The final Allied push in Tunisia began on April 22. On May 11, Rahn was able to escape from Tunisia, just two days before the final surrender of Axis troops.<sup>55</sup> In the end, it appears that there was little if any acceptance by Hitler, his immediate advisers, the higher echelons of the German Foreign Office, the military, or military intelligence of the rationale of the Mufti and other Arab leaders that the absence of a formal and unambiguous German commitment to the independence of all Arabs was a significant factor in the final defeat of the Axis in North Africa in 1943. Indeed, one cannot know whether an aggressive public campaign by the Germans for Arab independence and unity would have produced an Arab uprising that would then have had an impact on the military balance in the region. In retrospect, what analysis there was in Berlin of the defeat in North Africa was predominantly, although not exclusively, military in substance. It included admissions that the Reich's Italian allies were poorly trained, equipped, and led, and that they did not always perform well.<sup>56</sup> There was also grudging praise for the performance of the English and American forces, as well as regrets over the difficulties of resupplying and reinforcing German troops in North Africa.

Some insight into Hitler's assessment of the defeat was provided by Walter Hewel, the German Foreign Office's liaison in Hitler's main headquarters, in late June 1943. In a note to Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop, Hewel referred to ongoing discussions among Hitler and his staff about possibly putting together an official report on the defeat in North Africa, as well as a response to Britain's propaganda campaign depicting the Wehrmacht in the worst terms in the recently concluded North African campaigns. Von Ribbentrop was in favor of a response to Anglo-American propaganda against the German army. Hitler, however, told Hewel that he preferred no official response to the British and Americans, particularly in the interest of avoiding any mention of Germany's dissatisfaction with its Italian ally. According to Hewel, Hitler also rejected using the excuse of resupply and reinforcement difficulties. He paraphrased Hitler in the following way: "We encountered difficulties with the Italians. Nevertheless, one must be particularly careful in this area, for on our

<sup>55</sup> Rahn would briefly be appointed Reich Plenipotentiary to the Fascist National Government in Italy in September 1943. See Conze et.al., *Das Amt und die Vergangenheit*, 269.

<sup>56</sup> See BA-MA: RH2-600, entire file. For Italy in particular, see for example Rommel's generally balanced views on the Italian military in the war in North Africa in Liddell-Hart (ed.), *The Rommel Papers*, 91–101, 126–134, 147, 373.

side as well there were inexcusable failures and sins of omission. It is therefore better not to touch this topic at all.”<sup>57</sup>

In this postmortem, there was no mention of the Arabs, or speculation over what might have happened had Germany officially and publicly committed itself, in spite of perceived Italian and French interests, to a fully sovereign and independent Arab world, and to an all-out armed Arab uprising in support of Axis forces. If there was one point on which most everyone in the Foreign Office, the OKW, and the Abwehr could agree, perhaps with the exception of Hitler and von Ribbentrop, it was the decidedly negative overall impact of Germany’s alliance with Italy on its pursuit of a sound political strategy in the Arab world. Of course, it is difficult to imagine that the desired result for the Axis would have materialized in any case, given the ultimate military imbalance between Axis and Allied military forces beginning in 1942. Rommel, of course, was quick to cite both the political and military factors as causes for his defeat in North Africa, and the consequent loss of the entire Arab world. He criticized the German High Command for refusing to understand the importance of the war in the Mediterranean, and both the military and civilian leadership in general, and by implication Hitler himself, for failing to understand the enormous strategic importance of the Middle East for Germany’s future:

The blame for this – apart from the scant attention given to the African theatre of war by the German High Command, who failed to recognize its immense importance – lay with the half-hearted conduct of the war at sea by the Italians. . . It was obvious that the High Command’s opinion had not changed from that which they had expressed in 1941, namely, that Africa was a ‘lost cause’ and that any large-scale investment of materials and troops in that theatre would pay no dividends. A sadly short-sighted and misguided view!<sup>58</sup>

Rommel reiterated his criticism of Hitler’s generally deferential approach to Mussolini and the Italians on both the military and political fronts with the observation that, “Our Government’s weak policy towards Italy seriously prejudiced the German-Italian cause in North Africa.”<sup>59</sup> Finally, in his section of the 1957 report to the U.S. Army on German Middle East policy during the war, former General Walter Warlimont wrote that Arab sympathy for Germany or the exploitation of Arab nationalism were never major factors for the OKW or for Rommel in the war in North Africa.<sup>60</sup> Nor does it appear that they were for much of the leadership in the German Foreign Office in Berlin, or even for Hitler himself.

<sup>57</sup> PA: R27797, Handakten Ritter, Montenegro, Nordafrika, Norwegen, Bd.-, Botschafter Hewel, Notiz für den Reichsaussenminister, Betr. Englische Propaganda bezüglich Tunesienfeldzug, 25. Juni 1943.

<sup>58</sup> Liddell-Hart (ed.), *The Rommel Papers*, 191. Alfred Rosenberg was quick to blame Italy for the disasters in North Africa, Sicily and southern Italy, and Stalingrad in the summer of 1943. See: USHMM: The Alfred Rosenberg Diary, 26. Juli 1943, 717.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 192. <sup>60</sup> NARA: MS/P-207 (Warlimont), 154.

## THE JEWISH QUESTION, THE MIDDLE EAST, AND PALESTINE

To reiterate, this study will not speculate about how the Arab populations of the Middle East and North Africa, their governments, movements, leaders, and organizations would have reacted to Nazi persecution and mass murder of the Jewish communities in the Middle East and North Africa had the Axis been victorious in the war. With Germany's final defeat in North Africa and ultimately in Europe, we will never have a definitive answer to this question. Indeed, Germany's physical presence in the Arab world ended completely in May 1943, just a little more than a year and a half after the start of the "final solution" in Europe. We do know with reasonable certainty that Hitler's regime planned to extend the final solution from Europe to the Jews of North Africa and the Middle East. This was likely despite the absence of significant German colonial ambitions in the Mediterranean region, and despite its deferential policies toward Italian, French, and Spanish colonial interests in the region. There are, of course, the indirect references at the January 20, 1942 Wannsee Conference to the relatively large number of Jews in French northwest Africa, as well as the formation of an SS-Einsatzkommando that was slated for attachment to Rommel's army in North Africa later that year.<sup>61</sup> Given the region's close geographical proximity to the Nazi genocide in Europe, it would seem self-evident that, flush with total victory in the Soviet Union, North Africa, and the Fertile Crescent, and committed to the destruction of the Jewish people, Hitler would have extended the final solution to the almost three-quarters of a million Jews of North Africa and the Middle East. Undoubtedly, some friction regarding Nazi Jewish policy would have emerged with the Italians, the French, and the Spaniards, as had occurred from time to time in Europe between Germany and its allies and friends. As the new dominant power in the region, however, Germany likely would have found a way to carry out its program of mass murder of the Jews in the Arab world. Moreover, as was certainly the case in Europe, this possibly would have involved the participation of some of the local non-Jewish population.

In his memoir, Rudolf Rahn briefly alludes to the arrival in Tunis of an SD-Sonderkommando at the same time as his own arrival in November 1942.<sup>62</sup> According to Rahn, its general task was to take control of police functions in the city, and its first specific order from Berlin was to arrest the leadership of the Jewish community and to organize Jewish men from the community for forced labor (*Zwangsarbeit*). Rahn claims he intervened with the local, but unnamed SD leader<sup>63</sup> to have the Jewish community leadership released, and that he obtained the SD's approval of his suggestion to have the community

<sup>61</sup> For the background and plans for the formation of this particular SS-Einsatzkommando beginning in the summer of 1942, in anticipation of an Axis victory in the Middle East, see Mallmann and Cüppers, *Halbmond und Hakenkreuz*, 137–147.

<sup>62</sup> Rahn, *Ruheloses Leben*, 203–204.

<sup>63</sup> The official was SS Colonel Walter Rauff. See Robert Satloff, *Among the Righteous: Lost Stories from the Holocaust's Long Reach into Arab Lands* (New York: Public Affairs, 2007), 45.





PHOTO 7.1. Jews rounded up by the Germans in Tunis for forced labor, marching to the port of Bizaret (December 1942).  
 Courtesy Bundesarchiv, Berlin and Yad Vashem, Jerusalem.

leadership rather than the police be responsible for organizing Jewish labor services. Rahn also claims that Jewish workers would receive medical and other support services, and that generally they would receive the same treatment as the volunteer Arab workers. In the end, however, the Germans mobilized some 5,000 Tunisian Jews for forced labor, with some living in work camps and others living outside of the camps. Unlike Arabs who were conscripted for labor, Jewish forced laborers in Tunisia were fed and equipped by their own Jewish community, and did not receive payment for their labor; for Jews, the only exceptions were the approximately 5,000 Italian Jews who were excused from forced labor in early September 1942 at the request of the Italian government.<sup>64</sup> The conditions, of course, were terrible, and the Jewish population in Tunisia was generally subjected to the same sort of violence and intimidation that the Jews in Libya had experienced at the hands of the Germans and the Italians during the Axis retreat from Egypt after El-Alamein, westward through Libya.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> The Italians also feared that losses suffered by Italian Jews in Tunisia damaged overall Italian economic interests in Tunisia, and thus Italy's ambitions there. See ADAP: Serie E, Bd. III, Nr. 259 (Anlage). See also Hirszowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, 277.

<sup>65</sup> For more on anti-Jewish regulations and general Axis persecution of the Jews in French and Italian North Africa during the war, see Maurice Roumani, *The Jews of Libya: Coexistence*,



The final, genocidal stage of Nazi Jewish policy in Europe that began in late 1941 contains aspects that are particularly relevant to Germany's relationship with Arab nationalism and some of its leaders living in exile in Berlin after 1941. It arises from a little known Nazi policy beginning in 1942 of generally exempting some Jews living in German-occupied Europe from the wartime genocide. This policy was referred to indirectly in an unsigned July 12, 1943 internal German Foreign Office memorandum that its authors felt was necessary because "...the solution of the Jewish question in the German-controlled areas had made so much progress that in many places there were only the Jews living in mixed marriages and a small number of foreign Jews left."<sup>66</sup> The document suggested that the policy of allowing allied and neutral states to repatriate their Jewish citizens from German-occupied areas of Europe was being extended one last time in order to give those states a final opportunity to do so before "...the general Jewish measures are also applied to all foreign Jews in areas controlled by Germany."<sup>67</sup> This policy would have implications for Germany's fading interest in the Arab world, particularly for the Mufti and other Arab leaders in Berlin in 1943 and 1944. It would allow the movement of some Jews from Europe, either directly from, or indirectly through, states in western and southeastern Europe and Turkey to the Jewish National Home in Palestine.

Earlier chapters consider Nazi Jewish policy and its connection to Germany's relationship with the Arabs and the Middle East before the war. In part, this is done within the context of a Jewish policy that used Zionism and the Zionist movement and institutions in Germany, London, and Palestine for the promotion of Jewish emigration from central Europe to Palestine before the adoption of the "final solution to the Jewish question in Europe" in 1941. All of this had occurred in spite of growing Arab complaints about Nazi Jewish policy by September 1939. It only ceased with the formal end of Jewish emigration from Europe as part of a policy of systematic mass murder of the Jews in German-occupied Europe. Beginning in 1941, and given the intent of the final solution, all Jewish emigration from Germany and German-occupied Europe to all destinations, including Palestine, was prohibited. However, German willingness to send Jews from Europe to Palestine and elsewhere in fact did not end entirely, despite the Nazi state's closer and more pragmatic wartime relationship with Arab nationalism, Amin al-Husayni,

*Persecution, and Resettlement* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2009), 33 ff; Daniel Carpi, *Between Mussolini and Hitler: The Jews and the Italian Authorities in France and Tunisia* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1994), 205 ff; and Satloff, *Among the Righteous*, 45–56.

<sup>66</sup> PA: Inland II-Geheim, Judenausreise nach Palästina 1943, Bd.-, Vortragsnotiz zu Inl.II 1947 g, 12. Juli 1943.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* See also Nicosia and Browning, "Ambivalenz und Paradox bei der Durchsetzung der NS-Judenpolitik," 216–219. The list of allied, friendly, and neutral states to which this applied included Italy, Switzerland, Spain, Portugal, Sweden, Finland, Hungary, Rumania, and Turkey.

Rashid Ali al-Gaylani, and other Arabs in Berlin beginning in 1941. This was in part the result of the inevitable “friction” between Germany and allied or friendly states in Europe, alluded to earlier. Berlin was not always able to persuade allied or friendly states such as Slovakia, Croatia, Hungary, Rumania, and Bulgaria to comply with its plans, beginning in late 1941, to deport their Jewish populations.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, the regime could not even secure the cooperation of its main ally, Fascist Italy, in the deportation of Jews from Italy and Italian-occupied areas of southern and southeastern Europe.<sup>69</sup>

Further complicating matters was the question of Jews from neutral states such as Turkey and Spain, and the problem of determining their countries of origin. For instance, there existed the possibility of exemptions from the deportations for those Jews in German-occupied Europe who claimed Turkish or Spanish citizenship.<sup>70</sup> These disruptions in Germany’s implementation of the final solution in Europe might shed some light on its ultimate intentions toward the Jewish communities in the Arab world. A willingness to permit some Jews to leave occupied Europe during the final solution might have reflected the intention to murder those same Jews at a later time and in another place. In any case, and for the purposes of this study, the implications of these exemptions for some Jews for Germany’s already problematic relationship with Arab nationalism beginning in 1943 are instructive. On both a racial and geopolitical level, they are another indicator of the general indifference of Hitler’s government toward the Arabs in its approach to the issue of Arab nationalism and independence in a postwar Middle East.

At the height of the systematic annihilation of the Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe in 1943 and 1944, the German Foreign Office and the Sicherheitsdienst (SD) in the SS dealt with the attempts of Jewish organizations and several governments to secure the transfer of some Jews from German-occupied Europe to Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Palestine, or the Americas. The German Foreign Office had some difficulty getting the governments of Hungary, Rumania, and Bulgaria to comply with German requests for the deportation

<sup>68</sup> See Christopher Browning, *The Final Solution and the German Foreign Office* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1978), 102–108.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 134–141, 164–170. See also Dalia Ofer, *Escaping the Holocaust: Illegal Immigration to the Land of Israel, 1939–1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 189–198.

<sup>70</sup> Many who claimed Spanish or Turkish citizenship, and who might be permitted to enter Spain or Turkey, had never resided in those two countries. Some might have been descendants of Jews who had fled Spain during the Inquisition or had emigrated from the Ottoman Empire before the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923. For details on the complex history and identities of Turkish Jews in Europe, as well as Turkish laws that provided for the denaturalization of Turkish citizens who resided abroad for more than five years, and the situation of Turkish Jews residing in Germany, see Corry Guttstadt, *Die Türkei, die Juden und der Holocaust* (Berlin: Assoziation A, 2008), 109–153, 271–282, 481–483; Nicosia and Browning, “Ambivalenz und Paradox bei der Durchsetzung der NS-Judenpolitik,” 218–219. Only about 900 Turkish Jews were returned to Turkey during the war.

of their Jewish populations to Poland from the fall of 1942 through much of 1943. All three countries were involved in various ways in alternative efforts to send some of their Jewish populations to Palestine. An early indication of this came in December 1942 when the Rumanian government was involved in schemes to organize the movement of up to 80,000 Jews from Rumania to Palestine as part of a process in which Jews would pay a substantial fee to the Rumanian government.<sup>71</sup> The German embassy in Bucharest was instructed to strongly oppose the Rumanian effort. It was told to inform the Rumanian government that the Germany could never accept a plan that might end up sending military-age Jewish males to a British-ruled territory, one that involved a German ally concluding an agreement with the enemy, Great Britain, and that would be unacceptable to Arab leaders in the Axis capitals and to Arab opinion in general. Of course, in December 1942, the outcome of the war in North Africa was not yet settled, although the military tide had begun to turn against the Axis by the end of that year. Some Jews from Rumania were able to reach Palestine in January and February 1943, although the Germans were able to stop the process by the end of February through diplomatic intervention with Rumania.

However, the Rumanian example was just part of a larger process that would continue through 1943 and into 1944, much to the consternation of the Mufti and his fellow Arabs in Berlin. Even in January 1943, Martin Luther in the German Foreign Office hinted indirectly in a message to the German embassy in Bucharest that in the end, Germany was determined to remove the Jews from Europe one way or another. He noted “. . .that the Führer is determined in the end to remove all Jews from Europe during the war,” and that “the evacuation of Jews out of Europe is a compelling necessity for the internal security of the continent.”<sup>72</sup> Was this an indication that in certain situations Germany would accept the transfer of some Jews out of German-occupied Europe as an alternative to their deportation to ghettos and extermination camps in Poland? It is likely that this was indeed the case. However, Luther did instruct the German embassy in Bucharest that sending Jews from Rumania to Palestine was generally not in Germany’s interest at the time. Nevertheless, efforts by a few governments and by Jewish organizations to move relatively small groups of Jews out of occupied Europe to Palestine and elsewhere continued in 1943 and 1944. At the same time, German objections to these efforts gradually dissipated, more or less concurrently with the Axis demise and surrender in North Africa in May and the defeat and overthrow of Mussolini in the summer and fall of 1943.

<sup>71</sup> ADAP: Serie E, Bd. IV, Nr. 279, and Bd. V, Nr. 28. See also Browning, *The Final Solution and the German Foreign Office*, 171; Ofer, *Escaping the Holocaust*, 189–190; and Richard Breitman and Allan Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 223 ff.

<sup>72</sup> ADAP: Serie E, Bd. V, Nr. 70.

In early February 1943, the German embassy in Sofia reported to Berlin that Britain, via the government of Switzerland, had notified the Bulgarian government that it would allow almost 5,000 Jewish children from Bulgaria to enter Palestine.<sup>73</sup> After receiving initial assurances from the Bulgarian government that the British offer was nonbinding, the German ambassador in Sofia, Adolf Beckerle, responded that Germany's experience with Jewish emigrants in the past had been negative because they contributed to the anti-German propaganda of Germany's enemies. In fact, according to British radio transmissions, negotiations had been ongoing and steps were being taken to organize the movement of 4,500 Jewish children with 500 accompanying adults from Bulgaria to Palestine. British Colonial Minister Oliver Stanley had informed Parliament of the negotiations and the logistical difficulties associated with the idea, and that earlier agreements had already resulted in the removal of 270 Jewish children from Hungary and Rumania to Palestine.<sup>74</sup> Stanley made his statement to Parliament within the context of Britain's May 1939 White Paper on Palestine that allowed the immigration of an additional 75,000 Jews to Palestine over a five-year period, to the end of March 1944; by the autumn of 1943, some 44,000 immigration certificates had been used, leaving about 31,000 certificates still available for the remaining year. With the support of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA), the German Foreign Office instructed Beckerle in Sofia to firmly oppose the British offer to the Bulgarians, with the assertion: "Our experiences support the fear that these 5,000 Jews under English influence will become 5,000 propagandists against our anti-Semitic measures."<sup>75</sup> The instructions also included the assertion that the movement of Jews from Bulgaria to Palestine would contradict German policy toward the Arab world: "Also, such a measure would not be in harmony with our policy toward the Arab people."<sup>76</sup> To remain consistent with its current propaganda campaign in the Arab world, and given the fact that the war was still raging in North Africa, the German Foreign Office continued to use the argument that support for removing Jews from Bulgaria, or from anywhere in Europe, to Palestine would contradict its official support for the Arab people and their opposition to Zionism and Jewish immigration to Palestine.

Although Germany's opposition to the movement of Jews from Bulgaria to Palestine was clear, the Bulgarian government was not entirely inclined to

<sup>73</sup> PA: Inland II-Geheim, Judenausreise nach Palästina 1943, Bd.-, DG/Sofia an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 176, 4. Februar 1943.

<sup>74</sup> PA: Inland II-Geheim, Judenausreise nach Palästina 1943, Bd.-, AA/Berlin an DG/Sofia, D III 141 g, 13. Februar 1943. See also Ofer, *Escaping the Holocaust*, 189; and Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Vol. 3 (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985), 1123.

<sup>75</sup> PA: Inland II-Geheim, Judenausreise nach Palästina 1943, Bd.-, AA/Berlin (von Hahn) an RSHA/Berlin (Eichmann), D III 149 g, 8. Februar 1943.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

accept the German position. To appease the Germans, the government in Sofia decided to inform the Swiss intermediaries in February that although they were in fact not opposed to the idea of Jewish emigration from Bulgaria to Palestine, the logistical problems involved in moving a large group of people in wartime from Bulgaria to Palestine rendered the current plan unworkable.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, in March 1943, the communications in Berlin between the Foreign Office and the SS increased as rumors spread of other initiatives, including those involving Palestinian Jewish officials in Turkey and even Rumania, to move Jews from the Balkans via Turkey to Palestine. In early March, for example, Adolf Eichmann notified the German Foreign Office that Jewish officials working out of Istanbul were trying to arrange transit visas for 1,000 Jewish children and 100 accompanying adults overland from Rumania through Bulgaria to Turkey, and then on to Palestine. Eichmann demanded that this planned emigration be prevented, if possible.<sup>78</sup> The German embassy in Bucharest followed up on this effort a week later by informing Berlin that Turkey was indeed willing to provide the 1,000 Jewish children and accompanying adults from Rumania with the necessary transit visas for their journey to Palestine, and that 150 children were about to leave Rumania for Palestine, via Bulgaria and Turkey, in the next few days.<sup>79</sup> The German Foreign Office and the SS joined forces to do what they could to prevent Jews from leaving Rumania and Bulgaria for Palestine, although their options were limited.<sup>80</sup> At the same time, communications from the German embassy in Budapest arrived in Berlin reporting that Britain had issued entry permits to Palestine for up to eighty Jewish children from Hungary, although the emigration of these children had not yet taken place.<sup>81</sup>

The role of Turkey in this developing process was very important. By 1943, Istanbul had replaced Switzerland as the central location for officials from the Jewish Agency for Palestine and other Zionist organizations from Palestine involved in efforts to rescue Jews from German-occupied Europe.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>77</sup> PA: Inland II-Geheim, Judenausreise nach Palästina 1943, Bd.-, DG/Sofia an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 321, 27. Februar 1943. See also Breitman and Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews*, 220 ff.

<sup>78</sup> PA: Inland II-Geheim, Judenausreise nach Palästina 1943, Bd.-, Der Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD (Eichmann) an das Auswärtige Amt-Berlin, IV B 4 b-3 – 89/43g, 3. März 1943.

<sup>79</sup> PA: Inland II-Geheim, Judenausreise nach Palästina 1943, Bd.-, DG/Bukarest an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 1283, 10. März 1943.

<sup>80</sup> PA: Inland II-Geheim, Judenausreise nach Palästina 1943, Bd.-, Der Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD an das Auswärtige Amt/Berlin, IV B 4 3349 / 42g (1425), 10. März 1943; and AA/Berlin (LR Rademacher) an DG/Bukarest, Telegramm ohne Nummer, März 1943.

<sup>81</sup> PA: Inland II-Geheim, Judenausreise nach Palästina 1943, Bd.-, DG/Budapest an AA/Berlin, G Nr. 66, Abtransport jüdischer Flüchtlinge nach Palästina, 11. März 1943.

<sup>82</sup> Stanford Shaw, *Turkey and the Holocaust: Turkey's Role in Rescuing Turkish and European Jewry from Nazi Persecution, 1933–1945* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 256–258, 268 ff. For the most complete and detailed account of the efforts of Zionist and other



PHOTO 7.2. Simon Brod, Jewish Agency for Palestine representative in Istanbul, and Jewish refugees from Transnistria (May 1944).  
 Courtesy United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington D.C.

Its geographical proximity to both Palestine and eastern Europe, and the fact that, unlike Switzerland, Turkey was not surrounded by Germany, Italy, and German-occupied France, made it a natural gateway to Palestine for Jews able to escape from German-occupied Eastern Europe. So too did the apparent willingness of the Turkish government to help in the rescue process. For instance, since implementation of its “Special Transit Law No. 2/15132” on February 12, 1941, Turkey had permitted Jewish refugees with valid Palestinian immigration certificates to receive Turkish transit visas for passage through Turkey on their way to Palestine.<sup>83</sup> In all, more than 4,000 Jews passed through Turkey in route to Palestine in 1941 alone, a number that grew

Jewish organizations to organize rescue operations in German-occupied Europe beginning in 1942, see Aronson, *Hitler, the Allies, and the Jews*, Chaps. 18–30. For the significance of Istanbul in those operations, see Tuvia Friling, “Istanbul 1942–1945: The Kollek-Avriel and Berman-Ofner Networks,” in *Secret Intelligence and the Holocaust*, David Bankier (ed.) (New York: Enigma Books, 2006), 105–156.

<sup>83</sup> Shaw, *Turkey and the Holocaust*, 261–264. See also Ofer, *Escaping the Holocaust*, 164; and Guttschadt, *Die Türkei*, 236–238. Those without entry permits for Palestine who arrived in Turkey were usually permitted to stay until they could be smuggled into Palestine “illegally.”

significantly between 1942 and 1945.<sup>84</sup> This increase can be explained at least in part by the eventual German decision to participate in, rather than resist, various “exchange plans” with Great Britain, negotiated through the offices of the International Red Cross in Geneva and Ankara. These plans involved the exchange of Jews from German-occupied Europe for detained German nationals held in various parts of the British Empire since the beginning of the war. Most of the Jews involved in these exchanges, from countries such as Greece, Bulgaria, Rumania, Poland, and Hungary, ended up in Palestine in 1943 and 1944.

In the end, German Foreign Office efforts to completely stop the movement of Jews from the Balkans to Palestine in the winter and spring of 1943 were not successful. German diplomatic missions in Budapest, Bucharest, and Sofia acknowledged their inability to stop the process entirely. As the German embassy in Sofia admitted on March 13, nothing could be done to accommodate an RSHA request to stop the passage through Bulgaria of a transport of 150 Jews from Rumania, and the German ambassador indicated that he would not petition the Bulgarian government about it because “...there does not exist any chance for success, that only the distrust of the Bulgarian government would be aroused, and its relationship with Rumania would be damaged.”<sup>85</sup> There seemed to be some resignation on the part of the German Foreign Office and its representatives in the Balkans that, regardless of German entreaties to the Hungarian, Rumanian, and Bulgarian governments to stop the transports, there was little that could be done to stop them completely. In a brief note to Eichmann in the RSHA in late March, the German Foreign Office admitted that in spite of the assurances of the Bulgarian and Rumanian governments that they would take steps to comply with Germany’s requests: “It is however still questionable, whether and to what extent these steps can be successful.”<sup>86</sup>

By April 1943, the movement of Jewish refugees from Rumania to Palestine via Bulgaria and Turkey had apparently reached a point at which the ability of the German government to effectively influence the actions of the Rumanian and Bulgarian governments almost disappeared. The Foreign Office in Berlin telegraphed its embassy in Sofia asking for clarification about a recent transport of Jewish children from Rumania to Palestine via Bulgaria. The telegram reported that Germany’s “Bucharest embassy reports that transport of Jewish children numbering seventy-seven persons from Rumania to Palestine left

<sup>84</sup> Dalia Ofer and others conclude that more than 13,000 Jewish refugees managed to escape German-occupied eastern and southeastern Europe, and were able to reach Palestine mostly via Turkey between 1940 and 1944. See Ofer, *Escaping the Holocaust*, 320.

<sup>85</sup> PA: Inland II-Geheim, Judenausreise nach Palästina 1943, Bd.-, DG/Sofia an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 390, 13. März 1943.

<sup>86</sup> PA: Inland II-Geheim, Judenausreise nach Palästina 1943, Bd.-, AA/Berlin an das Reichssicherheitshauptamt, D III 403 g, 26. März 1943.



Bucharest on March 14 and has already passed through Bulgaria. On instruction from Sofia, a Bulgarian transit visa was given [to the transport] by the Bulgarian embassy in Bucharest.”<sup>87</sup> At about the same time, in early April, the German embassy in Bucharest reported to Berlin that the Rumanian travel agency “Romania” intended to transport seventy-four Jewish children from Rumania through Bulgaria and Turkey to Palestine.<sup>88</sup> The travel agency even requested the approval of the German embassy, but was informed “. . .that it is not in the political interest of the Reich that emigration should take place not only from Rumania but from Europe in general in view of the desired solution to the Jewish question in Europe.”<sup>89</sup> The German embassy in Bucharest suggested that should this particular transport leave Rumania, something should be done to stop it as it makes its way through Bulgaria. On April 14, the Foreign Office in Berlin, after admitting that German officials in Bucharest and Sofia had been unable to prevent the transport of Balkan Jews to Palestine, asked the German embassy in Ankara whether it might be able to persuade the Turkish government to cease issuing transit visas for Jews on their way to Palestine.<sup>90</sup> It was unlikely that German pressure on a neutral Turkey would be effective when it was not on Germany’s allies and friends in Budapest, Bucharest, and Sofia. In any case, Turkish assistance in preventing the movement of Jews from Europe to Palestine would prove to be unnecessary beginning in May as the Nazi regime, in an apparent change of policy, began to accept the reality that relatively small groups of Jews from southeastern and even from western Europe would be permitted to leave Europe and go to Palestine.<sup>91</sup>

In mid April 1943, Marshal Antonescu, the leader of Rumania, met with Hitler near Salzburg. A brief telegram from the German embassy in Bucharest to the Foreign Office in Berlin of April 30 reported that the Rumanian government was in possession of 70,000 immigration certificates for the

<sup>87</sup> PA: Inland II-Geheim, Judenausreise nach Palästina 1943, Bd.-, AA/Berlin (LR Wagner) an DG/Sofia, Telegramm ohne Nummer, April 1943.

<sup>88</sup> PA: Inland II-Geheim, Judenausreise nach Palästina 1943, Bd.-, DG/Bukarest an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 1816, 4. April 1943.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> PA: Inland II-Geheim, Judenausreise nach Palästina 1943, Bd.-, AA/Berlin an DB/Ankara, e.o. Inl.II A 918 g, 14. April 1943. In her essay, Tuvia Friling refers to Abwehr and Gestapo awareness of Yishuv rescue networks in the Balkans. For instance, she writes that German and Rumanian officials accepted bribes in return for allowing the purchase and preparation of the Struma, a rescue ship, for the transport Jews to Palestine. The Struma sank off the coast of Turkey in February 1942. See Friling, “Istanbul 1942–1945,” 155–156.

<sup>91</sup> In the summer and autumn of 1943 and through the first half of 1944, the SS also approved the transfer of at least several hundred Jews from transit camps in Holland, Belgium, and possibly France, to Palestine. Some were transferred by train via Bergen-Belsen and Vienna to Istanbul and from there through Syria and Lebanon to Palestine. See Bernard Wasserstein, *The Ambiguity of Virtue: Gertrude van Tijn and the Fate of the Dutch Jews* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 156–166, 198–212.



immigration of Jewish children from Rumania to Palestine. The telegram also revealed that the Rumanian government had informed the embassy that at his recent meeting with Hitler near Salzburg, Antonescu had obtained the German government's agreement to allow Jews to leave Rumania for Palestine.<sup>92</sup> In what appeared to be a significant policy change, the embassy requested instructions from Berlin on this issue for its future dealings with the Rumanian government. Eichmann's office, on the other hand, continued to operate on the assumption that no Jewish emigration was to be permitted from the Balkans or from any other part of Europe. Yet it did at least entertain a suggestion from the Bulgarian government that it might be possible to send 8,000 Bulgarian Jews to Palestine in exchange for the repatriation of 8,000 Bulgarian nationals living at the time in South America.<sup>93</sup> In any case, there was some confusion within the German Foreign Office and the RSHA over what Hitler or someone else in the German leadership had actually said to Antonescu when they met in April. It is likely that von Ribbentrop rather than Hitler had promised something to Antonescu at those mid-April meetings, something that related to the alleged existence of immigration certificates for Palestine for some 70,000 Jewish children in Rumania, and that von Ribbentrop had merely promised to consider Antonescu's request, but that he had not yet approved it.<sup>94</sup>

None of this appears to have been entirely secret in Berlin. Amin al-Husayni, perhaps because he had begun to sense a change in German policy on this issue, entered the fray in early May 1943. He began to express his strong opposition to any policy that allowed Jews to leave Nazi-occupied Europe for Palestine.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, he did so at precisely the same time that the German military presence in the Arab world was ending entirely with the Axis surrender in Tunisia on May 13, 1943. On May 6, the Mufti appealed to the Bulgarian government to do everything in its power to halt the movement of Jews from the Balkan states to Palestine.<sup>96</sup> Most of the letter reiterates the old anti-Semitic notions about an international Jewish conspiracy to dominate the world, and its intention to use Palestine as the base for this conspiracy. The Mufti then pleaded: "Beyond that, the emigration of the Jews to the Arab lands, and

<sup>92</sup> PA: Inland II-Geheim, Judenausreise nach Palästina 1943, Bd.-, DG/Bukarest an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 2370, 30. April 1943. See also Ofer, *Escaping the Holocaust*, 192.

<sup>93</sup> PA: Inland II-Geheim, Judenausreise nach Palästina 1943, Bd.-, Der Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD (Eichmann) an das Auswärtige Amt, IV B 4, 3349/42g (1425), 3. Mai 1943, and 4. Mai 1943.

<sup>94</sup> PA: Inland II-Geheim, Judenausreise nach Palästina 1943, Bd.-, AA/Berlin (Ribbentrop) an DG/Bukarest, Telegramm ohne Nummer, Mai 1943. The exact day in May is not specified, but it was likely in the first week of the month. See also Vortragsnotiz über Herrn U.St.S., Herrn St.S., zur Vorlage bei dem Herrn Reichsaussenminister, 7. Mai 1943.

<sup>95</sup> For the Mufti's efforts to block the movement of Jews from Bialystok and Hungary, see Aronson, *Hitler, the Allies, and the Jews*, 330 ff.

<sup>96</sup> Höpp, *Mufti-Papiere*, 163–164.

especially to Palestine, violates the most important existential interests of the Arab people, who in every way stand at the side of the Axis and their allies.” He closed with the request that the Bulgarian government prevent any Jewish emigration from Bulgaria, and to send the Jews instead “. . . where they will be under strong control, e.g. to Poland.”<sup>97</sup> On May 13, the day of the Axis surrender in Tunis, al-Husayni appealed to Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop with the same arguments about Jewish conspiratorial intentions: “The Arabs see in the emigration of the Jews to their lands a threat to their interests, which compels me to draw your Excellency’s attention this question and its damaging consequences for the Arabs.”<sup>98</sup> The Mufti’s appeal to von Ribbentrop reflected his awareness of the ongoing issue of the movement of relatively small numbers of Jews from southeastern Europe to Palestine since the beginning of 1943. His relatively late intervention in the matter might be explained by the realities of Germany’s final defeat in North Africa in April and May and its disastrous implications for his plans to lead the movement for Arab unity and independence in alliance with the Axis powers.

Notwithstanding his failure to obtain an official, blanket Axis endorsement of the unity and independence of the Arab world, the final defeat and surrender of German and Italian forces in North Africa in the spring of 1943 reduced the Mufti’s chances of obtaining meaningful German help to zero. Moreover, whatever relevance the Arabs and Arab nationalism had had for Hitler’s geopolitical strategy and aims in the war all but disappeared, as an increasingly isolated Reich was forced to put all of its resources into defensive and ultimately futile military campaigns in eastern, southern, and western Europe. By the summer of 1943, with almost two years of war still ahead of them, al-Husayni, al-Gaylani, and other Arab officials in Berlin found it virtually impossible to look to an Axis victory and the end of British domination in North Africa and the Middle East. On the other hand, it also meant that the German government was bound even less to maintain at least some modicum of sensitivity to the political rhetoric of sympathy for and collaboration with the Arab people, and with all Muslims in general, that nevertheless remained the basis of its propaganda campaign toward the Arab world for the rest of the war.

On June 10, almost a month after his previous note to von Ribbentrop, the Mufti wrote once again to the German foreign minister, and to the former Italian foreign minister, Count Ciano. He expressed his disappointment that Jews from Hungary, Rumania, and Bulgaria had been arriving in Palestine, in spite of assurances from Berlin that the process would cease. An English version of the letter, sent to von Ribbentrop in French, was also sent to Ciano.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 164. It seems likely that by the middle of 1942, the Mufti was generally aware of the fate of the Jews who were being deported to Poland since the fall of 1941. See Gensicke, *Der Mufti von Jerusalem*, 104.

<sup>98</sup> Höpp, *Mufti-Papiere*, 165. See also ZMO: Nachlaß Höpp, 1.27, AA/Berlin (Wagner) an DB/Sofia, Akt.z. 1294, Inl. II, Mai 1943.

Directing his anger to the Hungarian, Rumanian, and Bulgarian allies of the Axis, the Mufti wrote: “I deem it fitting to inform Your Excellency that the loyal Arab friends of the Axis powers are deeply offended that their friends, partners of the Axis powers, are furthering Jewish-English objectives by permitting the transfer of Jews, agents of the British and Communism and enemies of the Arabs and Europe, to Arab Palestine.”<sup>99</sup> The Mufti pleaded with von Ribbentrop and Ciano to give their attention to the matter and to do everything in their power to stop it. Similarly, the Mufti sent letters to the Rumanian and Hungarian foreign ministers with the request that they too take steps to prevent the further transfer of Jews from their countries to Palestine.<sup>100</sup>

The Foreign Office in Berlin, in a note to the German embassy in Rome on June 19, dismissed al-Husayni’s concerns as exaggerated. It contrasted the larger number of immigration permits issued by the British through Swiss diplomatic officials in the Balkans to the relatively small number of Jews who had actually arrived in Palestine through these channels since the end of 1942, numbers that the Mufti cited in his June 10 letter to von Ribbentrop and Ciano.<sup>101</sup> After insisting that the German government had vigorously intervened with Balkan governments in an effort to stop the movement of Jews to Palestine, Berlin instructed the embassy in Rome to inform the Mufti that the success of this intervention was reflected in the fact that only seventy-five Jews had reached Palestine via Turkey. It also insisted that British announcements of large numbers of immigration certificates and the impending arrival in Palestine of large numbers of Jews from Europe was pure propaganda. However, the June 19 German Foreign Office memorandum did qualify its argument by admitting that even with the “positive intentions” of Germany’s friends and allies in the Balkans, it was not possible to prevent a limited “illegal” immigration process into Palestine. While it is difficult to know precisely how many Jews were able to reach Palestine from the Balkans in 1942 and 1943, it seems clear that the numbers, although still relatively modest, were nevertheless much higher than just seventy-five.<sup>102</sup>

By the middle of the summer of 1943, and despite its previous assurances to the Mufti, the German Foreign Office had already indicated its intention to allow some Jews to leave Europe for Palestine in exchange for German or other Axis nationals who were in British custody. Once again using the Swiss

<sup>99</sup> Höpp, *Mufti-Papiere*, 168. <sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 179–181.

<sup>101</sup> PA: Inland II-Geheim, Judenausreise nach Palästina 1943, Bd.-, AA/Berlin (Wagner) an DB/Rom, Inl.II 1682g, Betr. Juden-Auswanderung nach Palästina, 19. Juni 1943; and LR von Thadden sofort zunächst Herrn LR Melchers Pol. VII, 15. Juni 1943. The German Foreign Office was likely referring to the small group of Palestinian Jews, with passports from the Palestine Mandate, who were exchanged in late 1942 for German nationals in British custody. These sixty-nine Palestinian Jews arrived in Palestine in November 1942. See Dina Porat, *The Blue and the Yellow Stars of David: The Zionist Leadership in Palestine and the Holocaust 1939–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 36–37.

<sup>102</sup> See Ofer, *Escaping the Holocaust*, Appendices A and D.

government as intermediary with Germany and its allies, Britain asked the German government to issue exit visas for 5,000 Jewish children from the occupied eastern territories for transfer to Palestine.<sup>103</sup> German interest in this particular initiative was based on the idea that the Jewish children would be exchanged for German nationals who had been detained in various parts of the British Empire since the beginning of the war. Discussions ensued between the German Foreign Office and the RSHA about how to respond to the British initiative. An unsigned July 13 letter from the Foreign Office in Berlin to Heinrich Müller of the RSHA referred to an earlier meeting between von Ribbentrop and Himmler, and their agreement that the Foreign Office would formulate the official German response to the British offer, based on the following points:

Basic agreement of the Reich government for negotiations; distribution of exit permits, if the occasion arises in exchange for interned [Germans], but rejection of the emigration to Palestine; basic condition: transfer of the children to England and approval of this action by resolution of the English lower house.<sup>104</sup>

The author of the letter to Müller further commented on the very real possibility that, should England accept Germany's conditions, there would be an exchange of Jewish children for interned Germans and that the RSHA would have to play an important role. Of course, the German insistence that the Jewish children ostensibly sent to England should not be permitted to go to Palestine was meaningless, as there would be no way that such a condition could be enforced once the children left German-controlled territory.

The German Foreign Office and the RSHA were now both willing to permit the movement of some Jews from Europe to Palestine, in spite of the objections of the Mufti in Berlin. The Nazi policy of allowing some Jews from friendly or neutral states who were caught in Germany or German-occupied territories to return to their home countries, mentioned earlier in this chapter, was not easy for some due to the difficulties involved in determining their countries of origin. This was particularly true for Jews considered by the Spanish government to be citizens, but who had never lived in Spain.<sup>105</sup> In late 1943 and early 1944, the German Foreign Office and the RSHA approved the transfer of Jews with

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 192–193.

<sup>104</sup> PA: Inland II-Geheim, Judenausreise nach Palästina 1943, Bd.-, AA/Berlin an SS-Gruppenführer Müller, Reichssicherheitshauptamt, 13. Juli 1943.

<sup>105</sup> For the negotiations between the German and Spanish governments regarding these problems, see the entire file in PA: Inland II-Geheim, Judenfrage in Spanien, Bd.-. After initial indifference on the part of the Spanish government regarding Jews “of Spanish descent” in German-occupied Europe during the war, Franco's government began to press the Nazi regime to permit the repatriation of Jews to Spain by the summer of 1943. Hitler's government resisted these efforts at first. The Germans believed that the Spanish government began to seek repatriation because of American pressure on Spain to seek the transfer of those Jews considered Spanish back to Spain for further transfer to Portugal and then to the United States and elsewhere in the

Turkish citizenship from German-occupied Greece to Turkey via Bulgaria, as well as Jews with other national identities for transfer out of Europe via Germany.<sup>106</sup> In any case, it is difficult to determine the final destinations of these Jewish refugees, although it is certainly possible that some ultimately ended up in Palestine. Such an outcome could not have been a surprise to German authorities.

In any case, the willingness of the German government to permit the transfer of some Jews from Europe to Palestine in exchange for German nationals still interned in Egypt and elsewhere by the British reflects the final stages of an ongoing process of diminishing interest in, and engagement with, Arab nationalism as a factor in German foreign policy. Sometime in the spring of 1944, al-Husayni once again registered his concerns about alleged German government complicity in planning the transfer of Jews from occupied Europe to Palestine. In a May 27, 1944 internal note from Eberhard von Thadden, the official in charge of Jewish affairs in the German Foreign Office since April 1943, reference was made to the Mufti's recent complaint to Himmler that an Anglo-German exchange agreement was in preparation that would send Jews to Palestine. Von Thadden was seeking information about the details of the agreement, specifically how large the exchange would be, and most importantly, "...whether the negotiations for the exchange were authorized by the Reich Foreign Minister and whether he had explicitly approved of including Jews in the exchange."<sup>107</sup> Several days later, after discussions in Berlin with an unnamed representative of the Mufti, von Thadden noted that discussions with the British regarding the exchange were indeed taking place, that at least one exchange had already taken place, that the next one had to be postponed temporarily, and that the Mufti's opposition to including Jews in the exchange would be considered, but that it would not in any way prejudice Germany's position on the issue.<sup>108</sup> Perhaps this was a hint that at least when it involved an exchange for German nationals held by the British, the Nazi regime was not at all opposed to sending Jews to Palestine, regardless of the objections of the Mufti and Arab nationalist circles in Rome and Berlin.

western hemisphere. See for example PA: Inland II-Geheim, Judenfrage in Spanien, Bd.-, DB/Madrid an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 7326, Inland.II 3361 g., 29. Dezember 1943.

<sup>106</sup> PA: Inland II A/B, Juden in der Türkei, Bd. 1, Ref. LR von Thadden, Aktennotiz, hiermit über Herrn U.St.S. Pol., Herrn VLR Melchers mit der Bitte um Kenntnisnahme vorgelegt, 22. September 1943; AA-Berlin an das Reichssicherheitshauptamt, z.Hd. von Eichmann, Nr. Inl. II A 8561, 15. November 1943; and Der Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD an AA-Berlin, IV B 4 b Nr. 2314-43 g (82), 29. Februar 1944.

<sup>107</sup> PA: Inland II A/B, Juden in Palästina, Bd.-, Ref. LR.I.Kl. von Thadden, Hiermit R XIII – Herrn LS. Dr. Theiß vorgelegt, 27. Mai 1944.

<sup>108</sup> PA: Inland II A/B, Juden in Palästina, Bd.-, Ref. LR.I.Kl. von Thadden, Hiermit R XIII – Herrn LS. Dr. Theiß mit der Bitte um beschleunigte Erledigung der Notiz vom 27. Mai vorgelegt, 3. Juni 1944.



PHOTO 7.3. Eberhard von Thadden (no date).  
 Courtesy Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Berlin.

The Mufti also tried to convince the German Foreign Office to exchange non-Jewish British citizens in its custody for German nationals rather than Jews who would be resettled in Palestine. But his interventions had little if any impact on German officials who were engaged in negotiations for the planned exchanges. In a second internal German Foreign Office memorandum of June 3, 1944, von Thadden stated that the delays in carrying out some exchanges were not the result of al-Husayni's interventions, but rather of Britain's inability to meet some of the deadlines suggested by Germany.<sup>109</sup> In that second memorandum, von Thadden confirmed "...that the German-Palestinian civilian exchange is being carried out with the clear approval of the Reich Foreign Minister. . ." <sup>110</sup> He also observed that there were few if any non-Jewish Palestinians under German control, and that the few non-Jewish Britons in German custody were being held back for possibly more important exchanges. Indeed, in 1944 Britain was willing to exchange German nationals for Jews and to allow them to settle in Palestine. Germany, in the process of ending Jewish life in Europe one way or another, no longer saw itself in

<sup>109</sup> PA: Inland II A/B, Juden in Palästina, Bd.-, Ref. LR.IKl. von Thadden, Hiermit Herrn Gruppenleiter Inl.II mit der Bitte um Kenntnismahme vorgelegt, 3. Juni 1944.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

need of support from Arabs in general or from any of their spokespersons in particular. In 1944, moreover, it was unlikely that people other than Jews in occupied Europe would be suitable and willing candidates for settlement in Palestine or that the British government would be inclined to permit non-Jewish Germans (*Palästinadeutsche*) who had lived in Palestine before the war to return.

A few days later, on June 8, von Thadden reiterated that Reich Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop, and therefore, presumably, Hitler himself, formally approved of what he termed the “Palestine-Exchange” (*Palästina-Austausch*), the exchange of Jews from occupied Europe who would be resettled in Palestine for German nationals in British custody. With a direct reference to the Mufti’s opposition to any exchanges that would enable more Jews to come to Palestine, von Thadden, as the person in charge of Jewish affairs in the German Foreign Office, was explicit in his instructions regarding an upcoming third exchange: “In this regard, I believe that it would be pointless to allow the intervention of the Grand Mufti to hinder the upcoming third exchange, scheduled for 5 July.”<sup>111</sup> Von Thadden also stipulated that should the Mufti try to intervene again in the matter, “. . .one would probably have to say to him that the exchange has been in progress for some time, and could not have been stopped in any case.”<sup>112</sup> While it is difficult to know just how many Jews and German nationals were involved in the exchanges, it is clear that by the middle of 1944, as was the case during the years before the war, the Nazi regime once again saw little relevance if any of Arab nationalist claims to the immediate policy needs of the Reich.

The exchange with Palestine was not accepted by everyone in the Nazi hierarchy. Himmler had doubts about it, although the basis for those doubts is still not clear.<sup>113</sup> What is clear is that Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop had a decisive input into this particular matter, and that he approved the removal of some Jews to Palestine at a time when the SS was fully in charge of the implementation of the “final solution” in Europe. That Himmler had a friendly working relationship with the Mufti is certainly true, as will be demonstrated in the section that follows on the formation of a Muslim Waffen-SS division in Bosnia in 1943. However, it is not likely that this was a factor in his reticence about the exchange with Palestine. His task was clear, namely the destruction of all the Jews in Europe. If he still thought in terms of one day extending the final solution to the Jewish communities of the Arab world, despite the fact that Germany had ceased to be physically present in any part of the Middle East or North Africa, moving a small group of Jews to Palestine in 1944 would not

<sup>111</sup> PA: Inland II A/B, Juden in Palästina, Bd.-, Ref. LR.I.Kl. von Thadden, hiermit Gruppenleiter Inland II vorgelegt, 8. Juni 1944.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> PA: Inland II-Geheim, Judenfrage: Allgemein, Umsiedlungsaktion (Warburgplan) u.a., Bd.-, Leiter Inl. II, Herrn LR.I.Kl.v.Thadden, 12. Juni 1944.



have made much of a difference. On the other hand, if he believed by the summer of 1944 that that would never happen, he might very well have wanted to prevent any Jews from escaping annihilation in Europe. In any case, von Thadden reported on June 13 that further delays in the exchange were no longer acceptable, especially since a group of non-Jewish German nationals who had been held in South Africa had already been sent to Palestine the previous October and were awaiting their repatriation to Germany.<sup>114</sup> They were mostly elderly people who were not in good health. Moreover, an agreement had also been reached for the repatriation of German nationals held in Egypt, who were to be exchanged for Jews who would be sent to Palestine. Von Thadden reported on June 19 that in the coming weeks, some 282 Jews would be exchanged for 282 German nationals who had been held by the British in South Africa and in Egypt, and that a further exchange involving 112 Germans held in Egypt was also planned.<sup>115</sup> It is not clear if these exchanges were ever carried out.

Some of the German nationals transferred from British custody to Germany in exchange for Jews from occupied Europe were the remnant of the former German-Christian communities in Palestine. Most were members of the Temple Society (*Tempel-Gesellschaft*), a breakaway Lutheran sect from Württemberg that had begun to settle in Palestine in the middle of the nineteenth century, and that numbered some 2,500 members by the 1930s.<sup>116</sup> The outbreak of war in September 1939 led the British to dissolve the Palestinian German community. Some 400 *Palästinadeutsche* had left for Germany in August 1939, just before the outbreak of war, while the British sent about 700 to Australia. The remaining Palestinian Germans were interned in Palestine or Egypt during the war, and some 440 of them, mostly women and children, were exchanged for Jews who were able to leave Europe for Palestine between the end of 1941 and 1944. For instance, there are references in the files of the Overseas Organization of the NSDAP (Auslandsorganisation der NSDAP) to an exchange involving sixty-three *Palästinadeutsche* that was planned for as early as December 1941,<sup>117</sup> although it is not known whether this initial and quite modest exchange ever occurred.

The Mufti referred to an exchange in 1944 that involved *Palästinadeutsche* who had been interned in Egypt since the beginning of the war. In a note to von Ribbentrop on July 25, 1944, al-Husayni complained that his request

<sup>114</sup> PA: Inland II-Geheim, Judenfrage: Allgemein, Umsiedlungsaktion (Warburgplan) u.a., Bd., Ref.Lr I.Kl.v.Thadden, hiermit Herrn Gruppenleiter Inland II wieder vorgelegt, 13. Juni 1944.

<sup>115</sup> PA: Inland II-Geheim, Judenfrage: Allgemein, Umsiedlungsaktion (Warburgplan) u.a., Bd., LR 1.Kl.v.Thadden, 19. Juni 1944.

<sup>116</sup> See Francis R. Nicosia, "National Socialism and the Demise of the German-Christian Communities in Palestine during the 1930s," *Canadian Journal of History* XIV (1979): 254.

<sup>117</sup> PA: R27192, Büro des Chefs der Auslandsorganisation, Ägypten, Bd. 71, LR Grossmann, hiermit der ZAF vorgelegt, 8. Dezember 1941.



of June 5 that Germans in Egypt be exchanged for Egyptians living in Germany was ignored, and that instead the most recent exchange had involved Jews who left for Palestine on July 2.<sup>118</sup> He also wrote that he feared more exchanges involving the *Palästinadeutsche* were being planned that would send Jews from Germany and France to Palestine. He concluded with the observation: “Furthermore, after the declaration of Your Excellency of 2 November 1943 that ‘the destruction of the so-called Jewish National Home in Palestine is an unchangeable component of the policy of the Greater German Reich,’ this step is unfathomable for the Arabs and Muslims and would arouse in them a feeling of disappointment.”<sup>119</sup> Again, in futility, the Mufti requested the prohibition of any movement of Jews from Europe to Palestine. He made a similar appeal to Himmler two days later, which also remained unanswered.<sup>120</sup> Al-Husayni and the Arabs no longer seemed to matter in the discussions regarding the exchange of Jews from German-occupied Europe for German nationals in British custody abroad. Indeed, by the end of the summer of 1944, it is difficult to discern a tangible German Middle East policy behind the largely meaningless content of Nazi propaganda aimed at the Arab world.

#### POSTSCRIPT: HANDSCHAR

There was never a consensus among German civilian and military authorities regarding the much-talked-about idea of forming Arab military units to support the Axis war effort in the Fertile Crescent and North Africa. The initial decision in January 1943 to transfer Arab members of the German-Arab *Lehrabteilung* from the southern Soviet front to Tunisia to recruit and train Arabs, referred to earlier, was unsuccessful. The Italians were never happy with the idea, and relatively few Tunisian Arabs volunteered to join the Axis war effort. The unit was withdrawn from North Africa not long after it arrived.<sup>121</sup> Nor did the Mufti’s idea of establishing some sort of Arab center in Egypt or Tunis under his authority, with the transfer there of Arab military units such as they existed, ever materialize. It was an idea that had gained little traction in Berlin and Rome in any case. All of this reflects the fundamental unwillingness of the German government to seriously commit to the goal of Arab self-determination and independence following a victorious war. German policy remained committed instead to reconciling the basic imperial interests and ambitions of Italy, Vichy France, and Spain in the Mediterranean area, as well as to Turkish interests with regard to the Arab Fertile Crescent.

However, the Nazi regime did take it upon itself to form a number of mostly non-Arab, mostly European Muslim military units for service in

<sup>118</sup> Höpp, *Mufti-Papiere*, 215.   <sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*   <sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>121</sup> Hirszowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, 299–300.

Europe, in support Germany's European war effort. In view of its constant manpower shortages after the first stages of Operation Barbarossa, the regime needed to recruit manpower for support roles from a variety of non-German sources for much of the war. This would also include manpower from the diverse Muslim populations that came under its control in south-eastern Europe and the southern Soviet Union beginning in 1941. Already in early 1942, a military unit composed of Muslims from the Caucasus was formed for service in the General Government in Poland; later that year, a unit made up of Muslims from the northern Caucasus and Tartars from the Volga area and the Crimea was formed.<sup>122</sup> These and other Muslim units were used by both the army and, in particular, the SS in the regions of the northern Caucasus and the Crimea. In central and western Europe, some Arabs, mainly prisoners of war, were also used.<sup>123</sup> All performed largely police and other support functions behind the lines in the areas occupied by the German army.

In the spring of 1943, during the final weeks of the Axis collapse in North Africa, the Mufti found an outlet for his frustrations over his increasing isolation and irrelevance in German policy calculations. An additional frustration was his largely unsuccessful effort to organize some sort of significant Arab-Islamic military force that would fight in conjunction with the German war effort in the Arab world. Moreover, since his arrival in Europe in November 1941, and his closer proximity to the significant non-Arab Muslim populations in the Balkans and the southern Soviet Union, the Mufti tended increasingly to see himself as a leader of all Muslims.<sup>124</sup> For instance, beginning in 1942, he tried to secure German support for a tour of Bosnia, but failed due to German deference to Italian objections to such a trip.<sup>125</sup> He eventually did become directly involved in the German plan to form a new Muslim SS division in heavily Muslim Bosnia-Herzegovina in the spring of 1943, at about the same time that the Axis military campaign and presence in North Africa was in the process of total collapse. In early February 1943, Hitler ordered the formation of an SS division to be composed mainly of Muslims from Croatian-controlled Bosnia, to be used in the struggle against both Josip Broz Tito's communist partisans and the Serbian nationalists loyal to the former king of Yugoslavia.

Despite the misgivings of the Fascist regimes in both Croatia and Italy regarding the formation of a Bosnian Muslim SS division, plans for the new SS Muslim division nevertheless went forward. Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop authorized Erwin Ettel, the Foreign Office official who had been assigned as its liaison with the Mufti the previous year, to enlist al-Husayni's

<sup>122</sup> Mallmann and Cüppers, *Halbmond und Hakenkreuz*, 221–222. See also Rubin and Schwanitz, *Nazis, Islamists*, 145 ff.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 223–226. <sup>124</sup> Rubin and Schwanitz, *Nazis, Islamists*, 151.

<sup>125</sup> See IFZ: Nachlaß Werner-Otto von Hentig, ED 113/6, Aufzeichnung von Hentig, 27. April 1943.

support for the idea.<sup>126</sup> Ettel met with al-Husayni on March 19, 1943, and reported that the Mufti was eager to help in any way he could. The new Muslim unit was to be a Waffen-SS division, an idea that Himmler and the SS enthusiastically endorsed.<sup>127</sup> On the following day, the Mufti met with the chief of the SS-Hauptamt, SS-Brigadeführer Gottlob Berger, who had been stationed in Croatia for part of the war and had been appointed by Himmler to oversee the formation of a Bosnian division that would be solely under the authority of the SS. Berger and the Mufti agreed that the Bosnian division would consist only of Bosnian-Muslim troops who would serve only in the Balkans. Its tasks would be limited to protecting the Muslim population against various partisan bands, to fighting against internal unrest, as well as against enemy troops that might at some point land in the Balkans. Finally, they also agreed that the Mufti would undertake a secret trip to Croatia where he would meet with members of the Croatian government, and then to Bosnia where he would meet with Muslim leaders. Al-Husayni told Berger and other SS officials before his trip that he did not want to involve himself in any political discussions relating to a future reconfiguration of the former Yugoslavia. This was perhaps his way of asserting that his focus was and remained the Arab world, and not Europe.

On his visit to Croatia and Bosnia between March 30 and April 11, the Mufti was accompanied by the chief of the Order Police (*Ordnungspolizei*), Kurt Dalueges, Berger, and other SS officials. The visit marked the beginning of his involvement in the formation and activities of the new Muslim SS unit for most of the remainder of the war in Europe.<sup>128</sup> Even before the Mufti's arrival, SS officers and the Croatian government concluded an agreement that the new division would be composed predominantly, but not exclusively, of Muslims.<sup>129</sup> They decided that both Muslims and Catholics from Croatia, including Bosnia-Herzegovina, could enlist in the new division, and that they would serve under mainly German officers. SS officers in Croatia were quite positive about involving the Mufti in the project. SS-Gruppenführer and Lt. General of the Waffen-SS Artur Phleps believed that al-Husayni was greatly admired by Muslims in Croatia and asserted that at least 20,000 Muslim volunteers would join the proposed division.<sup>130</sup> Not terribly enthusiastic about this German plan to begin with, the Croatian government tried unsuccessfully

<sup>126</sup> PA: R27322, Handakten Ettel, Erlaß des RAM, Arbeitsexemplar, Bd.-, Aufzeichnung Gesandter Ettel, Betr. Aufstellung einer bosnischen Division, 22. März 1943.

<sup>127</sup> See Gensicke, *Der Mufti von Jerusalem*, 114–115. See also Georg Lepre, *Himmler's Bosnian Division: The Waffen-SS Handschar Division, 1943–1945* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 1997).

<sup>128</sup> For a concise description of al-Husayni's itinerary in Croatia, see Gensicke, *Der Mufti von Jerusalem*, 117–119.

<sup>129</sup> PA: R27322, Handakten Ettel, Erlaß des RAM, Arbeitsexemplar, Bd.-, DG/Agram an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 1272, 23. März 1943.

<sup>130</sup> PA: R27322, Handakten Ettel, Erlaß des RAM, Arbeitsexemplar, Bd.-, Gesandter Ettel, Aufzeichnung, 25. März 1943.

to have the Mufti's visit postponed for a month, and he arrived in Croatia on March 31, 1943. To reaffirm the importance of this project, a memorandum from Under State Secretary Woermann confirming that the Mufti had arrived in Croatia also reiterated "...that a decision by the Führer in this matter is available and that the Reich Foreign Minister has been instructed accordingly."<sup>131</sup> During the Mufti's visit to Croatia and Bosnia, he spoke with Croatian officials and with Muslim leaders. He complained to the Croatians and the Germans about the poor protection afforded the Muslim population, especially in the Italian-occupied parts of Croatia.<sup>132</sup> He demanded greater protection for Muslim Croatians and Bosnians, while at the same time pledging the loyalty of the Muslim population to the Croatian state and to the Axis cause. Otherwise, according to the German embassy in Zagreb, the Mufti was generally kept out of sight of the diplomatic corps and the local population.

After his return to Berlin, in a April 30 communication with Wilhelm Melchers of the Near East Department (Abteilung VII) in the German Foreign Office, the Mufti reported in detail about his recent trip to Croatia and Bosnia, and generally on the progress in forming the new Muslim division in the Waffen-SS.<sup>133</sup> He complained of atrocities committed against Muslims in Bosnia in which he alleged that Serbian partisans, armed by England and Russia, murdered over 100,000 Muslims and left over 200,000 homeless. Perhaps reflecting on his frustrations to date with German and Axis policies toward the Arab world since 1933, he insisted that Muslims had once again demonstrated their loyalty to Germany, and implied that they had received little if anything in return. He asserted that the very fact that more than 12,000 Muslim volunteers had already signed up for the new Muslim Waffen-SS division was a clear reflection of that loyalty.

A clearer indication of the Mufti's mood is evident in his assessment of his activities since arriving in Germany in November 1941. This assessment appears in his April 16, 1943 conversation with Erwin Ettl, shortly after his return from the trip to Croatia and Bosnia.<sup>134</sup> This was a time when the formation of the Muslim SS division in Croatia coincided with the imminent Axis collapse and defeat in North Africa. Ettl refers to al-Husayni's bitter complaints that the

<sup>131</sup> PA: R27322, Handakten Ettl, Erlaß des RAM, Arbeitsexemplar, Bd.-, Aufzeichnung (Woermann), 31. März 1943. In keeping with their desire to maintain total secrecy, neither the German Foreign Office nor the Italian embassy in Berlin had been initially apprised of the impending visit by the Mufti to Croatia.

<sup>132</sup> PA: R27322, Handakten Ettl, Erlaß des RAM, Arbeitsexemplar, Bd.-, DG/Agram an AA/Berlin, Telegramm Nr. 1526, 12. April 1943.

<sup>133</sup> Höpp, *Mufti-Papiere*, 160–162. Melchers was appointed head of Abteilung VII in December 1939, after serving as German Consul in Haifa from 1937 to 1939. For more on Melcher's role in Haifa, see Nicosia and Browning, "Ambivalenz und Paradox bei der Durchsetzung der NS-Judenpolitik," 212–213.

<sup>134</sup> PA: R27322, Handakten Ettl, Erlaß des RAM, Arbeitsexemplar, Bd.-, Gesandter Ettl, Aufzeichnung, 16. April 1943.

Italians allegedly tried to prevent him from traveling from Croatia to Bosnia. The Mufti also repeated the charge that little had been done, especially by the Italians, to protect Muslims in Croatia and Bosnia from Serbian atrocities. Moreover, his demands that the new Muslim division be confined exclusively to protecting the Muslim population of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and that its officer corps include as many Muslims as possible, were not meeting with much success. Ettel also refers to al-Husayni's description of his three-day stopover in Vienna, as guest of Reichsstatthalter Baldur von Schirach, on his way back to Berlin from Zagreb. According to Ettel, the Mufti, in his conversations with von Schirach, spoke little about his recent trip, and instead focused on his role in, and views of, German policy toward the Arab world. The Mufti was aware that von Schirach was about to meet with Hitler at the Obersalzberg. He expressed to von Schirach his great disappointment with his working relationship with the German Foreign Office, and the fact that the responsible people in the Foreign Office were no longer engaged in Arab policy and the Middle East. Perhaps sensing the decreasing relevance of the Arab world in general in German policy, the Mufti told Ettel he intended to ask Woermann and the German Foreign Office to schedule meeting for him with Hitler. The Mufti's desired meeting with Hitler did not take place. His first meeting with Hitler in Berlin on November 28, 1941, an unsuccessful meeting in terms of the Mufti's wartime goals in any case, would remain his only meeting with the German dictator.

The Mufti seemed to fade from the scene by the new year of 1944, as issues such as Arab independence and the destruction of the Jewish National Home in Palestine ceased to be of immediate concern to Hitler and Nazi policy makers. As in the past, al-Husayni's correspondence with German officials and various Arab exiles in Europe continued to offer significant insight into the relative consistency of German attitudes and policy toward the Arabs. Through late 1943 and 1944, the Mufti's comments seem to reflect his realization that Germany would not be the main instrument for securing independence for the Arabs, and that indeed Germany had never intended to undertake that particular mission in any case. He wrote to an anonymous recipient in late October 1943 that, notwithstanding Italy's recent surrender, Germany still had not made the long sought-after formal commitment to support full Arab independence, and that German propaganda to Arabs and Muslims had been inadequate and largely ineffective.<sup>135</sup> A year later, in October 1944, al-Husayni issued yet

<sup>135</sup> Höpp, *Mufti-Papiere*, 189. Moreover, in his April 27, 1943 meeting with von Hentig in Berlin, following his return from Bosnia and Croatia, al-Husayni complained bitterly about the general indifference and opposition among the leadership in the German Foreign Office to a formal, public German commit to complete Arab independence. See IfZ: Nachlaß Werner-Otto von Hentig, ED 113/6, Aufzeichnung von Hentig, 27. April 1943. And, in a written statement twelve years after the end of the war, von Hentig seemed to confirm the Mufti's assessment of the relative disinterest of the Foreign Office leadership of von Ribbentrop, von Weizsäcker, and Woermann in the Middle East in general. See IfZ: Nachlaß Werner-Otto von Hentig, ED 113/2, Abschrift Hamburg, 20. Juni 1957.



PHOTO 7.4. Grand Mufti with Bosnian volunteers for Muslim Waffen-SS Division (November 1943).

Courtesy Bundesarchiv, Berlin.

another call for the formation of an Arab military unit, presumably for duty in Europe and later in the Arab world. It was greeted positively by Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop. The Mufti then wrote back to von Ribbentrop expressing his doubts that the German government was serious about acting on this suggestion.<sup>136</sup>

By the end of 1943, al-Husayni had come to realize that his quest for unequivocal German support for a unified and independent Arab world in some form would never be realized. Moreover, his support for, and cooperation in, the formation of a Muslim Waffen-SS division in Bosnia and Croatia in 1943, somewhat of a diversion from his own focus on Arab issues and the Arab world in any case, was also a failure. Along with the SS, the Mufti invested considerable effort in the organization, military training, and political education of this Muslim Waffen-SS division in Bosnia.<sup>137</sup> However by the fall

<sup>136</sup> See *Ibid.*, 218, 226–228

<sup>137</sup> Approximately 12,000 volunteers were eventually recruited for the division. For a detailed account of the organization of the division, its problems, and its ultimate failures, see Gensicke, *Der Mufti von Jerusalem*, 120–134. See also Rubin and Schwanitz, *Nazis, Islamists*, 151–152.

of 1944, with the Foreign Office in Berlin reporting on significant desertions from the Muslim Waffen-SS division in Bosnia-Herzegovina, its general demise seemed imminent.<sup>138</sup> Regardless of its success or failure, the Muslim Waffen-SS division, later named the Handschar Division, was a German idea, a European creation, meant for the support of Germany's war in Europe, and made up largely of European, not Arab, Muslims. In the effort to attract volunteers mostly from among the Bosnian-Muslim population in the Balkans for support duties in the war in Europe, the German government enlisted the services of al-Husayni, the well-known Arab Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, who was apparently well-known to many in Muslim Bosnia. However, this division, regardless of its success or failure, had nothing whatever to do with the Nazi regime's policies toward the Arab world in the Fertile Crescent, the Arabian Peninsula, and North Africa.

<sup>138</sup> See for example ZMO: Nachlaß Höpp, 1.27, Vortragsnotiz betr. Reise Großmufti nach Budapest, Inland II 21248, 5. Oktober 1944.





## Conclusions

This study has devoted relatively little space to an analysis of German and Axis propaganda toward the Arab world. Recent scholarship, alluded to in previous chapters, offers the reader a comprehensive account of the content of Nazi Germany's Arabic-language propaganda, particularly during the war years. Thanks to their important work, this book is able to focus on the content and the actual intent of German policy with regard to the Arab lands of the Middle East and North Africa, beyond the largely temporary, tactical imperatives of Nazi wartime propaganda in those regions. German policy was, according to the German diplomat and Foreign Office official, Werner-Otto von Hentig, one that consistently refrained from revealing Berlin's real intent in the Arab world, in large part due to the Reich's deference to the imperial interests and aims of its Italian ally in the Fertile Crescent and North Africa.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, it is useful to begin this conclusion by considering some of the tactics employed in Nazi propaganda toward the Arab world during the Second World War, tactics that were meant to conceal Germany's intentions in the region. It can provide a useful mechanism with which to identify, define, and summarize the actual intent of Nazi Germany's policy toward the Arab world before and particularly during the Second World War. In drawing a distinction between propaganda and actual policy, this study will hopefully contribute to a clearer understanding of the actual intentions of the Third Reich toward the

<sup>1</sup> See IfZ: Nachlaß Werner-Otto von Hentig, ED 113/6, von Hentig/Berlin an Habich/Berlin, 20. Juni 1940. Von Hentig, head of the Near East Department (Abteilung VII) in the German Foreign Office from 1937 to 1939, also complained in this note that it was time for Germany to develop its own coherent and viable policy toward the Arab world rather than continuing to simply follow the lead of an Italy for which most Arabs had a deep distrust and antipathy. He would again suggest such a course, albeit in vain, in his comprehensive analysis of the Arab world on July 1, 1940, referred to in [chapter 5](#).

Arabic-speaking lands of the Fertile Crescent, the Arabian Peninsula, and North Africa. In turn, this may contribute to developing a useful context for scholars who consider the varied responses in the Arab world to National Socialism and Hitler's Third Reich.

Germany's wartime propaganda campaign in the Arab world was intense and extensive. This was particularly the case after its victory over France in the summer of 1940 and its somewhat more direct political role in Axis policy in the region that followed. The arrival of Rommel and his Afrika-Korps in Libya in February 1941, following British victories over the Italians in Egypt and Cyrenaica (eastern Libya) in late 1940 and early 1941, of necessity signaled the start of more intense Arabic-language propaganda radio broadcasts from Germany to the Arab world. Although aimed at the Arab world in general, initially there seemed to be a particular focus on Egypt given the uncertain and precarious situation that Rommel's forces faced in early 1941. However, as extensive as the German propaganda campaign eventually became, its methods still tended to reflect a continuing deference to Italian, French, and even Spanish colonial interests in the Fertile Crescent and North Africa. That entailed, of course, a non-committal and generally indifferent position on long-standing Arab demands for independence. The German ambassador in Rome, Hans von Mackensen, reported on an Italian complaint in April 1942 that even when German propaganda did allude in the most general terms to the Arab people and their rights, it tended to provoke the Arabs in a negative way in the French and Italian colonies. He wrote: "...from the Italian point of view, it is objectionable to even speak of the 'Arab people,' and thereby bring up the difficult problem of the Arabs living in the Italian and French colonies."<sup>2</sup> In that report, von Mackensen conveyed to Berlin Mussolini's frequent reminder, one that was shared by most in the Foreign Office in Berlin, namely that Axis propaganda statements were and should remain propaganda, and therefore should not reflect the actual intent of German foreign policy.

In April 1941, just two months after Erwin Rommel's arrival in Libya, the Radio-Political Department (Rundfunkpolitische Abteilung) in the German Foreign Office issued preliminary guidelines for German Arabic-language radio broadcasts in light of the situation in Libya and Egypt.<sup>3</sup> It directed the use of "undisguised broadcasts" (*ungetarnte Sendungen*) with an emphasis on Egypt that would contain news with a definite anti-British slant. There were also to be special discussion programs about current events in Egypt, Britain's dominant political and economic influence in Egypt, British propaganda and "lies" about Germany, the relationship between democracy, England, and Islam, British power, and about the attitudes of well-known Egyptian politicians and freedom

<sup>2</sup> PA: R28876, Büro des RAM, Vorderer Orient, 1941–1942, Bd. 7, Telegramm, DB/Rom an AA/Berlin, Nr. 1204, 14. April 1942, and Telegramm Nr. 1219, 15. April 1942.

<sup>3</sup> PA: R67482, Rundfunkpolitische Abteilung, Verbindungsmann RAM, usw., Bd. 7, Aufzeichnung, Betrifft: Sondersendungen in hocharabischer Sprache für Ägypten, 18. April 1941.

fighters toward England. The guidelines also established a “secret broadcast” (*Schwarzsender*) that would aim the message “Egypt for the Egyptians” (*Ägypten den Ägyptern*) at younger Egyptian revolutionaries and their nationalist movements, generally at ordinary Egyptian civil servants, the poor masses, and at the lower levels of the officer corps of the Egyptian army. Yet, beyond the slogan “Egypt for the Egyptians,” no specific or concrete calls for Egyptian sovereignty and independence were made at that time. The only specific themes that the guidelines did suggest for the *Schwarzsender* were Britain’s responsibility for Egypt’s poor economy, the ability of British authorities to take advantage of the internal conflicts within Egypt’s population, the cooperation of certain Egyptian politicians with British authorities, and the need to break British power in Egypt once and for all. It concluded that the message must demonstrate above all “. . .that the conclusion of the Anglo-Egyptian Friendship Treaty of 1936 has only damaged Egypt, since as a result all of Egypt’s political and economic goals cannot be realized.”<sup>4</sup> It would not be until 1942 that references to some form of Egyptian independence would appear in German propaganda.

In the end, it is difficult to measure the effectiveness of Nazi Germany’s wartime propaganda campaign on the Arab populations of the Middle East and North Africa. Although this study does not draw conclusions on any overall Arab response to German propaganda in the region, it does consider the role of the Mufti and other Arab exiles in Berlin in Nazi Germany’s propaganda campaign during the war. For those Arabs and German officials who desired Arab unrest and rebellion against Britain and later the United States during the war, their hopes remained unfulfilled. In Berlin, all seemed to agree that the Arabs in general were sympathetic toward Hitler and the Third Reich from the outset. Yet, with the exception of Iraq briefly in April 1941, there were no serious Arab attempts to take advantage of the war by rebelling against Britain’s position in the region; even during the Iraqi coup of 1941, no popular uprising in support of the coup against the British position in Iraq occurred. Unlike the more turbulent decades of the 1920s and 1930s, there was relatively little wartime popular unrest and violence against the British, the French, the Italians, or the Spaniards in Arab lands of the Middle East and North Africa. The hopes of some in Berlin and Rome that Axis wartime propaganda might stimulate popular uprisings against the British throughout the Arab world, and thereby significantly assist Axis troops on the ground, never materialized. One possible explanation for this relative quiet might be that the wartime military power on the ground of both Allied and Axis armies precluded any inclination on the part of a largely unarmed Arab population to rise up in revolt. Another factor was the likelihood that the Mufti, al-Gaylani, and other Arabs in the Middle East and in exile feared that, given the reluctance of

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Berlin and Rome to clearly and unequivocally endorse complete Arab independence, the Axis intended to maintain some form of European control of the Arab world. If nothing else, this was evident in Arab fears of Italian ambitions in the Arab world and Hitler's fairly consistent support for his Italian ally.

The substance of Axis propaganda to the Arab world, although filled with many positive, pro-Arab generalities and virulent attacks on Britain, the United States, and especially the Jews, did not reflect an actual intention to fight for the independence of the Arab lands of the Middle East and North Africa. A few examples of this apparent disconnect between propaganda and actual intent at this point might be helpful in summarizing some of this book's main arguments regarding Nazi Germany's intentions and policy toward the Arab world. One of the more blatant examples of this disconnect occurred in the fall of 1940, just a few months after Germany's victories in western Europe. The German Consulate in Tetuán in Spanish-controlled northern Morocco reported on Spain's recent appointment of a Spanish governor in the neighboring and hitherto autonomous city of Tangiers. The German Consul expressed misgivings about the apparently positive manner in which Germany's Arabic-language radio broadcast from Berlin had reported the appointment.<sup>5</sup> The Consul's report began by reminding Berlin that Spain was not loved in Morocco, and that Germany's popularity in the Arab world was diminished when Berlin portrayed any expansion of Spanish power in Morocco in a positive light. He further reported that the Arabs in the Spanish-controlled portion of Morocco opposed the new order in Tangiers. He also suggested that future broadcasts should avoid if possible any reference to Spanish and Italian relations with the "Arab-Islamic world" because Germany's "...friendship with both powers is such that it does not win friendship for us in the Islamic world, and we therefore have no reason to advertise our relationships with them in our propaganda to the East."<sup>6</sup> The report closed with the observation that while Spain had been viewed in Morocco as an enemy for many years, "Italy enjoys even less sympathy as a result of its ruthless colonial wars in North Africa."<sup>7</sup> The German Consulate did not recommend that German radio broadcasts should even mention in passing the Arab desire for independence; rather it simply sent a veiled warning that German propaganda should not overtly advertise Germany's real policy interests and intentions in the Arab world.

Four months later, in a similar report to the Foreign Office in Berlin from the German Consulate-General in Casablanca in French Morocco, the contradiction between German policy and its general support for continuing European imperial interests in the Arab world, and Nazi propaganda and the question of Arab independence was likewise apparent. Theodor Auer, the German

<sup>5</sup> PA: R67490, Rundfunkpolitische Abteilung, Referat B.Allg., Propaganda, Bd. 15, DK/Tetuán (Richter) an AA/Berlin, J.Nr. 1497/40, "Deutsche Propaganda in der arabischen Welt, insbesondere arabische Radiosendung aus Berlin zur Neuordnung in Tanger," 13. November 1940.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*      <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

Consul-General in Casablanca, again described the popularity of Hitler and the new Germany in French Morocco and throughout the Arab world, and observed that Germany's Arabic-language radio broadcasts were trying to take advantage of that popularity in many ways. Auer also observed with some confidence that the working relationship between Germany and France since the summer of 1940 had not to that point had an adverse effect on Germany's generally positive image. Nevertheless, he warned that public pronouncements about close Franco-German cooperation in North Africa could have a very negative impact on an Arab opinion that already embodied a degree of skepticism: "Too strong an emphasis on German-French cooperation may conform to certain necessities in German-French political affairs, but it also has the potential to raise doubts among native-born listeners about Germany's future position on the Moroccan and Arab question. As seen from here...the Montoire policy should be left out of the Arabic broadcasts."<sup>8</sup> Auer was referring, of course, to Hitler's meeting with Marshal Phillippe Pétain in Montoire on October 24, 1940, when Hitler assured the French leader that Germany would do everything necessary to preserve France's overseas empire in any future peace settlement. Auer recommended that German propaganda in Morocco place emphasis on German military power and its recent military victory over France (i.e., on those elements for which he argued the population of Morocco held Germany in high esteem). In other words, German propaganda should serve as an instrument to distract the Arab populace from the contradictions between Arab ambitions for sovereignty and independence and those of an otherwise much-admired National Socialist Germany that aimed to preserve the French colonial rule in some form in North Africa. Auer also suggested the intensification of another element in German propaganda that would distract Arabs from Germany's interest in the perpetuation of European colonial rule in much of the Arab world. He recommended periodic references to the "Jewish question" and the need for the local population to keep in mind the German example of how "...one country under one leader, for the benefit of the country and its people, can free itself from Jewish control."<sup>9</sup>

In May 1941, Gerhard Rühle of the Radio Political Department (Rundfunkpolitische Abteilung) in the German Foreign Office submitted a comprehensive review of Germany's radio propaganda broadcasts in the Arab lands of North Africa and the Middle East to Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop.<sup>10</sup> Rühle

<sup>8</sup> PA: R67490, Rundfunkpolitische Abteilung, Referat B.Allg., Propaganda, Bd. 15, DGK/Casablanca an AA/Berlin, P 57/41, "Die deutsche Radiosendungen in arabischer Sprache - Marokko," 12. März 1941.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> PA: R67482, Rundfunkpolitische Abteilung, Verbindungsmann RAM, usw., Bd. 1, Aufzeichnung betr. die Rundfunkpropaganda in dem arabischen Raum (Rühle), dem Herrn Reichsaus-senminister weisungsgemäss vorgelegt, 5. Mai 1941.

reported that according to reports received from German diplomats and agents, as well as from Arabs with contacts in Germany, German radio broadcasts from Berlin and Athens were generally well regarded in the Arab world. He described the contents of those broadcasts to include the following: readings from the Koran; news from the region with a clear anti-British slant; an emphasis on German military strength; discussion programs that dealt with Arab history and literature and with an emphasis on Arab heroes from the past; discussion programs with Islamic religious content and about the role of Islam in resistance against foreign domination; and recorded music as a means of promoting popular interest in the broadcasts. In other words, there was nothing in the current content of Nazi propaganda to the Arab world that even the most ardent Arab nationalist might reject.

However, the pro-Axis al-Gaylani coup in Iraq in April was followed a month later by Britain's reassertion of its former position in Iraq and the removal of the short-lived al-Gaylani regime. Besides the situation in Iraq, there was Britain's anticipated invasion of Vichy-controlled Syria and Lebanon. Rühle was clearly aware of these realities and their additional pressure on the content of German propaganda toward the Arabs. He suggested that should Germany decide to formally call, via radio broadcasts, for a full-scale Arab uprising in the Fertile Crescent against the British, its radio programming would require much more anti-English content. This would have to include the goal of ending British domination in the Near East, Britain's past broken promises to the Arabs, Koran readings that emphasized struggle against oppressors, and poetry readings that stressed freedom and independence and the struggle against foreign powers. Here, Rühle seemed to echo the causal relationship between a firm commitment to Arab independence and an Arab insurgency, in support of German military operations in the region reiterated time and again by the Mufti and other Arab nationalists. Rühle observed that, "A call for the struggle for independence and freedom will undoubtedly be successful if German consent can be given."<sup>11</sup> Although nothing in his report suggests that Germany should in fact issue a formal and unequivocal commitment to Arab independence, Rühle does suggest that Germany at least raise the question in its propaganda broadcasts, something that German propaganda did in fact do. He was surely aware that actual German policy in the Arab world to that point had included no such commitment to the idea and achievement of Arab independence; it is also possible that he had concluded there could be a price to pay for that omission.

Germany's commitment more or less to the status quo in North Africa continued throughout 1942 and beyond. In February 1942, Under State Secretary Woermann informed the German embassy in Rome that German propaganda should avoid any references to political issues involving the Arab

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

population of North Africa: "In the Arab territories west of Egypt, no national-Arab or other political propaganda should be made. Our propaganda in these territories should be limited to placing the political significance of Germany and its struggle in the proper light."<sup>12</sup> Karl Megerle, von Ribbentrop's assistant for propaganda matters in the German Foreign Office, issued specific guidelines for German propaganda for Tunisia on November 20, almost two weeks following the Anglo-American invasion of French northwest Africa.<sup>13</sup> In an effort to appeal to French residents of Tunisia and northwest Africa, all speculation about the territorial future of Tunisia and presumably all of French North Africa was to be avoided. The primacy of the German-Italian relationship was to be reaffirmed, Italian-French conflicts were to be downplayed and resolved, the authority of the motherland (France) was to be reaffirmed and strengthened, and the French local government and population were to be treated as friends. German propaganda should advertise that the Axis forces "... together with France want to defend French North Africa, and with it, the French Empire, against the Anglo-American assault that also seeks to divide up the rest of the French Empire."<sup>14</sup>

Megerle also encouraged everyone to publicize Hitler's past assurances to Pétain of Germany's full support for the integrity of the French empire. Anglo-American promises to the Arab population of independence were to be described as a cover for delivering the Arab people of Morocco and the entire region to Anglo-American and Jewish exploitation. Finally, as far as the Arab population was concerned, only the most general themes were to be pursued with statements such as: "The Axis powers respect the religion, customs, property, and treasures of the Muslim peoples and struggle on their side against Anglo-American oppressors and against a Jewry that expels Muslims from Palestine and the holy places and that seeks to make itself the ruler over the entire Arab world..."<sup>15</sup> Here, Megerle seems to have rejected those earlier recommendations that Germany downplay or avoid entirely references to common German-French interests in North Africa. Indeed, as far as North Africa was concerned, Berlin had to appeal to two different constituencies with very different and mutually exclusive interests and goals. It appears that Megerle favored focusing German propaganda on an appeal to the French citizens rather than to the Arab majority of French North Africa.

These and other reports and directives pertaining to the substance of German propaganda in the Arab world reflect several realities in the wartime strategic and foreign policies of Hitler's Reich toward the Arab world. Few would argue that the Third Reich did not enjoy a general popularity and

<sup>12</sup> ADAP: Serie E, Bd. I, Nr. 231.

<sup>13</sup> PA: R29867, Büro des U.St.S., Nord-Afrika II, Bd. -, Karl Megerle/Salzburg, Vorläufige Sprachregelung für Propagandazug und Sender Tunis, Fuschl Nr. 1621, Telko Nr. 1453, 20. November 1942.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*    <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

good will within the Arabic-speaking lands of the Middle East and North Africa. Indeed, Germany had also enjoyed a high degree of acceptance in the Arab world, in comparison to the other European great powers, before Hitler's assumption of power in 1933. Moreover, Nazi propaganda in the region, both before and particularly during the war, sought to capitalize on that sympathy and good will in a variety of ways, as mentioned by Rühle in his report. Nevertheless, it also seems clear that German policy toward the Arab world was predicated on a fundamental support for the continuation of European imperial rule in some as yet undefined reconfiguration of colonial boundaries. It is also clear that there existed some concern among Arab exiles in Berlin and Rome, and perhaps even inside the Arab world as a whole, over ultimate German and Axis intentions, both before and during the war. That concern recognized that while German propaganda in the region certainly did express kind words for the Arabs, their history and culture, and for Islam, it did not reflect the actual intent of a Germany foreign policy that sought to maintain a dominant European position in the Arab world. That Germany's very active wartime radio propaganda broadcasts to the Arab world were not driven by a clear and unequivocal commitment to future Arab independence seems quite clear in the many futile initiatives of the Mufti and other Arabs throughout the war to secure just such a formal, public commitment from Berlin.

Finally, to reiterate, Arab unrest and rebellion in conjunction with, and in support of, Italian and German military campaigns in North Africa between the fall of 1940 and the early summer of 1943, and with Axis failures in Iraq and Syria in May and June 1941, never materialized. Of course, its potential military value to the Axis war effort will never be known. Nor can one demonstrate beyond a reasonable doubt that it did not materialize entirely or in part because of a general Arab realization that there was no clear, formal German or Axis commitment to Arab independence; it is equally impossible to demonstrate that such a clear and determined commitment would indeed have produced significant Arab unrest and rebellion.

On June 19, 1943, German Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop issued a directive to all state and party agencies engaged in the Nazi regime's overall wartime propaganda effort. This occurred more than two years after the Tetuán, Casablanca, Megerle, and Rühle reports and directives, and just one month following the final defeat of Axis troops in Tunisia and their expulsion from their only remaining foothold in the Arab world. There is no mention of North Africa or the Middle East in von Ribbentrop's directive, so it is not clear whether this was part of some sort of assessment of Germany's propaganda efforts by the German Foreign Office following the recent Axis defeat in North Africa, or for that matter the German collapse following the Wehrmacht's surrender at Stalingrad in early February. However, von Ribbentrop's June 1943 directive is instructive in part because it failed to mention specifically the Axis disasters in North Africa and in the Soviet Union, their possible



relationship to the propaganda campaign in support of the German war effort, and possible improvements from that point on that might help in reversing German military fortunes. The title of the directive is “Basic Instructions for all offices working in the Foreign-Information-Service” (*Grundsätzliche Weisungen für alle Stellungen, die im Auslands-Informations-Dienst tätig sind*).<sup>16</sup> After reiterating his earlier substitution of the term “foreign information service” (*Auslands-Informations-Dienst*) for “foreign propaganda” (*Auslands-Propaganda*), von Ribbentrop asserts that the change amounted to much more than merely a change of words. He attempts to demonstrate just how such a change would better help the German war effort in the following way: “One should not want to directly and frontally force opinions, judgments, and conclusions on people abroad, rather one should give them information on the basis of which they will themselves build their opinions, judgments, and conclusions.”<sup>17</sup> Yet, von Ribbentrop does not stipulate whether the “information” provided by several years of German wartime propaganda had enabled its recipients in the Arab world to form the judgments and conclusions that he, the German Foreign Office, and the Nazi regime had desired. Again, without specific references to the events of the past six months in North Africa or the Soviet Union, he suggests three approaches that were likely to produce success: the obvious necessity of communicating information favorable to Germany and unfavorable to the enemy; the reinterpretation of enemy information and evidence in a way that is favorable to Germany; and the creation of stories of unrest or disturbances that had only a grain of truth or possibility and that could be made to be believable abroad. He does not define what that success would look like or entail.

German propaganda in the Arab world had, in fact, followed von Ribbentrop’s first two rules between 1940 and 1943, obviously with mixed success. It is clear that for much of the interwar period there existed a general sympathy for Germany in the Arab world, albeit along with very real and continuing suspicions of German motives based on policies such as Berlin’s pre-1941 support for Jewish immigration to Palestine, and of course its adherence to the alliance with Italy between 1938 and the Axis surrender in Tunis in May 1943. The third rule was difficult to follow with regard to the Arab world, try as they might, since the very basis for creating stories of unrest or disturbances based on a “grain of truth or possibility” was generally lacking. He then recommend the right “packaging” of this information for each country in such a way that it could be adapted to Germany’s basic intentions toward a particular country or region and its particular circumstances. Information, he concludes, must be communicated in such a way that “. . .it takes into

<sup>16</sup> PA: R27322, Handakten Ettel, Erlaß des RAM, Arbeitsexemplar, Bd.-, “Grundsätzliche Weisungen für alle Stellen, die im Auslands-Informations-Dienst tätig sind” (Ribbentrop) Streng Vertraulich!, 19. Juni 1943.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

account the mentality and the racial characteristics of a particular country, and that it achieves the desired resonance through the kindness of its form.”<sup>18</sup>

Whatever it was supposed to mean, von Ribbentrop’s supposedly new or preferred approach to propaganda did not appear to differ significantly from the Nazi propaganda approach in the Arab world to that point. Particularly as it related to German policy in the Arab lands of the Middle East and North Africa between 1933 and 1944, Nazi propaganda reflected the usual disconnect, especially in time of war, between the intent of propaganda and that of actual policy. Part of the intent of German foreign policy in the Arab world, as this study has sought to demonstrate, was predicated generally on the continuation of a European presence and European control throughout the Arab world in some as yet undefined political configuration following an Axis victory in the war. On the one hand, one wartime component of the Nazi regime’s efforts to achieve its intended goals, admittedly a subject of debate and disagreement in German military and foreign policy circles, was the mobilization of Arab insurgencies as a means of assisting Axis armies on the ground in North Africa and the Fertile Crescent. Germany’s “Auslands-Propaganda,” or as von Ribbentrop labeled it, “Auslands-Information,” was supposed to be a useful mechanism to achieve this particular goal. As stipulated in his June 19 directive, that propaganda should contain information that would enable its receivers to form on their own the conclusions desired by the Axis powers. However, this assumption seemed to preclude the existence of at least one significant conclusion that the Arab targets of Nazi propaganda had in fact already reached several decades before, namely their demands for an end to European imperial domination in whatever form, and the establishment of fully independent Arab states.

Nazi wartime propaganda in the Arab world did stress a particular conclusion that most Arabs had in fact reached simultaneously since the end of the First World War. That issue was the end of the Jewish National Home in Palestine and the vehement opposition to the establishment of an independent Jewish state.<sup>19</sup> Unlike the question of Arab independence, this propaganda point and Nazi Jewish policy in general actually did reflect real intent in the foreign policy of Hitler’s Germany during the Second World War. It was a message that demonized all Jews, including the Jewish communities in the Arab world. Many Arabs no doubt accepted this message. Opposition to a Jewish state and the demonization of the Jews everywhere had been part of the propaganda that served Nazi foreign policy since 1933, while opposition specifically to the Jewish National Home had been part of Nazi policy only since the early years of the war and the beginning of the “final solution” in Europe. Indifference and opposition to Arab independence had been an

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> See Achcar, *The Arabs and the Holocaust*, 5–20. See also Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, chaps. 5–7.

axiom of German foreign policy that Nazi propaganda had consistently sought to sidestep, as its virulent attacks on Zionism and the Jews continued unabated, even after the final defeat of Axis forces in North Africa in May 1943.<sup>20</sup> Although the question of the political future of the Arab world had become largely irrelevant for Hitler's government and its foreign policy by the summer of 1943, the so-called Jewish question would remain a central element in German policy until the end of the war. Therefore, Nazi propaganda in the Arab world, often with a focus on the Jews and calls for Arab attacks on Jews in Arab lands, continued as before until the end of the war, more or less in harmony with the intent of German policy as it was being carried out in Europe. While consistently refusing to publicly embrace a policy of sovereignty and independence for the Arab populations of the Middle East and North Africa, Hitler's government consistently pursued a policy aimed at the destruction of the Jewish people in Europe as well as the Arab world and beyond.

Hitler's policy toward the Arab world reflected a significant degree of continuity that stretched from the Wilhelminian period through the Weimar years and the Third Reich. Imperial Germany had generally accommodated itself to a status quo that included shared control among the Ottoman, British, French, Italian, and Spanish Empires over the Arabic-speaking lands of the Middle East and North Africa. The Kaiser's government remained fairly content with its expanding economic and cultural presence within the existing political structures, and pursued its imperial ambitions in areas of the world beyond the Middle East and North Africa. Its alliance with the Ottomans in the First World War and its subsequent defeat precluded any German role in the establishment of a postwar order in the Arab world, one that witnessed the expansion of primarily British and French imperial influence and control, in one form or another, over most of the remaining Ottoman-Arab territories of the Fertile Crescent and Arabia. Moreover, the successful efforts of the World Zionist Organization to include within the final peace settlement the creation of a Jewish National Home in Palestine was also in line with Imperial Germany's somewhat belated wartime support for the Zionist cause. The end of the First World War more or less completed a process begun almost a century earlier, namely the gradual expansion of European imperial control over the Arab lands of the Fertile Crescent, the Arabian Peninsula, and North Africa. Moreover, it also resulted in a substantial achievement for the Zionist movement in its hopes of one day creating an independent state for the Jewish people. In general, the prewar status quo in the Arab world was retained, albeit without the Ottoman Empire, and with an even greater Anglo-French presence, and with the new Jewish National Home under British authority as mandated by the new League of Nations.

<sup>20</sup> Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, 194.

The primary foreign policy focus of the new German republic beginning in 1919 was the peaceful revision of most of the provisions of the Versailles Treaty in Europe. As such, and given its military and political weakness and diplomatic isolation, Weimar Germany was in no position to contest the new postwar order in the Arab world, even if it had wanted to. In fact, the governments of the Weimar Republic did not inherit any compelling reasons to challenge the final settlement for the Middle East. Therefore, Weimar Germany quietly pursued its rather modest interests in the Arab world, interests that in some respects mirrored those of its Wilhelminian predecessor. It too defined Germany's interests in the Arab world and the larger Middle East as primarily economic and cultural; as was the case before 1914, the government in Berlin set out to promote those interests within the context of adhering to the political status quo in the region. With its primary focus on Europe, Weimar Germany accepted Anglo-French-Italian imperial domination of the region, and the establishment and development of the Jewish National Home in Palestine. Within this context, Weimar governments sought to expand Germany's mainly economic and cultural presence in the otherwise European-dominated Arab states. In doing so, however, Berlin also claimed that it was not responsible for the unrest and violence that it viewed as the result of the new status quo in the Arab world, a status quo that it repeatedly insisted it had no role in establishing. Moreover, in its acceptance of the postwar settlement in the region, Weimar Germany's response to Arab efforts to reverse the settlement and to achieve Arab national self-determination and independence and an end to the Jewish National Home in Palestine were met with indifference or outright rejection.

Much like the governments of Imperial and Weimar Germany, Nazi attitudes and policy toward Arab demands for independence after 1933 also ranged from indifference to rejection. Nazi racial ideology and geopolitical ambitions in Europe necessitated more or less the continuation of the status quo in the Middle East and North Africa. Hitler's quest for German *Lebensraum* in Europe and his racial world view presumed the maintenance of European colonial rule, especially British colonial rule, over much of Africa and Asia as part of a natural world order in which there was no place for Arabs and other "colonial peoples" to achieve their full political sovereignty and independence. Moreover, the end of Jewish life in Germany would initially require the dispossession and rapid emigration of the Jewish population from Germany, preferably to destinations outside of Europe, including the Jewish National Home in Palestine. The reliance of Nazi Jewish policy on the continued existence of the Jewish National Home, albeit under British control, necessitated the rejection of Arab requests for German diplomatic and material support in their quest to end British colonial rule in Palestine and the larger Arab world, to dismantle the Jewish National Home, and to end Jewish immigration to Palestine. Therefore, Hitler's Germany during the prewar years, as was the case with previous German governments since

the late nineteenth century, generally accepted the post-World War I status quo in the Middle East. This strategy would be modified somewhat in 1938 and 1939 as the situation in Europe changed with Hitler's pursuit of the annexation of Austria and the breakup of the Czechoslovak state. However, Hitler soon realized that the unrest and quest for independence in the British and French empires around the world was not enough to persuade London and Paris to accept his plans for central and eastern Europe, and that he would have to achieve his goals in Europe in the face of Anglo-French opposition. Germany's policy of restrained encouragement of, and support for, Arab unrest in Palestine and elsewhere in 1938 and 1939, meant primarily to distract Anglo-French attention from central Europe rather than to actually threaten the existence of the British and French empires, was ultimately unsuccessful.

Germany's victory over France in June 1940, coupled with Italy's entry into the war on Germany's side followed by its unsuccessful invasions of Greece and Egypt in the fall, directly extended Germany's political and military involvement into the Arab world. It also brought Hitler face to face with the conflicting French, Italian, and Spanish imperial interests in the Arab world, and intensifying Arab demands that a seemingly invincible and victorious Germany unequivocally commit to support Arab independence. From the start, Hitler took the very clear position that Italian interests and ambitions in the entire Mediterranean were paramount in Axis relations and policy, but that France's colonial position in the region must be more or less preserved as well in the interest of enlisting French support against Great Britain. Arab hopes that the Axis would explicitly commit to their independence in some form were in the end fundamentally unacceptable to Hitler, and obviously to Mussolini, to the French government in Vichy, and to Franco's government in Spain. Yet, Axis propaganda broadcasts continued to preach Axis solidarity with Arabs and Muslims everywhere against their "common" Anglo-American and Jewish enemies. Even as British forces easily ousted the brief pro-Axis government of Rashid Ali al-Gaylani in Iraq and, with the assistance of Gaullist troops, seized control of Syria and Lebanon from the Vichy French in May and June 1941, an explicit German commitment to Arab independence was not forthcoming. Repeated attempts by the Mufti of Jerusalem from his prewar and wartime exiles in Lebanon, Iraq, and Berlin respectively to secure a clear and unequivocal commitment from Germany to support Arab independence remained unfulfilled. Indeed, the only firm commitment for change in the Arab world that Hitler would undertake was Germany's determination to destroy the Jewish National Home in Palestine, and ultimately the Jewish communities in the Middle East and North Africa.

North Africa and the Middle East represented a large region in very close geographical proximity to German-occupied Europe, one in which German troops were militarily engaged and, however briefly, appeared to be on the verge of a military victory in 1942. Therefore, Germany was for a time in a position to possibly apply National Socialist racial principles to the populations

living in the region, a significant minority of whom were Jews, and a large majority of whom were Arabs. Had the Axis won the war, there can be little doubt that this ultimately would have included the ancient Jewish communities of the region in the “final solution,” the mass murder of the European Jews that had become a central element of Germany’s war in Europe. Of course, it is not likely that the same fate would have befallen the Arab population, despite the Nazi racial view of the world, and its general disdain for Arabs as for all “colonial peoples.” Notwithstanding the absence of significant German colonial ambitions in the Arab world, the reality of Italian, French, Spanish, and continuing British imperial interests in the Arabic-speaking world, and Nazi views about the racial inferiority of the Arabs, made it unlikely that Hitler’s government could ever have supported Arab independence and the end of European colonial rule in some form in the region.

Germany’s primary focus on Europe, and its military campaign in the Soviet Union, meant that the resources necessary for a military victory in North Africa and the Middle East would be limited. This problem was only compounded by the infusion of massive American resources into the war, and by the landing of Anglo-American forces in northwest Africa on November 8, 1942. Moreover, Germany’s continuing deference to the interests and ambitions of its Italian ally, coupled with the perceived strategic requirements of protecting the basic positions of Vichy France and Franco’s Spain in North Africa, generally precluded any Axis commitment to Arab independence and unity. In the end, this policy produced no political or strategic advantages for the Axis war effort in the region. The arguments of the Mufti and other Arabs to Hitler and Mussolini that an Axis military victory in the Arab world was possible only with a clear and public Axis commitment to Arab independence fell on deaf ears. As observed earlier, it is not at all certain that an Arab revolt would have occurred even if Hitler had made such an open and clear commitment in 1941 and 1942. Again, it must be emphasized that with the possible exception of al-Gaylani’s short-lived coup in Iraq in April and May of 1941, the Arab world remained relatively quiet during the war years. By the end of 1942, the tide of battle was turning decidedly against the Germans, in North Africa and especially in the Soviet Union, making Germany’s rather murky policy toward the Arabs increasingly irrelevant. The New Year 1943 would see the massive defeat of German forces at Stalingrad in February, followed by the final Axis defeat in Tunis and expulsion from North Africa in May 1943. This final, total termination of an Axis presence anywhere in the Arab world relegated the Middle East and North Africa even more than previously to the periphery of Germany’s strategic interest and policy for the remainder of the war.

This in turn produced a new and very different imperative for Hitler’s government. It included the obvious, namely an immediate need to defend against Allied offensives from the Soviet Union in the east, from Italy in the south, and from an anticipated allied invasion of France in the west. It also relegated the Arabs, their exiled leaders in Europe, and the Middle East as a

whole to a much diminished level of immediacy and importance for German policy makers in Berlin. By the end of 1943, especially following Italy's surrender in September, Italian, French, and Spanish imperial interests, along with Arab nationalism and independence and the elimination of the Jewish National Home in Palestine, had for the most part ceased to have any relevance to the immediate needs of Hitler and Nazi policy makers. Through late 1943 and 1944, the Mufti concluded that Germany had never been in a position to help secure Arab independence after all and that it had in fact never really intended to do so. Indeed, he even found himself unable to stop Germany's decision to, once again, send Jewish refugees, albeit in relatively small numbers, from German-occupied Europe to Palestine in exchange for German nationals in British custody since the beginning of the war. Moreover, the Mufti's role in the formation of the Muslim Waffen-SS (Handschar) division in Bosnia in 1943 had little if anything to do with Arab independence and the Arab world. The project was a German idea, a European creation, and meant to support Germany's war effort in Europe. It was made up mostly of European, not Arab, Muslims, and had little if anything to do with remaining interests that the Nazi regime might have had in the Arab world. Indeed, Croatian officials expressed their anger to the Germans in the summer of 1944 that the existence of the Handschar division threatened the territorial integrity of a Greater Croatia, and that it was "...sickening, that in the offices of the division there were everywhere pictures of the Grand Mufti, but not of the Croatian Chief of State."<sup>21</sup> In the end, the Handschar division in Europe was al-Husayni's only tangible "accomplishment," if one can call it that, from his wartime exile in Germany during the Second World War. Indeed, it was one that gave him a position of some importance in Bosnia for a time following the Axis surrender in Tunisia, but that had nothing to do with the Arab lands of the Middle East and North Africa.

<sup>21</sup> ADAP: Serie E, Bd. VIII, Nr. 95.





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# Index

- Abdullah, Amir, 85
- Abetz, Otto, (fig. 5.2), 141n.22, 152, 153  
(fig. 5.2), 153n.63, 159, 160n.79, 170,  
175–176, 178, 196–197
- Abwehr (German intelligence), 108–110,  
109n.25, 172, 188n.19, 210, 224, 238,  
244n.90
- Aden, 25, 116, 122
- Afghanistan, 2, 113, 113n.41, 128, 165,  
167, 189
- Afrika-Korps. *See* Erwin Rommel
- Alami, Musa al-, 97, 109, 187n.15
- Albania, 124, 133
- Algeria, 21, 25, 50, 75, 116, 118, 135, 140,  
141n.23, 142–144, 196, 218, 221–222,  
224, 235–236
- Anatolian Railway, 22
- Anglo-American landings in northwest Africa  
(1942), 216, 220, 222, 230, 278
- Anglo-Egyptian Treaty 1936, 129, 135, 219,  
219n.117, 219n.118
- Anglo-German Naval Agreement (1935), 64, 82
- Anglo-Iraqi Treaty 1930, 219, 219n.117,  
219n.118
- Anglo-Italian Agreement (1938), 120–123,  
128, 130
- Angola, 32
- anti-Semitism, 2, 6, 10–13, 33, 72, 115, 180
- Antonescu, Ion, 248–249
- Arab labor for Axis, North Africa, 240–241
- Arabian Peninsula, 1–3, 16, 21, 24–25, 43, 47,  
66, 112, 127, 140, 144, 146–147,  
160–161, 205, 207, 220, 263, 266, 275
- Arlossoroff, Chaim, 74
- Armistice (France with Germany and Italy  
1940), 144n.35, 152–153, 171–172, 176,  
190n.29
- Armistice Commission (German) in Wiesbaden,  
178n.133
- Armistice Commission (Italian) for Syria, 152
- Arnim, Hans-Jürgen von, 232, 234
- Arslan, Amir Schekib, 75
- Auer, Theodor, 196–197, 268–269
- Austria, 23, 28, 66–69, 82, 99, 101–103, 105,  
108, 117, 277
- Bahrain, 207
- Balfour Declaration, 23, 26, 33, 37, 38n.39, 72,  
80, 183
- Baranowski, Shelley, 10n.17
- Bari. *See* Italy; propaganda (German and Axis)
- Beckerle, Adolf, 244
- Bedri, Abdul Ghaffur el-, 77n.55
- Belgium, 32, 49, 107, 248n.91
- Ben Gurion, David, 5n.10
- Berger, Gottlob, 226–227, 259
- Berk, Schwarz van, 108
- Berliner Tageblatt*, 80n.62
- Bey of Tunis, 224, 232
- Bismarck, Otto von, 19, 19n.3, 21
- Bizaret. *See* Jews, forced labor in North  
Africa
- “Blood and Soil” (*Blut und Boden*) 62
- Bohle, Ernst, 78
- Bolshevism, 49, 63, 70, 236
- Börsen Zeitung*, 80n.62
- Bose, Subhas Chandra. *See* India
- Bosnia-Herzegovina. *See* Handschar Division
- Brauchitsch, Walther von, 108n.23
- Brit Shalom, 5n.10
- British White Paper (1939), 110, 112, 131, 136,  
136n.4, 183, 244
- Brod, Simon, 246 (fig. 7.2)
- Browning, Christopher, 10–11
- Bulgaria, 113, 188, 242, 244–245, 247–251,  
253
- Bullock, Alan, 9
- Bülow, Bernhard von, 37, 82n.69
- Bülow-Schwante, Vicco von, 90
- Burckhardt, Carl, 107n.21

- Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy,  
London, 103
- Canaris, Wilhelm, 108–110, 161, 210,  
224–225, 224n.8, 231
- Catroux, Georges, 190
- Caucasus, 98n.121, 189, 192, 198, 202, 204,  
204n.71, 206, 209–211, 210n.90, 217,  
220–221, 228, 235n.49, 258
- Cavallero, Ugo, 122, 122n.75
- Central Association of German Citizens of the  
Jewish Faith (Centralverein deutscher  
Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens), 33–34
- Central Powers, 22, 44
- Central Relief Committee, 85
- Christian Arabs, 7
- Churchill, Winston, 7, 27, 69n.31, 105, 226
- Ciano, Count Galeazzo, 17, 69, 85–86, 85n.83,  
86n.86, 116, 118, 120–123, 121n.66, 128,  
141–142, 141n.23, 147–149, 151,  
151n.59, 189, 189n.20, 189n.21, 195,  
195n.43, 195n.45, 200, 203n.69, 208n.83,  
250–251
- Claß, Heinrich, 48
- Clodius, Carl, 99
- Colonial Office, London, 85, 136, 185
- “colonial peoples,” 1, 54–56, 59, 61, 63,  
276, 278
- Colonial Policy Office of the NSDAP  
(Kolonialpolitisches Amt der  
NSDAP), 65
- Colvin, Ian, 108n.23
- Corsica, 50, 118, 122–123, 141, 141n.23, 144
- Cosmelli, Giuseppe, 187, 187n.15
- Craig, Gordon, 45n.61
- Croatia, 242, 258–262, 259n.128, 260n.131,  
261n.135, 279
- Cüppers, Martin, 3–4, 5n.10, 11, 13, 14n.14,  
70–71
- Czechoslovakia, 68–69, 82, 101–103, 105–106,  
108, 128
- Daluges, Kurt, 259
- Darlan, François, 170, 175
- Darré, Walter, 62
- Das Schwarze Korps*, 94
- Dentz, Henri, 154, 170, 172–174, 176–178,  
176n.123
- Der Angriff*, 80n.62, 108
- Deutsche Diplomatisch-Politische  
Korrespondenz*, 80n.62
- Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro (DNB), 110, 223
- Dirksen, Herbert von, 106
- Djibuti, 122, 141
- Döhle, Walter, 79, 79n.60, 85, 85n.82, 97, 115,  
117, 184
- Dresdner Bank, 87
- Drummond, Eric, 85, 85n.83
- “Eastern Question,” 19–21, 44
- Eden, Anthony, 64, 80n.63
- Egypt, 4, 25, 31, 39, 85, 135, 150, 155, 161,  
163–164, 171, 178, 186, 189, 194–195,  
197–199, 202, 204, 218–221, 228–230,  
240, 253, 256–257, 266, 277  
and “independence” from England., 21,  
24–25, 55, 75–76, 79, 81, 87, 116, 135,  
140, 146
- Axis and independence of, 87–88, 105, 114,  
128–131, 147, 157, 160, 190n.27, 196,  
205–211, 208n.81, 208n.83, 215, 219,  
224–225, 267, 271
- Italian aims in, 116, 119, 122, 124, 126, 144,  
149, 152, 155, 216
- Eichmann, Adolf, 95n.115, 245, 247, 249
- Einsatzkommando* in North Africa, 239,  
239n.61
- El-Alamein, 194, 228, 240
- El Aouina, 230
- Epp, Ritter von, 62, 65
- Ethiopia, 66, 67n.22, 68, 85, 101, 118–120,  
123, 144, 178, 235
- Ettel, Erwin, 213 (fig. 6.3), 213–214, 213n.100,  
214n.101, 258–261
- Europapolitik*. *See Kontinentalpolitik*
- Farhud*, 177n.126
- Faysal I (King), 41–42
- Felmy, Helmuth, 114n.43, 140n.17, 168,  
204–211, 205n.73, 234
- Fertile Crescent, 1, 3, 7, 16, 21, 23–26, 26  
(fig. 1.4), 29, 31, 33, 44, 47, 50,  
98n.121, 137, 140, 144, 149, 152–153,  
157, 159–161, 164, 168–171, 176,  
182–184, 187, 189, 196–198, 204–207,  
210, 212, 215–217, 220, 229, 239, 257,  
263, 265–266, 270, 274–275
- “final solution,” 3, 10–12, 61, 193, 239,  
241–243, 255, 274, 278
- Fischer, Fritz, 19
- Foreign Policy Office of the NSDAP  
(Ausienpolitisches Amt der NSDAP), 65,  
95, 99, 110, 111n.30, 127n.88, 130
- Foreign Trade Office of the Overseas  
Organization of the NSDAP

- (Aussenhandelsamt der Auslandsorganisation der NSDAP), 99
- Fourteen Points (Woodrow Wilson), 29
- France, 15, 22, 24, 28, 30, 32, 36, 38, 41, 44, 48–51, 57, 63, 68, 69, 71, 74, 101, 105, 126, 134, 135, 139, 162, 176, 184, 186, 195–196, 225–226, 246, 248n.91, 257, 277
- Vichy and the French empire, 140–143, 152–153, 171, 179, 190, 190n.29
- and the Syrian and Lebanese mandates, 25, 38–39, 75, 79, 110, 118, 135, 159, 161, 164, 173, 179, 192, 197
- and French North Africa, 21, 146, 194, 218–220, 222, 225, 233, 235–236, 271
- and relations with Italy, 53–54, 63, 116, 118, 121, 121n.66, 122, 122n.73, 123, 126n.86, 144, 144n.35, 152, 223
- Vichy anti-Jewish laws in North Africa, 235, 240n.65
- France and Nazi Germany, 15, 51–52, 57, 62–66, 78, 107, 114, 121, 133, 140–143, 141n.22, 151–153, 153n.63, 159, 170–171, 194, 196, 222–223, 257, 269, 278
- Francis, Joseph, 77n.55
- France, Francisco, 142, 143 (fig. 5.1), 155, 252n.105, 277–278
- Frank, Hans, 117
- Free French. *See* Gaullists
- Friedländer, Saul, 10
- Friedrich Krupp, 84
- Friling, Tuvia, 248n.90
- Gaullists, 153–154, 162, 171–172, 177, 190, 196, 218, 225, 227, 234, 236–237
- Gaylani, Rashid Ali al-, 6, 8, 61, 162–184, 177n.126, 187, 188n.19, 195–196, 195n.43, 198, 200, 201–207, 201 (fig. 6.2), 203n.69, 209–215, 211n.96, 214n.101, 215n.107, 219–221, 242, 250, 267, 270, 277–278
- Gehrcke, Franz *see* Fritz Grobba
- Gensicke, Klaus, 4
- “Gentlemen’s Agreement“ (1937), 119
- German-Arab Training Unit (Deutsch-Arabische Lehrabteilung), 205–206, 208–211, 210n.90, 235n.49, 257
- German Pro-Palestine Committee (Deutsches Pro-Palästina Komitee), 33, 33n.30, 34n.31, 37
- Germany, and al-Gaylani coup (1941), 162–181, 184, 187, 201 (fig. 6.2), 221, 267, 278 and the Jewish National Home in Palestine, 12, 16, 23, 26, 28–45, 71, 74, 80, 89–100, 188, 192, 200, 227, 257, 261, 275–277, 279 and a Jewish state, 80, 89–100 economic and cultural interests in Arab states, 28–45, 70–89, 127–134 and return of former colonies in Africa, 19, 28, 31–32, 49, 62, 64–65, 68–69, 102n.2, 143, 151, 153 arms exports to Arab states, 79–89, 127–134 and Palestinian Germans (*see* *Palestinian Germans [Palästinadeutsche]*), and German nationals in British custody, 12, 135, 247, 251n.101, 252–257, 279 and relations with Turkey, 1, 22, 128, 132, 133, 136, 137, 140, 161, 164–166, 169, 175, 189, 197–198, 215n.107, 228, 241–257, 242n.70 German and Italian landing in Tunisia (1942), 228–230 collapse in the Soviet Union (1943), 60, 219, 221, 228, 238n.58, 272, 278 Axis collapse in North Africa (1943), 222–239 Gestapo. *See* SD; SS Gibraltar, 141, 143, 155 Goebbels, Joseph, 60, 61, 73, 108, 138, 138n.12, 177n.125 Göring, Hermann, 62, 86, 86n.86, 108, 114, 122, 175, 189 Granow, Erich von, 182 Great Britain, imperial interests in the Arab world, 13, 24–26, 30, 104–105, 108, 110, 111n.33, 113, 114, 116–120, 122, 135, 151, 157, 161, 184, 190, 204, 230, 270 and intelligence in the Middle East, 185 and Egypt, 25, 39, 55, 87, 120, 122, 128, 163, 207, 215, 219, 219n.117, 266–267 and Iraq, 40–42, 83–87, 124, 128–129, 128n.92, 150, 159, 162, 164, 166, 173, 175–176, 183, 186, 201, 207, 219n.117, 228, 267, 270 and Palestine and Transjordan, 7, 25, 37, 42, 44, 91, 94, 98, 100, 115, 120, 136, 173, 183, 185, 186 and French mandates in Syria and Lebanon, 30, 38, 162, 173, 176, 186, 227, 270

- Great Britain, (cont.)  
 and Saudi Arabia, 128–132, 186, 215  
 and exchange of German nationals for  
 Jews, 244–245, 247, 252, 254  
 and Hitler's overtures 11, 14–17, 14n.24, 21,  
 47–54, 57, 62–70, 78, 80–81, 81n.67, 101,  
 103, 106–107, 138, 152n.60
- Greece, 154, 155, 163, 165, 197, 204, 209,  
 210n.90, 211, 247, 253, 277
- Grobba, Fritz, 36, 38, 41–42, 76, 76n.51, 77,  
 77 (fig. 3.1), 77n.55, 81–87, 81n.66,  
 81n.67, 84n.73, 85n.78, 85n.82, 98, 100,  
 108–114, 114n.43, 115, 124–126,  
 126n.88, 127–129, 127n.90, 128n.92,  
 131, 132n.110, 139, 140, 151, 157, 163–  
 164, 164n.87, 167–170, 174n.119, 176,  
 182, 191–192, 194, 194n.40,  
 202–203, 202n.67, 204–207, 211n.96,  
 213–215, 214n.101, 215n.107
- Groscurth, Helmuth, 109
- Ha'avara Transfer Agreement, 95, 95n.117,  
 96, 108
- Haddad, Kemal, 147, 147n.46, 148n.48, 149,  
 157–159, 163–164, 187
- Hagen, Herbert, 110
- Halder, Franz, 114, 114n.43
- Halifax, Earl Edward, 69, 102, 102n.2
- Hamza, Fuad, 130
- Handschar Division, 257–263, 262 (fig. 7.4),  
 279
- Harley, H. Fitzgerald, 108n.23
- Hassell, Ulrich von 142
- Hendaye, *See* Spain, ambitions in Morocco and  
 northwest Africa; Gibraltar
- Henderson, Neville, 103, 107, 119
- Henke, Josef, 121
- Hentig, Werner-Otto von, 97 (fig. 3.4), 97–98,  
 98n.121, 103n.5, 108, 110–111, 111n.33,  
 112, 112n.35, 113, 115, 130–131, 140, 153,  
 172–173, 172n.114, 172n.115, 261n.135,  
 265, 265n.1
- Herf, Jeffrey, 3–4, 14
- Hewel, Walter, 211, 237
- Hijaz, 25, 43
- Hildebrand, Klaus, 9, 47, 68n.26
- Hillgruber, Andreas, 9
- Himmler, Heinrich, 108, 199n.58, 226, 227,  
 252, 253, 255, 257, 259
- Hinrichs, Walther, 90, 115
- Hirszowicz, Lukasz, 11, 12
- House of Commons, 85
- Hud, Khalid al-, 110–113, 115, 132
- Hungary, 241n.67, 242, 244, 245, 247,  
 249n.95, 250
- Husayn, Sharif, 16, 25, 43
- Husayni, Amin al-,  
 and Nazi anti-Semitism, 193, 239, 278  
 and mass murder of the Jews in Europe, 193,  
 239, 278  
 and Zionism and the Jewish National  
 Home, 72, 79–100, 183–188, 192, 200,  
 227, 257  
 and Great Britain, chap. 6, 222–239  
 and support for the Axis, 72, 79–100, chap. 6,  
 222–239  
 among Arab exiles in Berlin, 8, 180–204, 201  
 (fig. 6.2), 241–242, 250  
 meeting with Hitler 1941, 191–194, 193  
 (fig. 6.1)  
 and North Africa, 204–238  
 and Bosnian Muslim Waffen-SS division,  
*see* Handschar Division,  
 and wartime transfer of Jews from Europe to  
 Palestine, 249–257
- Ibn-Saud, King, 88, 98, 110, 112, 125–126,  
 126n.88, 127n.90, 130–132
- India, 15, 31, 55, 105, 166, 195n.45, 198–200,  
 199n.58, 226, 229
- Inönü, Ismet, 197
- Iran, 1, 2, 83, 87, 98, 113, 113n.41, 116, 128,  
 138, 164–165, 167, 175, 184, 187–189,  
 203, 203n.70, 206, 207, 212, 228, 229
- Iraq, 2, 25, 31, 41–42, 41n.50, 42n.54, 73, 77,  
 77n.55, 83–85, 84n.73, 85n.78, 86, 88,  
 98n.122, 100, 100n.133, 110, 114, 115,  
 126n.88, 127, 128, 128n.92, 129, 131,  
 135, 140, 145, 159, 161, 163–166,  
 165n.91, 181, 185, 188, 189, 192, 200,  
 201 (fig. 6.2), 203n.70, 209, 210n.90, 214,  
 216, 228, 277–278  
 and “independence” from England in 1930,  
 40, 75, 79, 81, 129, 219, 219n.117,  
 219n.118  
 Axis and Iraqi independence, 6, 8, 61, 76,  
 76n.51, 86–88, 116, 124, 146–148, 150,  
 160, 163, 171, 179, 195, 195n.43, 198,  
 200, 202–203, 205–207, 212–213,  
 220, 225  
 collapse of al-Gaylani coup, 162, 166–180,  
 177n.125, 177n.126  
 and an independent Arab federation,  
 126n.86, 153, 171, 212



- and wartime relationship with Great Britain, 129, 148, 150, 154–180, 186, 187, 211, 228–229, 267, 270, 277
- Iraq Petroleum Company, 129, 207
- Istiqlal*, 77n.55
- Italy, 15, 25, 39, 47–53, 57, 63–70, 67n.22, 75, 84n.73, 85–86, 86n.86, 114, 116–127, 134, 144n.35, 145–148, 158, 159, 164–167, 176, 203, 205–207, 210, 210n.90, 212, 214n.102, 219, 223, 258, 278
- imperial interests in the Mediterranean, 17, 50, 53, 116–127, 130, 137, 141, 145, 149, 150–151, 153, 155, 158–162, 178, 186, 187, 190, 194, 196, 198, 212, 216, 257
- entry into the war, 122, 122n.73, 122n.75, 137, 139, 186, 277
- defeats in Egypt and Greece (1940), 154, 155, 163, 171
- Arab distrust of, 71, 85–86, 112, 123–126, 130, 137, 140, 141, 150, 152, 152n.61, 165n.1, 211, 214, 268
- and Libya, 21, 25, 123, 157, 235
- and Egypt, 39, 119, 122, 144, 149, 208, 225
- and French North Africa, 118, 126n.86, 142, 194, 223, 225, 231–234
- and the Red Sea and Arabia, 118–120, 125, 144, 216
- and relations with Great Britain, 120–123, 130, 144, 149, 150, 152
- and anti-Jewish Race Laws (1938), 123–124, 241n.67, 242, 246
- and Jews in Tunisia, 240n.64
- final defeat of (1943), 60, 235, 237n.56, 238, 238n.58, 279
- International Red Cross, 247
- Jabotinsky, Vladimir, 5n.10
- Jäckel, Eberhard, 9
- Jacobsen, Hans-Adolf, 9
- Japan, 32, 47, 68, 70, 119, 159, 163, 188, 195n.45, 198–200, 199n.58, 226
- Jews, 28–45, 46–61, 70–79, 89–100, 239–257
- emigration from Germany and Europe, 11–12, 14n.24, 28–45, 82n.67, 89–100, 114–115, 184, 239–257, 276
- immigration to Palestine, 5, 8, 24, 30–31, 34, 38n.39, 42, 71–72, 72n.41, 74, 79, 80, 89, 90, 93–96, 100, 115, 115n.48, 136n.4, 140, 182, 227, 239–257, 273, 276
- forced labor in North Africa, 230, 239, 240, 240 (fig. 7.1)
- of Spanish and Turkish descent, 242n.70, 252–257, 252n.105
- Zionist rescue organizations, 245, 245n.82, 246, 246 (fig. 7.2), 248n.90
- wartime exchange for German nationals, 239–257
- Jewish Agency for Palestine, 245, 246 (fig. 7.2)
- Jewish National Home, 5, 7, 8, 12, 16, 23, 26–38, 38n.39, 42, 44–45, 71, 72, 74, 76, 80, 89, 91, 93, 94, 104, 136n.5, 182–185, 188, 192, 200, 227, 241, 257, 261, 274–277, 279
- Ottoman declaration in favor of, 23
- Austro-Hungarian declaration of, 23
- Imperial German declaration in favor of, 23–24
- Jewish state, 38n.39, 76, 79–82, 81n.67, 89–100, 98n.122, 120, 136n.4, 183, 274
- Kapp, Karl, 218
- Kaoukji, Fauzi, 81, 81n.65, 82, 85
- Kastl, Ludwig, 31, 33n.30
- Keitel, Wilhelm, 108, 167, 209, 225
- Kontinentalpolitik*, 11, 51, 56
- Kroll, Hans, 169
- Kuhn, Axel, 9
- Kurds, 178, 228
- Kuwait, 24 (fig. 1.3), 25, 203, 207, 212
- Lahousen, Erwin von, 224
- Law for the Export and Import of War Materials (*Gesetz über Aus- und Einfuhr von Kriegsgerräte*), 82
- Lawrence (of Arabia), 24, 211
- League of Nations, 7, 15, 25, 26, 29, 41, 41n.50, 43, 44, 55, 89–90, 105, 107n.21, 121, 185, 275
- and German membership, 31–35, 33n.30, 37–38
- Lebanon, 25, 26 (fig. 1.4), 31, 35, 38, 73, 75, 79, 85, 118, 135–136, 146, 152, 160, 162, 164, 171–173, 172n.115, 176–179, 176n.123, 178n.133, 183–184, 186, 190, 192, 196, 205, 207, 212, 227–228, 248n.91, 270, 277
- Libya, 21, 21 (fig. 1.2), 25, 40, 116, 120, 123, 135, 140, 145, 149, 155–156, 163–165, 171, 178, 194, 196, 199, 214, 216, 218–219, 235, 240, 266
- Lichtheim, Richard, 26

- “living space” (*Lebensraum*), 9–10, 9n.17, 11, 15, 46, 51–53, 56–57, 61–64, 68, 93, 101, 103, 105, 107, 128, 133, 134n.113, 155, 276
- Locarno, 28, 31
- Luftwaffe, 167–168, 173, 175–176, 176n.123
- Luther, Martin, 217, 243
- Mackensen, Hans Georg von, 118, 144, 148–149, 208, 215, 218–219, 232, 266
- Maghreb, *See* North Africa
- Mallmann, Klaus-Michael, 3–4, 5n.10, 11, 13, 14n.14, 70–71
- Mandates, 7, 25, 26 (fig. 1.4), 28–45, 79, 118, 135, 147–148, 160n.79, 177, 179, 182, 186, 190, 196
- Mausier-Werke, 83
- McMahon, Sir Henry, 25
- Mecklenburg, Georg, 34
- Megerle, Karl, 271–272
- Melchers, Wilhelm, 260, 260n.133
- Mommsen, Wolfgang, 19
- Montoire, *See* Philippe Pétain,
- Morocco (French), 2, 21, 21 (fig. 1.2), 25, 75, 135, 140, 141n.23, 142, 143, 177, 196, 216, 221–222, 224, 230, 235, 236, 268, 269, 271
- Morocco (Spanish), 21, 21 (fig. 1.2), 25, 75, 140, 142, 143, 196, 224, 236, 268, 271
- Mufti of Jerusalem, *See* Amin al-Husayni
- Müller, Heinrich, 252
- Munich Agreement and Conference, 103, 106
- Mussolini, Benito, 13, 16, 50, 86, 116, 120, 123, 162, 188, 198–199, 203, 235, 243, 277–278
- and relations with Great Britain, 85, 101, 118, 120–121
- and relations with France, 116–118
- and relations with Hitler and Germans 50, 54, 63, 66, 69, 106, 114, 116, 117 (fig. 4.3), 119, 122, 123, 128, 137n.8, 138–144, 148, 155–156, 186, 188, 189n.20, 194–195, 195n.45, 199, 208, 212, 220, 238, 266
- Nashashibi family, 136
- Netherlands, 107
- Neurath, Constantin von, 65, 66, 75, 91, 92, 92n.106, 116
- Nice, 118, 123, 141n.23, 144
- Nord, Erich, 35, 38, 42
- Nordbruch, Götz, 190n.29
- Ofer, Dalia, 247n.84
- OKH (Oberkommando des Heeres), 170
- OKW (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht), 111, 113, 116, 123, 131, 132n.110, 152, 159, 165–168, 171, 175, 210n.90, 223–225, 232, 236n.52, 238
- “Operation Barbarosa” (*Fall Barbarosa*), 155, 156, 168, 175, 187, 194, 258
- “Operation Green” (*Fall Grün*), 102, 105
- “Operation Sunflower” (*Fall Sonnenblume*), 156
- Order Police (*Ordnungspolizei*), 259
- Ottoman Empire, 7, 16, 18–20, 20 (fig. 1.1), 21, 23–25, 40, 44, 125, 133, 182, 183, 242n.70, 275
- alliance with Germany in First World War, 19, 22, 27, 33, 34, 133
- German interests in, 22–23, 27, 44, 275
- Otto Wolff, 83–84, 129
- overseas German communities (*Auslandsdeutsche*), 78
- Overseas Organization of the NSDAP (*Auslandsorganisation der NSDAP*), 78, 91, 99, 213n.100, 256
- Pact of Steel, 133, 134n.113
- Palestine, 4, 5, 5n.10, 7, 8, 11–13, 14n.24, 16–17, 23, 25–40, 26 (fig. 1.4), 29n.21, 38n.39, 42–45, 70–101, 72n.41, 77n.55, 82n.67, 92n.106, 95n.117, 96 (fig. 3.3), 104–105, 108, 114–116, 118, 120, 130, 132n.110, 183–184
- Arab revolt in, (1936), 79–90, 80n.63, 81n.66, 93, 104, 108n.23, 109–110, 109n.25, 112, 115, 119, 183, 184
- wartime situation in, 4, 12, 13, 16, 17, 136, 136n.4, 136n.5, 140, 144, 146–148, 150, 152, 160–161, 164, 173, 177, 186–189, 192, 200, 205–207, 209–212, 227, 239–257, 246n.83, 247n.84, 248n.90, 248n.91, 252n.101, 261, 271, 273, 274–279
- Palestinian Germans (*Palästinadeutsche*), 40, 95, 255–257
- pan-Arab nationalism, 76, 94, 153, 171–172, 182, 186, 188, 215–216, 215n.107, 220
- Papen, Franz von, 148n.48, 150, 198
- Paris Protocols, 170
- Passfield White Paper, 38n.39

- Peel Commission (Royal Commission), 81–82, 90–95, 97–100, 99n.126, 104, 120, 121, 183
- Peel Partition Plan (1937), 96 (fig. 3.3)
- Permanent Mandates Commission, 31–38, 33n.30
- Pétain, Philippe, 153–154, 153n.64, 154 (fig. 5.3), 222, 224, 231, 269, 271
- Petroleum, 22, 41–42, 112, 126, 129, 131, 140, 145–146, 148, 161, 189, 202, 204, 204n.71, 207, 228, 229
- Pfeiffer, Peter, 196–197
- Phipps, Eric, 80, 80n.62, 80n.63
- Phleps, Artur, 259
- Poland, 28, 46, 82, 93, 103, 107, 111, 122, 128, 132, 133, 137, 243, 247, 250, 250n.97, 258
- Portugal, 241n.67, 242, 252n.105
- propaganda (German and Axis) to the Arab world, 2–5, 8, 12, 14, 16–17, 23, 25, 60, 65, 70–76, 103, 104, 110, 114, 119–120, 123–124, 136–138, 137n.10, 138n.12, 145–146, 149, 158, 160, 163, 168, 179, 184, 190n.29, 191, 195–196, 199, 204–205, 208n.81, 209–211, 215, 218, 220, 223, 233, 235–237, 244, 250, 261, 265–275
- Prüfer, Curt, 33n.30, 41n.50, 75, 215, 215n.107
- racial ideology, Nazi, 1, 10–12, 10n.17, 23, 46–47, 52, 54–61, 70, 79n.58, 93, 276
- Rahn, Rudolf, 142n.22, 173–174, 174 (fig. 5.5), 174n.119, 176, 176n.23, 178–179, 230–234, 231n.31, 236–237, 237n.55, 239, 240
- Rauff Walter, 239n.63
- Reich Foreign Office (Auswärtiges Amt), 8, 17, 29, 30, 33n.30, 34–42, 66–67, 73, 75, 76, 76n.51, 78, 81, 83n.71, 84, 86, 87–91, 95, 97, 98n.121, 99–100, 103n.5, 105, 108–113, 111n.30, 113n.41, 120, 121, 124–130, 132n.110, 133, 136, 138, 138n.12, 140, 144, 146–148, 150–152, 157–159, 161–163, 164n.87, 165–168, 170–175, 181–182, 189–191, 194, 196, 199, 202, 204–207, 208n.83, 210n.90, 211, 213, 213n.100, 214–218, 215n.107, 223–225, 230–232, 236–238, 241–245, 247–249, 251, 251n.101, 252–255, 258, 260–261, 260n.131, 261n.135, 263, 265, 265n.1, 266, 268–273
- Near East Department (Abteilung III, Abteilung VII), 36, 75, 78, 97, 103n.5, 108, 125, 164n.87, 172, 196, 260, 265n.1
- Germany Office (Referat Deutschland), 90, 92, 115
- Trade Department (Handelspolitische Abteilung), 88, 99
- Economic Affairs Department (Sonderreferat-W), 113n.41
- Radio Political Department (Rundfunkpolitische Abteilung), 191, 266, 269
- Reich Industry Consortium: Export Group for Armaments (Reichsgruppe Industrie: Ausfuhrgemeinschaft für Kriegsgerät), 83
- Reich Kommissar for Export and Import Allowance (Reichkommissar für Aus- und Einfuhrbewilligung), 82
- Reich Ministry for the Enlightenment of the People and Propaganda (Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda), 73, 77n.43, 138
- Reich Ministry for Economics (Reichswirtschaftsministerium), 17, 84, 88, 89, 91, 95, 99, 111, 129, 130, 132n.110
- Reich Ministry of the Interior (Reichsministerium des Innern), 17, 89, 91, 95, 96
- Reich Ministry for the Occupied Territories (Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete) 226
- Reich Security Main Office (Reichssicherheitshauptamt), 199n.58, 216n.109, 244, 247, 249, 252
- Reichenau, Walter von, 50, 63
- Reichert, Franz. *See* Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro
- Rheinmetall-Borsig, 83, 87, 129
- Ribbentrop, Joachim von, 60, 65, 65n.16, 68, 68n.26, 102 (fig. 4.1), 110, 111n.30, 112, 112n.35, 113, 118, 122, 123, 128, 132–133, 133n.112, 142, 142n.26, 149, 151, 158–159, 161, 165–175, 176n.123, 177n.128, 178–179, 186, 189, 190n.27, 194n.40, 195–200, 202–206, 202n.67, 208, 208n.81, 212–217, 216n.110, 220, 222, 224n.8, 225n.12, 226–230, 237, 238, 249–252, 255, 256, 258, 261n.135, 262, 269, 271–274

- Ritter, Karl, 113n.91  
 Riza, Muhammad, 187  
 Riza, Shah, 187  
 Rome-Berlin Axis, 67, 67n.22, 118  
 Rommel, Erwin, 4, 156 (fig. 5.4), 157, 160–162, 164, 168, 173, 175, 178, 189, 194, 199, 202, 208n.81, 215, 217–221, 228, 232, 237n.56, 238, 239, 266  
 Rosenberg, Alfred, 49, 60, 62, 63, 65, 80, 80n.63, 94, 95, 99, 111n.30, 152n.60, 226, 238n.58  
 Roser, Rudolf, 172  
 Rühle, Gerhard, 191, 269–270, 272  
 Ruhr Crisis, 52, 63  
 Rumania, 93, 241–251, 241n.67, 248n.90  
 Russia (Tsarist), 15, 21–23, 133
- sabotage (Axis) in Arab lands, 160–161, 228–229  
 Said, Nuri, 163  
 Samuel, Herbert, 183  
 Saudi Arabia, 26, 26 (fig. 1.4), 43, 75, 76n.51, 85, 88, 98, 109–114, 109n.25, 119, 120, 124–128, 126n.88, 130–132, 132n.110, 135, 136, 159, 164, 186, 192, 203, 206–207, 215, 216  
 Schacht, Hjalmar, 64, 82n.69  
 Scheiban, Sheik Rahhal, 73  
 Schellenberg, Walter, 199n.58, 216, 216n.109, 217, 217 (fig. 6.4)  
 Schirach, Baldur von, 98, 261  
 Schlobies, Hans, 130  
 Schmidt, Karl, 108n.23  
 Schöllgen, Gregor, 19  
 Schubert, Carl von, 32, 33n.30  
 SD (Sicherheitsdienst): Security Service of the SS, 94, 96, 110, 216n.109, 239, 242  
 “secret treaties,” 16, 25  
 Seiler, Ferdinand, 76–77  
 Shakir, Tawfik al-, *See* Kemal Haddad  
 Shatt al-Arab, 175, 203, 203n.70  
 Shaw Commission, 37  
 Shawkat, Naji, 150  
 Sillitti, Luigi, 125  
 Simpson, John Hope, 38n.39  
 Simon, Sir John, 64  
 Slovakia, 242  
 Sobernheim, Moritz, 29–30, 29n.21, 35–36  
 Somaliland, 21 (fig. 1.2), 116, 141n.23, 144, 235  
 Sonderstab F, 168, 204–206, 208–211, 234  
 Soviet Union, 9–11, 15, 16, 46, 49, 52, 57, 61, 63, 98n.121, 105, 107, 132, 133, 139, 151, 155, 161, 164–165, 171, 178, 186–189, 191, 194, 204, 210n.90, 211, 219–221, 227–229, 234, 235n.49, 239, 258, 272, 273, 278  
 Spain, 21, 135, 142, 143–146, 187, 196, 220, 225, 241n.67, 242, 242n.70, 252, 252n.105, 277  
 imperial aims in Morocco and northwest Africa, 142, 142n.26, 151, 152, 196, 237, 257, 268, 278  
 Spanish Civil War, 68, 101, 118  
 Speer, Albert, 67, 67n.22, 78n.58  
 Stahmer, Friedrich, 27–28  
 Stalingrad, *See* Germany, collapse in the Soviet Union,  
 Stanley, Oliver, *See* Great Britain, exchange of German nationals for Jews  
 Stohrer, Eberhard von, 39  
 Straits (Turkey), 22, 133  
 Stresemann, Gustav, 28, 28n.17, 32, 36, 45n.61  
 Stuckart, Wilhelm, 89  
 Struma, 248n.90  
 Sudan, 21, 21 (fig. 1.2), 25, 140, 144, 147, 160  
 Sudetensland, 105–106  
 Suez Canal, 118, 120, 122, 123, 141, 144, 155, 168, 178, 206  
 Suleiman, Hikmet, 100  
 Suñer, Serrano, 142  
 Sunion, *See* Sonderstab F  
 Switzerland, 241n.67, 244–246  
 Sykes-Picot Agreement, 16, 24 (fig. 1.3), 25  
 Syria, 2, 25, 31, 34–35, 38–42, 50, 73–77, 79, 81, 81n.66, 85, 86, 110, 118, 126, 131, 160n.79, 172n.115, 174n.119, 176n.123, 178n.133, 183, 186, 188–189, 192, 196–198, 205–207, 209–212, 210n.90, 227–229, 235, 248n.91  
 Italian ambitions in, 50, 126, 131, 144, 152, 160, 173  
 Vichy French defeat in, 135–179, 189–190, 190n.29, 196, 270, 272, 277
- Tangiers, 237, 268  
 Temple Society (*Tempelgesellschaft*), *See* Palestinian Germans  
 Thadden, Eberhard von, 253–256, 254 (fig. 7.3)  
 Thies, Jochen, 9, 9n.14

- Tito Josip Broz, 258
- Transjordan, 25, 26 (fig. 1.4), 31, 75, 79, 85, 118, 127n.90, 146–147, 160, 161, 164, 183, 192, 205–207, 212, 229
- Trevor-Roper, Hugh, 9
- Tripartite Declaration on India and Arabia, 195n.45, 198–200, 226
- Trumpener, Ulrich, 22
- Tunisia, 21, 21 (fig. 1.2), 25, 50, 75, 116, 118, 122, 135, 140, 141, 141n.23, 144, 196, 218, 223–224, 230–237, 235n.49, 240, 240n.64, 249, 257, 271, 272
- Turkey, 1, 2, 128, 132, 133, 140, 161, 165, 172, 175, 184, 187–189, 228, 241–242, 242n.70
- and policy of neutrality, 1, 22, 136–137, 150, 164
- and interests in the Arab Fertile Crescent, 169, 197, 215n.107
- “Special Transit Law” (1941), 246
- and transfer of Jews to Palestine, 241–248, 242n.70, 246 (fig. 7.2), 247n.84, 248n.90, 251, 253
- Terrorism, 2, 94, 229
- United States, 14, 16, 19, 32, 33, 46–48, 52, 57–59, 70, 89, 131, 136, 146, 176, 188, 196, 197, 218–219, 222–229, 233–234, 242, 252n.105, 267, 268, 271, 277–278
- Versailles Treaty, 28, 31, 35, 36, 44, 49, 62, 276
- Vichy, *See* France
- Völkischer Beobachter*, 80, 94, 104n.9
- Waffen-SS, *See* Handschar Division
- Warlimont, Walter, 114n.43, 175, 238
- Weinberg, Gerhard, 9, 14n.26, 52–53, 116, 204n.71
- Weizmann, Chaim, 5n.10
- Weizsäcker, Ernst von, 67, 91, 91n.104, 92 (fig. 3.2), 97, 98n.122, 99, 110, 121, 142, 144–147, 151, 161, 162, 165, 172, 202n.67, 214, 214n.102, 217, 224–225, 232, 261n.135
- Weltpolitik*, 11, 19, 21, 51, 52, 56, 57, 65
- Wiedemann, Fritz, 66
- Wilhelm II, Kaiser, 19, 21, 23, 27, 44, 53, 275
- Wilson, Horace, 106
- Woermann, Ernst, 109 (fig. 4.2), 109–110, 112, 126, 127, 130–131, 144–146, 149, 153, 159–162, 164–166, 173, 178, 187, 187n.15, 196–198, 200–203, 202n.67, 211–213, 224, 225, 260, 261, 261n.135, 270
- Wolff, Heinrich, 72, 74, 77, 77n.55, 78, 79n.60, 180
- World Zionist Organization, 23, 26, 275
- Wurst, Timotheus, 73–74
- Yassin, Sheik Yussuf, 98
- Yemen, 83, 88, 119–120, 127–128, 130, 132, 132n.110, 144, 160, 192, 207
- Yishuv*, 26, 28–45, 89–100, 242–257
- Zeesen, 104, 137
- Zionism, 5, 5n.10, 11, 16, 26, 29, 31–34, 80, 82n.67, 90, 93–94, 99, 120, 236, 241, 244, 275
- Zionist Federation for Germany (Zionistische Vereinigung für Deutschland), 32

