



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

The importance of conspiracy theory in extremist ideology and propaganda

Fink, A.H.

Citation

Fink, A. H. (2020, April 16). *The importance of conspiracy theory in extremist ideology and propaganda*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/87359>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/87359>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/87359> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Fink, A.H.

Title: The importance of conspiracy theory in extremist ideology and propaganda

Issue Date: 2020-04-16

Chapter 11: The Grand Conspiracy Theory Comes to the Middle East

Introduction

This chapter will examine the early spread of the Grand Conspiracy Theory in the Middle East. It will emphasize the role of state-sponsored propaganda and briefly survey the evolution of some of the more influential variants of the Grand Conspiracy Theory in the Middle Eastern context. Subsequent chapters will deal with the role of these ideas on two extremist ideologies from the Middle East in greater depth, but this chapter will only touch on these later developments in order to provide historical context. This chapter will mainly focus on the anti-Jewish strain of the Grand Conspiracy Theory because as we shall see, the Soviet attempts to spread Lenin's ideas about imperialism in the Middle East reacquired anti-Jewish themes that Lenin had removed from Hobson's ideas. This chapter is not seeking to prove that these propaganda campaigns were the sole reason that the Grand Conspiracy Theory spread in the Middle East, just that they likely contributed to the spread, especially via radio-propaganda, and are exemplars of the kind of conspiratorial rhetoric that was circulating in the region during this time.

The first part of this chapter will lay out some background analysis on the major similarities and differences between Europe in the 19th century and the Middle East in the 20th century with regards to the spread of the Grand Conspiracy Theory. The second part will describe three major state propaganda campaigns that helped spread the Grand anti-Jewish Conspiracy Theory in the Middle East in the mid-20th century.

Court politics and proto-conspiracy theories

Both Europe in the 19th century and the Middle East in the 20th century had a common historical experience of monarchical court politics and accompanying political and sectarian "proto-conspiracy theories" – tales of court intrigue. Also, both regions had long traditions of Jew-hatred. Daniel Pipes has pointed out that there is very little evidence of conspiracy theorizing in the Middle East before the year 1800.¹ This thesis argues that there was very little conspiracy theorizing, in the sense that we usually understand it today, anywhere in the world before the year 1800 because before the democratic age the type of narratives that are the precursors of most conspiracy theories were court intrigues, and these often just described the way politics could actually work in monarchies. The capitals and *divans* of the Middle East certainly had just as much court intrigue and rumors of skullduggery and monarchical illegitimacy as the capitals and courts of Europe. Indeed, probably the closest thing to a grand conspiracy of usurpation that overthrew a monarch via long-term intrigue took place in this region. This was the Abbasid Revolution of 750 AD, which was preceded by "prolonged, persistent, sophisticated and, on the whole, clandestine propaganda."² This revolution

¹ Daniel Pipes, *The Hidden Hand*, pp. 296-297.

² Moshe Sharon, *Black Banners From the East*, (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem/Brill, 1983), p. 19.

overthrew the Ummayyad dynasty which had ruled the Muslim world since the early days of Islam. The revolution arguably began some time before 718 AD, when Abbasid propagandists began clandestinely arguing among Shi'a for their legitimacy as potential rulers of the Muslims because of their family connection to Mohammed.³

The literature of the Middle East also contains plenty of narratives that involve subterfuge, espionage, and deception that changed history. To take just one accessible example, examine Persian epic poem the *Shahnameh*. This well-known and well-loved work is littered with references to spies, concealed identities, and deception. Ferdowsi, the author of the *Shahnameh*, may have included so many stories like this to please his patron Mahmud of Ghazni (971-1030 AD). In addition to being a warrior, Mahmud was a consummate spymaster. Mahmud had spies he sent to other lands (*mushrif*s) and also a separate spy service dedicated to keeping an eye on the members of his court (the *Mushrifan-i- Dargah*).⁴ The 15th century historian Saifu'd-Din Hajji states that Sultan Mahmud received information even about the private meetings of his ministers.⁵

In Europe before the French Revolution there was another kind of narrative which is very similar to the modern conspiracy theories we have been studying, namely: sectarian propaganda that strives to blacken the reputation of another religion by arguing that the leaders of that religion are malevolent liars. Martin Luther's screed against the Jews and the early-modern anti-Jesuit and anti-Jansenist conspiracy theories in Europe are the best-known examples of this type from Europe. In an age where monarchical politics and religion were very closely intertwined there was a great deal of overlap between stories of Jesuit intrigue and stories of court intrigue. Like Europe, the Middle East also had its own versions of narratives which are recognizably sectarian conspiracy theories. In chapter 4 we discussed the medieval propaganda polemics against the Isma'ilis, the black legend that accused the Ismaili leadership of being secret atheists bent on destroying Islam and taking over the world.⁶

While the peoples of the Middle East had access to their own kinds of themes and tropes that were the precursors of the Grand Conspiracy Theory in Europe, Middle Eastern conspiracy theorists did not independently develop their own strains of the Grand Conspiracy Theory that attacked the idea of liberalism and democracy. Instead Middle Eastern conspiracy theorists adapted European narratives. After all, liberalism and modern democracy developed in Europe first, and by the time the ideas penetrated the Middle East there were already some very serviceable and well-developed conspiracy theories that could also be imported and used to attack them. This was first seen, very briefly and it appears inconsequentially, when opponents of the 1908 Young Turk revolution in the Ottoman Empire accused the pro-parliamentary revolutionaries of being aligned with a secret Jewish plot.⁷ At around the same time during the Constitutional Revolution in Iran a leading cleric Shaykh Fazollah Nuri denounced the pro-republican revolutionaries as being secret Freemasons and *babis* (a variant of Baha'i) among

³ Ğ. H. Yüsofi, "Abu Moslem Korasani," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, I/4, pp. 341-344. Available online at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/abu-moslem-abd-al-rahman-b>. Accessed on August 28 2018.

⁴ Muhammad Nazim, *The Life and Times of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931), p. 144-5.

⁵ Nazim, p. 145.

⁶ Farhad Daftary, "The 'Order of the Assassins:' J. von Hammer and the Orientalist Misrepresentations of the Nizari Ismailis," *Iranian Studies*, vol. 39, No. 1 (Mar., 2006), p. 72.

⁷ Bernard Lewis, *Semites and Anti-Semites*, (W. W. Norton & Co., 1999), Kindle Edition, p. 138.

other accusations. He excommunicated the leaders of the Constitutional Revolution and accused them of capital offenses.⁸ Both of these uses of anti-Freemason and anti-Jewish conspiracy theories to attack pro-republican revolutions may have been inspired by the Black Hundred propaganda from their northern neighbor Russia. As mentioned earlier, these propaganda themes seem to have petered out rather quickly.

Jumping forward a century, it may appear at first glance that conspiracy theories are uniquely prevalent in the political culture of the Middle East today. A quick comparison at news bulletins coming out of Iran and Syria compared with those coming out of Europe and America might give one the impression that the Middle East is inherently “more conspiratorially-minded” than the West. A Norwegian analyst who was a PhD student studying in Jerusalem in the 80s complained that “...in Arab political analysis and rhetoric, conspiracy theory comes close to serving as a general, all-purpose explanation of history and international politics.”⁹ However, as Daniel Pipes correctly pointed out, the idea that conspiracism is a major factor in Middle Eastern politics and only a minor, marginal factor in European politics is disproven by European history. The atrocities and massive cataclysms committed or induced by the arch-conspiracy theorist Nazis should be enough to refute this idea, to say nothing of the other examples illustrated earlier in this thesis. While it may be true that at the present time the peoples of the Middle East are more prone to conspiracy theorizing than are most people in Europe and the Americas, this was certainly not the case in the recent past and may not be so in the near future. This relative lack of conspiracy theorizing in the West may be a temporary anomaly, caused by the discrediting of the Nazis and the Soviets and their associated conspiracy-theory propaganda.¹⁰ One wonders how an opinion poll about a belief in the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy theory conducted in present day Tehran or Cairo would compare to a similar poll taken in early 20th century Paris, Berlin, or Moscow.

This chapter does not make any kind of argument that there is anything inherently “conspiratorial” in Arab/Persian/Turkish/Muslim etc. culture or thought or that conspiracy theories became popular in the Middle East solely through the efforts of Nazi or Soviet or Arab Nationalist or Islamist propaganda. Indeed, information on the popularity of conspiracy theories in the Middle East over time is spotty and sometimes contradictory. This chapter is not concerned with the effectiveness of propaganda in the Middle East on entire populations, but rather will show how successive waves of propagandists, both European and Middle Eastern, adapted the Grand Conspiracy Theory to their own purposes and ensured it was spread through the whole region. Discussing the effectiveness or popularity of a certain conspiracy theory pushed by propagandists is interesting but is ultimately beside the point when it comes to the effects these ideas have had on the Middle East in their role of inspiring violent extremism there (This will be discussed in the subsequent two chapters.) The fact that a certain conspiracy-theory used in a piece of political propaganda may be rejected by the overwhelming majority of the target audience is not important for our purposes. If this piece of propaganda convinces and inspires a minority, perhaps an extremely small minority, who, driven by their belief in the conspiracy theory, go on to organize and significantly affect politics, it can have more impact

⁸ Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, (University of California Press, 1993), pp. 92-93.

⁹ Tore Björge, *Conspiracy Rhetoric in Arab Politics: The Palestinian Case*, (Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, Oslo 1987) p, 103.

¹⁰ Pipes, *The Hidden Hand*, pp. 8-9.

over the long-term than the contemporary effect of the initial propaganda campaign. Indeed, a “second-generation” conspiracy theorist can be all the more effective at spreading a conspiracy theory, as he is not bound by the constraints of a state propagandist who is working towards a concrete political goal. In the case of the spread of the anti-Jewish variant of the Grand Conspiracy Theory to the Middle East, a prominent figure who took part in the crafting of the Nazi-sponsored “first-generation” spread of this theory in Middle East was also a major driver of the “second-generation” dissemination of the conspiracy theory after the Second World War. This was the Palestinian leader Hajj Amin al-Husseini. We will discuss his special role later in the chapter.

Jew hatred

The ancient and medieval Christian communities of the Middle East had similar Christian anti-Jewish traditions that were common to Europe. Islam, the dominant faith in the region, also had anti-Jewish traditions dating back from Islam’s earliest days. A few sections of Islam’s holy book, the *Quran*, reference the conflict between their prophet Muhammad and Jewish tribes on the Arabian peninsula. These conflicts were fleshed out in hadiths and early histories of Islam. As the great 9th century Quran commentator Al Tabari wrote:

“In my [Tabari’s] opinion, [the Christians] are not like the Jews who always scheme in order to murder the emissaries and the prophets, and who oppose God in his positive and negative commandments, and who corrupt His scripture which He revealed in His books.”¹¹

In the Christian gospel story, a group of Jews manage to have the Messiah arrested and killed (but he rises again after three days.) The *Quran*, on the other hand, mentions a Jewish plot to stymie Islam and harm Muhammed, but the plot was ineffective, they utterly failed. A Christian could read the gospels and get the impression that the Jews were malevolent and powerful capable of even killing the son of God. Anti-Jewish Muslims reading the Quran traditionally thought of the Jews as evil but ineffectual, powerless to stop the rise of the Prophet.¹² Before the modern era the strains of anti-Jewish thought in Islam emphasized the insignificance of the Jews, their weakness and impoverishment.¹³ They might be hostile to Islam but they had inevitably and ignominiously failed early on, and were now relegated to the margins, perhaps as a living example of the cost of opposing Islam. As the second surah (chapter) of the Quran puts it:

“And they [the Jews] were covered with humiliation and misery, and they drew on themselves the Wrath of Allâh. That was because they used to disbelieve the *Ayât* (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations etc.) of Allâh and killed the Prophets wrongfully. That was because they disobeyed and used to transgress the bounds...”¹⁴

¹¹ Andrew G. Bostom, *The Legacy of Islamic Antisemitism: From Sacred Texts to Solemn History* (Prometheus Books, 2008), Kindle Edition, locations 984-986.

¹² Lewis, *Semites and anti-Semites*, p. 129.

¹³ Lewis, *Semites and anti-Semites*, p. 218.

¹⁴ *Translation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'an in the English Language*, Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, Dr. Taqi Ud Din Hilali trans. *Holy Quran Translation in English*, (Saudi Arabia: King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Quran, 2000?) Sûrah 2. Al-Baqarah, Verse 61, Part 2, p. 13.

Despite its incongruity with anti-Judaism of the more Christian type, this pre-existing Islamic-style Jew-hatred provided a foundation on which clever propagandist could establish imported anti-Jewish conspiracy theories from Europe. While acknowledging this, it is important to recognize how modern European themes now dominate the anti-Jewish Islamic diatribes. The idea of the evil-but-ineffective Jew has been replaced by that of the nearly all-powerful Jewish menace.¹⁵

Radio

Now to deal with three factors that made the environment for the spread of the Grand Conspiracy Theory in the 20th century Middle East significantly different from its spread in Europe in the 19th century. We will discuss one technological difference and two political differences: the invention of radio, the impact of European imperialism, and Zionism.

First, radio: In all the propaganda campaigns discussed so far in this thesis with the exception of the campaigns of the Nazis and the Soviets after they had taken power, the main medium for their spread was newspapers, written material, posters, and books. Of course there was certainly an important role played by word-of-mouth and rumor, but these were less enduring and are nearly impossible to document. Newspapers and pamphlets allowed a state or a group to put out a uniform message across wide areas without worrying about a “whisper-down-the-lane” effect of having the message distorted. However, printed propaganda requires physical access to the target population and that enough of the population be literate (though images can get *some* of a message across.) If a propagandist was denied access to an area, clandestine newspapers could be printed in secret or smuggled into the denied territory, but the necessity for secrecy was still very limiting. The invention of the radio and especially the short-wave radio allowed propagandists to bypass these limitations. Not only could a message be beamed across national borders and even across continents, directly to a target audience, but the target audience did not even have to be minimally educated to receive the message. Radio allowed foreign states to conduct mass propaganda efforts with relatively little investment, apart from radio equipment and linguistic and cultural experts.

Radio allowed propagandists to spread their messages with unprecedented rapidity and over a large area, but unfortunately radio propaganda is more difficult to document and analyze than newspaper propaganda, without tapes or transcripts there is no real “primary source.” After the invention of radio scholars can no longer rely so much on libraries and newsprint to show the course of conspiracy theories, and consequently their particular pathways of transmission are less discernible. This chapter will examine three times when propagandists from different regimes used radio to spread conspiracy theories in the Middle East. Later sections of this chapter will examine some records that are available, reports of radio broadcasts written by American monitoring of Nazi, Soviet, and Arab nationalist propaganda.

¹⁵ Lewis, *Semites and Anti-semites*, p. 134-136.

European imperialism

A major factor that influenced the perceptions of narratives derived from the Grand Conspiracy Theory in the Middle East, one that can hardly be understated, was the role of European imperialism. During the modern era large sections of the Middle East have been either directly ruled by European powers or, perhaps more importantly for our purposes, indirectly ruled by European powers. The most notable example of this was Egypt, which was never formally part of the British Empire. In fact, for the first 32 years of British rule Egypt was formally a semi-autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire. Egypt was of crucial importance to the British because of its location at the main choke point on the way to India, the gem of the British Empire. Therefore Britain invested enormous amounts of resources and attention to ensure that Egypt remained safely within the fold of the British Empire even while on paper it was part of the Ottoman Empire. British tactics involved coopting local elites and attempting to direct Egyptian popular opinion away from anti-British, more nationalist, ideas.¹⁶ Egypt supposedly became independent in 1922, but really it was still under British domination. After living in such a situation for decades, one where a supposedly independent country is actually under the heavy manipulative influence of an outside Western power, it was not a stretch for some Egyptians, along with other non-European denizens of the various European empires, to see some conspiracy theories as consistent with the political reality they experienced: a few alien men in an embassy wielding enormous influence over their supposedly independent or autonomous government. The versions of the Grand Conspiracy Theory discussed in this thesis harp on the idea of a small group of manipulators using guile and deception (sometimes backed up by force) to subdue whole peoples, and in the case of Egypt this is close to what actually happened, though on a smaller scale and with less success than what is described in the Grand Conspiracy Theory.¹⁷

It should be noted here that the era of European imperialism was not the first time that an outside power had come in and taken direct and indirect control of the peoples of the Middle East. After all, the Ottoman Empire had conquered Egypt in the 16th century, and even before this parts of the Middle East and indeed almost every corner of the globe had come under the control of foreign empires at some point. Large sections of the Middle East had come under the rule of the Mongols, Ghurids, Seljuks, etc. at one point or another. One of the things that made the era of 19th-20th century European imperialism different, however, was the insistence of many of the European powers that they believed in universal values, in liberty, in representative government, rule of law, etc., even while they conquered foreign populations and manipulated supposedly sovereign governments. This contrast between word and deed would have been seen as hypocritical at least and perhaps even deceptive in the extreme, especially among the peoples under the rule of the French and British empires.

Also, as we have noted, in the early 20th century new technology allowed the rivals and enemies of these empires to reach their subject populations directly, through radio. Nazi and Soviet propagandists against the British and French empires could point out the aforementioned

¹⁶ For an extended study on this issue see James Whidden, *Egypt: British Colony and Imperial Capital*, (Manchester University Press, 2017).

¹⁷ Hannah Arendt made a point similar to this, though dealing more with domestic US politics. See *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Location 270.

hypocrisy of these powers and attack them using the tried-and-true conspiracy theory narratives.

Zionism

A new factor that entered the Middle East in the late 19th/early 20th centuries that was not relevant in Europe in the 18th and most of the 19th century was Zionism. Zionism is a movement that in the late 19th and early 20th century advocated and organized for the establishment of a Jewish national homeland in the Biblical “promised land.” Zionism was born in Europe, well after the anti-Jewish variant of the Grand Conspiracy Theory was established, and its effect on conspiracy theories in a Middle Eastern context dwarfs its effect on the development of conspiracy theories in Europe in the 19th and early 20th century.

Most historians date the beginning of Zionism with the 1896 publication of the book *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State) written by the playwright and journalist Theodor Herzl. There had been a few efforts at Jewish settlement in Palestine before Theodor Herzl, but he transformed these desultory efforts into a political force.¹⁸ Herzl called a well-publicized congress in Basel in 1897 where the participants resolved to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine, organize “the whole of Jewry in suitable local and general bodies, in accordance with the laws of their respective countries...” and to get the consent of the relevant governments to accomplish these aims.¹⁹

This call to organize Jewry all over the world made the Zionist Congress a kind of mirror image to the paranoid imaginings of anti-Jewish conspiracy theorists, especially their imaginary version of the Universal Israelite Alliance. However, Zionism was a movement to get Jews *out* of Europe and put them in a single place far from the seats of power, not a move to take over Europe and the World. This means there was a bit of cognitive dissonance for anti-Jewish conspiracy theorists who observed prominent Jews organizing and lobbying not take over their countries and destroy monarchy and Christianity but instead to get Jews to leave Europe and start farming in an Ottoman province. The Black Hundred ideologue and likely author of the *Protocols* Gregori Butmi-De Katzman referenced Zionism in an October 1905 introduction to some works of the pseudonymous “N. L.” (written during the Revolution of 1905.) Butmi insisted that Zionism was just a cover organization for revolutionary activity in Russia, and that Zionists were only pretending to be interested in emigration to Palestine:

“For a more complete understanding of the events that are taking place, we consider it appropriate to point out that the so-called ‘Zionism’, so widespread among the Jewish intelligentsia in Russia, has a plan for the relocation of Jews to Palestine only as an outward pretext, in fact it is a revolutionary organization, merged with the Jewish ‘Bund.’ - England, through its agents, the Russian Masons, contributes to the internal enslavement of Russia by the Jews; The Jewish Zionists, by instigating internal turmoil, paralyze the possible resistance of Russia to the machinations of English foreign policy. The agreement on this case between Zionism and Freemasons took place, apparently, in the year 1900, at the initiative of Dr. Hertzels, the founder of modern Zionism. Thus, Jewish Zionism, acting in Russia under the aegis of Russian freemasons,

¹⁸ Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*, (Tauris Parke Paperback, 2003), p. 81.

¹⁹ Lawrence J. Epstein, *The Dream of Zion: The Story of the First Zionist Congress*, (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), p. 84.

and in agreement with English Freemasonry, is a well-organized, Russia-wide, treacherous agent of English foreign policy that is always hostile to Russia.”^{20 21}

Hitler professed a similar idea in *Mein Kampf*. He wrote that the Jews were still aiming for world domination, and the talk of a Jewish state was just camouflage for building their global conspiracy and gaining a piece of ground for use as a safe-haven and training center:

“When the Zionists try to make the rest of the world believe that the new national consciousness of the Jews will be satisfied by the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine, the Jews thereby adopt another means to dupe the simple-minded Aryan.

They have not the slightest intention of building up a Jewish State in Palestine so as to live in it. What they are really aiming at is to establish a central organization for their international swindling and cheating.

As a sovereign State, this cannot be controlled by any of the other States. Therefore, it can serve as a refuge for swindlers who have been found out, and at the same time, a high school for the training of other swindlers ...”²²

The Soviets also viewed Zionism as a kind of demi-conspiracy to a larger conspiratorial project. They did not think Zionism was part of a plot by the Jews to conquer the world but was a local initiative of the “imperialist conspiracy.” Take this 1920 example from the Comintern, also used in the preceding chapter:

“...A glaring example of the deception practised on the working classes of an oppressed nation by the combined efforts of Entente imperialism and the bourgeoisie of that same nation is offered by the Zionists' Palestine venture (and by Zionism as a whole, which, under the pretence of creating a Jewish State in Palestine in fact surrenders the Arab working people of Palestine, where the Jewish workers form only a small minority, to exploitation by England). In present international conditions there is no salvation for dependent and weak nations except as an alliance of Soviet republics.”²³

While the Soviet Union spread propaganda all over the world and eagerly pressed every international advantage it could against “imperialism,” the Middle East (and therefore Zionism) was not a priority target for Soviet propaganda until later in the 20th century. A 1946 US intelligence analysis of Soviet radio propaganda stated that the Soviets broadcast in Persian and Arabic only about 60 minutes a day each, equal to the effort expended on Japanese and Swedish broadcasts and well behind the 345 minutes of broadcasting in English, 300 of German, and 120 each for Chinese and French.²⁴

²⁰ Н. Л. (N. L.), *ФРАНК-МАСОНСТВО и ГОСУДАРСТВЕННАЯ ИЗМЕНА* (Freemasonry and State Treason), (St. Petersburg: Printed by the newspaper “Russia,” 1906, Introduction by G. Butmi dated October 27, 1905, p. 14.

²¹ Butmi then says he “recently” got ahold of information about the alliance between Zionism and Freemasonry. He is probably not referring to the *Protocols* here, as it had already been published several times even years earlier, though it is possible he is referring to it.

²² Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf / My Struggle* (Stalag edition, reprint of the 1944 English edition) (Ostara Publications), pp. 363-364.

²³ *The Communist International: 1919-1943 - Documents, Vol. 1: 1919-1922*, p. 144.

²⁴ “Analysis of Soviet Foreign Propaganda Broadcasts,” Central Intelligence Group, 23 July 1946, ORE 2. Available at https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000256976.pdf.

Unlike the Soviets and the early Nazis in the 1920s and 30s, who were focused on Europe, the Arab Palestinians could not ignore the increasing Jewish settlement in their region. The Zionist movement was increasingly successful in the first decades of the 20th century. By 1908 there were about 10,000 “Zionist” Jewish settlers in Palestine. These settlers were noticeably different from the Jews which already inhabited the region, in language, custom, and attitude.²⁵ By the turn of the century there was increasing anti-Jewish feeling among Palestinian Arabs, mainly connected to fears about increased Jewish immigration and land purchases.²⁶ The Ottoman rulers of Palestine were aware of Zionism and they tried to limit this movement which promised to exacerbate tensions in their already fractious empire and attract the unwanted attention and involvement of European powers whose Jewish citizens and subjects were emigrating to Palestine. Ottoman administration was not very effective, and their restrictions on immigration and land sales were unable to halt the immigration.²⁷

Zionism, European imperialism, and the beginning of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

The Ottoman loss in WWI dramatically shifted the situation in favor of the Jewish settlers in Palestine. While the war was still raging the British government had publicly pledged its support for a national home for Jews in Palestine in the “Balfour Declaration.” The British reasons for making this statement were probably a combination of sympathy for Zionism and an effort to shore up Jewish support for the war.²⁸ When the Ottoman Empire was dismembered by the victors, the British took Palestine, ostensibly administering the territory on the behalf of the League of Nations. Under British rule the Jewish population continued to increase, and Jewish settlers spent millions of pounds purchasing land from the local Arab nobility.²⁹

After the Balfour declaration leading Zionists pressed their cause hard, and this elicited predictable resistance from the local Arabs, and eventually armed resistance.³⁰ The Jews in Palestine formed armed groups to defend their settlements from Arab attacks, and the main armed organization, the *Haganah*, also became involved in assisting further Jewish immigration.³¹ To mitigate the hostility of the Arabs against them, the British also imposed immigration restrictions on Jews trying to enter Palestine, but with limited effect. With the increased persecution Jews faced in Hitler’s Germany, many German Jews who could emigrate did, and many of these went to Palestine.³² This did not go unnoticed in the Arab world. One Arab commentator noted in 1933 “Hitler’s victory is a dangerous development for the Arabs in Palestine, his plans regarding the Jews are well known. He will not hesitate to realize these plans and we will witness waves of refugees.”³³

²⁵ Neville J. Mandel, *Arabs and Zionism before World War I*, (University of California Press, 1976) p. 34.

²⁶ Mandel, pp. 40-44.

²⁷ Lewis, *Semites and Anti-Semites*, pp 167-168.

²⁸ Matthew Gray, *Conspiracy Theories in the Arab World, Sources and Politics*, (Routledge, 2010), p. 55.

²⁹ Colin Shindler, *A History of Modern Israel*, (Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 32.

³⁰ Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, (Penguin, 2015), Kindle Edition, p. 10.

³¹ Mark Tesser, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, (Indiana University Press, 2nd edition, 2009), p. 186.

³² Matthias Küntzel, *Jihad and Jew-Hatred*, (Telos Press Publishing, 2009) Kindle Edition, Location 585.

³³ René Wildangel, “The Invention of ‘Islamofascism’. Nazi Propaganda to the Arab World and Perceptions from Palestine,” *Die Welt des Islams*, 1 January 2012, Vol.52(3/4), pp.526-543, p. 540.

Paradoxically, given the fact that Nazi and Tsarist anti-Jewish conspiracy theorists were partially responsible for the increased Jewish settlement in Palestine by increasing the persecution of Jews in Europe, some Arabs would adapt and adopt the Anti-Jewish version of the Grand Conspiracy Theory, and use it to rail against that settlement. It appears that Arab Christians in and around Palestine were the first to import these ideas. It is important to emphasize that at this point the number of residents of the Middle East who endorsed this conspiracy theory by the mid-1930s was probably quite small, just a part of the literate population. We lack any reliable hard data on the spread of this idea, but we do have various Arabic editions of the *Protocols*. Anti-Jewish conspiracy theorists don't have to believe in the truth of or even to read the *Protocols* to believe in a version of the conspiracy theory it describes, but its role as the "classic" document of anti-Jewish conspiracy theory means that it can serve as a barium meal to help chart the spread of the idea of the Grand anti-Jewish Conspiracy Theory.

The first editions of the *Protocols* in Arabic were published by Christians in the 1920s. This may have been a translation of a mid-1920s French version. Another contender for first translation into Arabic was an article published in January 1926 in the Roman Catholic periodical *Raqib Shayun*. By 1929 the leader of the Palestinians Hajj Amin al-Husseini referenced the *Protocols* while inveighing against Jewish settlement in Palestine, warning that Jewish colonization of the region was part of the global Jewish plot.³⁴ Al-Husseini played such an important role in the assimilation of European anti-Jewish conspiracy theories into the Arab context that we will examine his biography and beliefs more deeply in the subsequent section.

The Mufti

Hajj Amin al-Husseini was a former officer in the Ottoman army who had defected and joined the British-sponsored Arab revolt in 1917.³⁵ While still working for the British after the war, al-Husseini became a strong opponent of Jewish settlement in Palestine and in 1920 he took part in the formation of al-Fidiya, the first anti-Jewish military organization in the region. He pushed for the creation of a "Greater Syria" under British protection which would include Palestine.³⁶ Perhaps because they trusted this Arab nationalist firebrand who had nevertheless worked for them, the British appointed al-Husseini as the "Grand Mufti" of Jerusalem in 1921 when he was only 24, despite his lack of training as a religious scholar. Perhaps by placing someone so inexperienced who had worked for them in such an influential position, British officials were trying to replicate some of their success with indirect rule that had worked in Egypt. Instead they ended up promoting the career of the man who would become a major thorn in their side.

Al-Husseini was tasked by the British authorities with creating a "Supreme Muslim Council" in Palestine that would be in charge of all Muslim charities, courts, foundations, etc.

³⁴ Esther Webman, "Adoption of the Protocols in the Arab Discourse on the Arab-Israeli Conflict, Zionism, and the Jews," in *The Global Impact of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, Esther Webman ed. (Routledge, 2011), p. 202.

³⁵ Barry Rubin and Wolfgang G. Schwanitz, *Nazis, Islamists, and the Making of the Modern Middle East*, (Yale University Press, 2014), p. 63.

³⁶ Rubin and Schwanitz, pp. 63-65.

This British decision gave this nationalist neophyte an enormous amount of power and funds.³⁷ In the 1920s al-Husseini constructed a militant network to oppose Jewish settlement and support Pan-Arab nationalism, rooted in Islamism.³⁸ Al-Husseini traveled widely to build support for his cause, from India to Geneva. Fatefully, he had a good relationship with Muhammad Mustafa al-Maraghi, the rector of the renowned al-Azhar University in Egypt and a leader in a new movement in Egypt: the Muslim Brotherhood.³⁹ Somewhere along the way al-Husseini picked up the idea of an international Jewish conspiracy, and he used it in anti-Zionist propaganda.

In the 1930s al-Husseini, via the Palestinian Muslim Council, funded a violent Palestinian Islamist group the “Black Hand.” This group carried out attacks against Jews and British soldiers.⁴⁰ There is no evidence that this move was motivated by the Mufti’s belief in any anti-Jewish conspiracy theory, and is more likely it was just an unfortunately normal human response to escalating political/religious conflict. At around the same time there were also violent Jewish groups that attacked both the British and Arabs.

Regardless of one’s opinion about the methods used by some Jews during the creation of Israel and the methods used by some Palestinians, the right or wrongness of Israel’s creation, the legitimacy or illegitimacy of Palestine as a state (as opposed to an extension of Syria or Jordan), etc., the kinds of fighting discussed so far in this chapter have been “normal” - that is, not linked to any belief in a massive imaginary enemy. There were two groups of people, both of whom believe they have a right to the same piece of land. Unfortunately, in this kind of situation violent conflict is unexceptionable. As stated by Ze’ev Jabotinsky, a Zionist leader and one of the founders of the Jewish militant organization the Irgun: “Every indigenous people will resist alien settlers as long as they see any hope of ridding themselves of the danger of foreign settlement. This is how the Arabs will behave and go on behaving so long as they possess a gleam of hope that they can prevent ‘Palestine’ from becoming the Land of Israel.”⁴¹ That being said, one does not have to be in favor of the French Revolution to recognize the Austrian tales of Illuminati were false, nor does being against republican government require one to adopt the Black Hundred tales of an international Judeo-Masonic conspiracy. Likewise one does not have to be pro-Israel to recognize that tales of a vast international conspiracy to dominate the world are false. Unfortunately, for al-Husseini and his followers being against the Jews in Palestine came to mean that one had to oppose them all over the world, engage or enable atrocious violence against them, and to label them as evil conspirators.

Enter the Nazis

Al-Husseini was deeply anti-Jewish, and when the Nazis came to power in Germany he saw in them a potential ally against the Jews and his former patrons the British. In 1933 al-Husseini approached the German Consulate in Jerusalem just a few months after Hitler became

³⁷ Rubin and Schwanitz, pp. 67-68.

³⁸ Rubin and Schwanitz, pp. 78.

³⁹ Rubin and Schwanitz, pp. 87-88.

⁴⁰ Shaul Bartal, *Jihad in Palestine: Political Islam and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, (Routledge, 2016), pp. 1-2.

⁴¹ Avi Shalim, p. 14.

chancellor. He told the German representatives that he was against the “current Jewish influence on economy and politics” that was “damaging everywhere and needed to be fought.”⁴² Al-Husseini was apparently so enamored with the Nazis and their anti-Jewish ideas that he overlooked the 1933 deal made between some Zionists and Hitler to allow 60,000 Jews to immigrate to Israel in exchange for a third of their property.⁴³

After a failed general strike against British Rule and Jewish immigration, in 1937 al-Husseini initiated a Palestinian revolt. His armed followers attacked Jewish settlements, destroyed crops, and mined roads. Al-Husseini had managed to get the backing or tacit consent of some surrounding Arab states and also support from Italy. The German government dispatched Adolf Eichmann, who was later to become one of the architects of the Holocaust, to meet this up-and-coming anti-Jewish leader, but Eichmann was denied entry into Palestine by the British and instead met with al-Husseini’s representatives in Cairo. He reported back to Berlin that these Arabs may have been ignorant of Nazi ideology, but they had a deep hatred for Jews.⁴⁴

Al-Husseini’s rebellion managed to get Hitler’s attention. In 1938 Hitler urged the German minority in soon-to-be invaded Czechoslovakia to “Take the Arab Palestinians as your ideal. With unusual courage they fight both England’s British Empire and the world Jewry. They have no protector or helper. I give you the means and weapons, and all of Germany is behind you.”⁴⁵ The German government also provided direct aid to al-Husseini’s revolt, shipping thousands of rifles to fight the Jews and British. According to a US intelligence analysis completed after the war, captured German documents indicated that al-Husseini’s revolt had been dependent on Nazi support, it would not have continued without it.⁴⁶

Realizing that war with Germany would soon break out, the British tried to concede to most Arab demands in order to end the Palestinian trouble. They promised bans on Jewish immigration and the establishment of a Palestinian state, but the Arab hardliners led by Al-Husseini refused to accept even these drastic concessions. Instead they ended up collaborating with the Nazis. After all, if the Germans won the coming war, they would have no need of any British agreements.⁴⁷

Al-Husseini’s advocacy for the Palestinian cause and jihad against the Jews made him a star in the Arab world. When he visited Iraq in October 1939 he was feted as a hero and granted large subsidies. He also became involved in Iraqi politics.⁴⁸ His 1936 general strike in Palestine had also galvanized the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, which experienced rapid growth between 1936 and 1938 when it championed Palestinian cause in Egypt.⁴⁹ In 1938 there was a well-publicized “World Parliamentary Congress for the Defense of Palestine” held in Cairo. Western diplomatic reports state that Arabic translations of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*

⁴² Jeffrey Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 16.

⁴³ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 93.

⁴⁴ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 96.

⁴⁵ Rubin and Schwanitz, pp. 96-97.

⁴⁶ Rubin and Schwanitz, p. 97.

⁴⁷ Rubin and Schwanitz, pp. 100-105.

⁴⁸ Rubin and Schwanitz, p. 107.

⁴⁹ Küntzel, Location 588.

and *Mein Kampf* were distributed to attendees, though one of the reports about the conference notes that these had no impact on the attitudes of the general Egyptian public.⁵⁰

Nazi propaganda

Nazi interest in cultivating Muslim allies in the Middle East was initially not focused on Palestine and Zionism, but they were recognized early on as an important tool with which to rally Arab popular opinion to the Nazi side. After enduring a 1933 anti-German boycott led by Egyptian Jews, a group of Germans in Cairo wrote a memo to the German Foreign office about how the “broad masses” of Egyptians could be awakened to the “Jewish threat.” They concluded that direct anti-Jewish publicity campaigns in Egypt were probably of limited value, but suggested that Germany “...focus far more on the point where real conflicts of interest between Arabs and Jews exist: Palestine. The conflict between Arabs and Jews there must be transplanted to Egypt.”⁵¹

Nazi success in this quest for Arab (and also Persian) allies would have had obvious advantages for German strategy, especially after war broke out. If the Arabs revolted successfully then the main source of oil for the British would be jeopardized, and therefore the economy of the British Empire and the capacity of the British fleet would be threatened. Unrest in the Arab regions and in Persia could pave the way for the German conquest of these regions, and German propaganda and secret activity there could cultivate future collaborators for a Nazi-occupied Middle East.

However, Nazi racialism was a formidable ideological obstacle to these kind of alliances with Arabs. The Nazis loudly declared their “anti-Semitism,” and Arabs are Semitic. Hitler had made his contempt for the other “lower” races quite clear in *Mein Kampf*. In one passage, immediately after discussing how he as a Teuton “would far rather see India under British rule than under that of any other nation...” he continued his denigration of the non-European peoples and pooh-poohed the idea of a successful Egyptian revolt against the Teutonic Britons: “The hopes founded on a legendary rising in Egypt were just as chimerical. The ‘Holy war’ may give our German nincompoops the passing illusion that others are now prepared to shed their blood for them...but in actual fact the ‘Holy War’ would soon be brought to a sanguinary conclusion under the withering fire of British machine-guns...” Hitler concluded this section deriding the very idea of an alliance with any of the world’s subject peoples, including the Arabs: “I, as a nationalist, who estimate [sic.] the worth of humanity according to racial standards, must, in recognizing the inferiority of the so-called ‘oppressed nations’, refuse to link the destiny of my own people with the destiny of theirs.”⁵² Passages like these were used in British propaganda during the war to discredit the idea of an Arab alliance with Germany.⁵³

In 1934 the Nazi diplomat Fritz Grobba suggested modifying sections of *Mein Kampf* in its forthcoming Arabic translation to make it more appealing to Arabs. Hitler agreed to these changes, such as changing “anti-Semitic” to “anti-Jewish.” This project ran into trouble and

⁵⁰ Gudrun Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt, 1914-1952*, (I.B. Tauris, 1989), pp. 146-147 and also footnote 96 on p. 260.

⁵¹ Küntzel, location 586.

⁵² Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Stalag edition, p. 742.

⁵³ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 34.

bureaucratic wrangling, some of it connected with the difficulty of translating the obviously anti-Egyptian passage. The Germans shelved this project.⁵⁴ Nevertheless this attempt was an early sign that the Nazis were willing to modify their ideology for propaganda purposes, at least when presenting it to Arabs.⁵⁵

Nazi racialism became a real problem for German diplomats after the passage of new German laws banning marriage between Arians and non-Arians and stripping non-Arians of German citizenship. The diplomats managed to muddle through this without too many embarrassments. One German diplomat wrote a memo blaming the “Jewish press” for spreading the idea that the German race laws applied to Egyptians. The German diplomats had similar difficulties with trying to reassure Turks and Persians that Nazi ideology was not against them, though as Turks and Persians were not “Semites” it was less glaringly problematic.⁵⁶

Racial issues aside, some Nazis saw much promise in the Muslim world as a source of potential allies. One Nazi journalist and member of the SS who had visited Egypt and Palestine in 1936 and 1939 praised the effect that the Palestinian revolt had had in Egypt. He commented on the “return to the religions traditions of Islam” and praised their “fierce hostility to Western liberalism... Recent developments in Egypt... Show how strongly this theocracy is able to revive itself after the first onrush of liberalism.”⁵⁷ For some residents of the Middle East the feeling was mutual. Some Arab politicians imitated Hitler, for example the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (PPS) which was modeled on the NSDAP and had a swastika in its banner, and the “Young Egypt” party, which had torchlight processions and used direct Arabic translations of Nazi slogans. The future leaders of Egypt Gamal Abdul Nasser and Anwar Sadat were both onetime members of Young Egypt.⁵⁸

The obvious issue that brought the Nazis and the radical Muslims aligned with al-Husseini together was Jew-hatred. While the Nazis had at one point permitted Jews to emigrate to Palestine, the regime did not intend to just evacuate the Jews from Europe. In 1937 a German foreign ministry report ominously warned that Germany’s Jewish question would “not be solved when there are no more members of the Jewish race left on German soil.”⁵⁹ Echoing Hitler’s ideas about Zionism professed in *Mein Kampf*, the report warned that a Jewish state could function as a sort of Jewish Vatican, and that such a state “rooted in international law... could have a fateful impact on German foreign policy.”⁶⁰ A subsequent memo recommended that Germany should prevent the emergence of a Jewish state, to include lending ““direct support for the Arabs with weapons and money, whether in Palestine itself or via other Arab countries such as Iraq.”⁶¹

⁵⁴ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, pp. 24-26.

⁵⁵ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 26.

⁵⁶ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, pp. 18-22.

⁵⁷ Küntzel, Locations 635, 2635.

⁵⁸ David Patterson, *A Genealogy of Evil*, (Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 98.

⁵⁹ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 29.

⁶⁰ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 29.

⁶¹ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 29.

Nazi radio propaganda

As mentioned earlier, the Nazis supported al-Husseini directly with weapons and as war drew near they began to take a greater interest in creating and disseminating propaganda in Arabic. In late April 1939, about five months before war broke out, the Germans began transmitting propaganda in Arabic via shortwave radio broadcasts.⁶² Much of the Nazi records of this propaganda campaign were destroyed during the war, but fortunately for historians US diplomats in Cairo under Alexander C. Kirk regularly translated, summarized, and forwarded the contents of Nazi Arabic propaganda to Washington. Kirk had previously served as the charge d'affaires in Berlin, where he had reported on the Nazi's anti-Jewish policies.⁶³ There were also broadcasts in Persian, but these are less well-documented.⁶⁴ These broadcasts continued until close to the end of the Nazi regime.⁶⁵ The radio campaign (accompanied by printed materials which were less likely to ever be read by their intended recipients in Allied-occupied lands) hammered home the idea of a massive Jewish conspiracy, in addition to other topics meant to spark hatred of the British and later hatred of the Soviets and the Americans. One American listener in September 1941 noted how Nazi propaganda in Arabic was "mainly concerned with creating an atmosphere of distrust in regard to the British promises to the Arab world." but also noted that "...Interwoven into every program is the 'Jewish menace.' The Zionist question provides the basic theme."⁶⁶ The linking of Britain to the Jews was a standard part of the propaganda repertoire.⁶⁷

The content of the propaganda will be discussed more later, but first we should note contemporary evaluations of its reach. A US report from 1942 estimated that there were about 130,000 shortwave radios in Egypt and the Arab speaking nations to the east of it. Shortwave radios were often listened to in public places, such as cafes. Shortwave propaganda programs allowed Nazi propaganda to reach even the illiterate, which at that time were still a significant portion of the Arab population.⁶⁸ According to a British intelligence report from 1942 German radio propaganda was "widely listened to in Egypt..."⁶⁹ An American intelligence report from August 1942 stated that "It may be safely stated that upwards of three-fourths of the Moslem world are in favor of the Axis." explaining that Muslims wanted to be on what they thought would be the winning side of the war. The report also described German propaganda as "excellent"⁷⁰

However, it should be noted that a poll conducted in 1943 by Stuart C Dodd of the American University in Beirut noted that only 13% of Palestinian radio listeners said they tuned in to German Arabic broadcasts, and only 5% of them listened at least daily. He found it was one of the most unpopular radio stations in Palestine. The Arabs interviewed by Dodd who had listened to German broadcasts had an understanding that it was war propaganda.⁷¹

⁶² Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 37.

⁶³ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 10.

⁶⁴ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 157.

⁶⁵ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 232.

⁶⁶ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 71.

⁶⁷ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, pp. 104-105.

⁶⁸ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 9.

⁶⁹ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 136.

⁷⁰ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 138.

⁷¹ Wildangel, p. 543.

So, evidence for the effectiveness of this Nazi propaganda campaign is mixed, but the long-term effects of this propaganda might best be measured not in the number of Middle Easterners it convinced at the time but how the themes that were boosted and spread by this propaganda have persisted in radical Islamist circles long after the war. In the same way the effects of Tsarist anti-Jewish conspiracy theory propaganda should not be judged so much by the electoral results of the URP but in the resonance of its themes in later Nazi ideology.

The Nazis had an important ally in their propaganda efforts, al-Husseini. Now operating out of Iraq, al-Husseini had written to Hitler early in the war proposing to orchestrate a massive German-backed Arab revolt. He proposed the creation of an Arab super-state along Nazi lines and asked for assistance in wiping out the Jews of the Middle East. The Germans viewed al-Husseini as the legitimate spokesman for the Arabs and accepted these proposals. Al-Husseini was also in clandestine contact with the King of supposedly British-aligned Saudi Arabia and also the King of Egypt, who were both prepared to switch sides if they believed Germany was about to win. In April 1941 al-Husseini and his pro-German allies in the Iraqi government attempted a coup against the pro-British regime in Baghdad, without informing their German allies beforehand. The Germans attempted to render effective support to this coup, but the British moved decisively and squelched the incompetently-run uprising.⁷² This uprising was accompanied by a pogrom in the Jewish quarter of Baghdad that killed at least 180.⁷³ After their failed coup al-Husseini and many of his collaborators escaped to Axis-controlled territory. Al-Husseini placed his network at the disposal of the Germans for gathering intelligence and began to work in shaping German propaganda. In keeping with his own beliefs, he advised the Germans to emphasize Jew hatred in their broadcasts. In a 1942 memo al-Husseini recommended playing up Hitler's statements about his religious faith and specifically recommended telling the Arabs that President Roosevelt was a Jew.⁷⁴

The Content of Nazi Propaganda in Arabic

Of course, Nazi propaganda broadcasted its anti-Jewish, anti-British (and other Allies,) and anti-democratic messages in many languages, not just to Muslims in the Middle East.⁷⁵ What probably made their propaganda campaign there more effective in the long-term was the combination of the involvement of al-Husseini and his allies in creating and spreading this propaganda and the hatred of Zionism and British imperialism in the region. Nazi propaganda in Arabic made no distinction between hating Jews and hating Zionism⁷⁶ and they skillfully knitted together the idea of a grand Jewish conspiracy to support the British (or vice-versa) and a Jewish conspiracy to destroy Islam.

Interestingly Nazi propagandists targeting Muslims did not directly draw on the *Protocols* or the writings of Hitler. (Though in at least one broadcast Jewish support for "masonic institutions" is mentioned.)⁷⁷ Instead the propaganda had an extremely Islamist bent, focused on

⁷² Rubin and Schwanitz, pp. 124 - 131.

⁷³ Rubin and Schwanitz, p. 132.

⁷⁴ Rubin and Schwanitz, p. 137-138.

⁷⁵ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 37.

⁷⁶ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 13.

⁷⁷ "Axis Broadcasts in Arabic for the Period June 26 to July 2, 1942," Enclosure to dispatch from Alexander Kirk file no. 820.02 RAH/icg, no 492, Cairo July 13, 1942, US National Archives, Roll 982 124, page 2 b.

citations from the Quran and exhortations for Muslims to be more religious (and therefore, they maintained, more anti-Jewish and pro-Axis.)⁷⁸ One of the topics repeated “ad nauseam” according to a US analysis of the broadcasts was that “the Jews, backed by Britain and the U.S.A., are the arch-enemies of Islam.”⁷⁹ Nazi Arabic propaganda regularly exhorted their listeners to “Believe in God and his prophets and fight for God with your goods and your soul.”⁸⁰ The Nazi core leadership, were not religious, but Nazi radio repeatedly tried to appeal to Muslims by calling for a religious revival,⁸¹ a revival that necessitated fighting against the British and the Jews. The mark of the Mufti and his allies probably shows through here. Nazi Arabic propaganda depicted the Jews as the persistent enemy of Islam, one that worked in secret to introduce innovations into Islam.⁸² The Germans were depicted as the friends of Islam. The British were also depicted as being against Islam. In the words of one broadcast, they “... know that they cannot exist with a flourishing Islam. They want therefore to exterminate this religion from the world.”⁸³

The most extreme of the accusations leveled by the Nazi Arabic propaganda broadcasts was that a Jewish conspiracy had already succeeded in clandestinely corrupting Islam. A broadcast from February 1941 excoriated those “who secretly fight against Islam” by introducing superstitions into Mohammed’s pure religion. These enemies are “...above all the Jews, who in the past pretended to have adopted Islam but in fact were very far from it.”⁸⁴ (This seems to imply the idea of secret Jews living as Muslims and deliberately infecting Islam.) The broadcast cited some of the anti-Jewish passages of the Quran: “You will find that those who are most hostile to the believers are Jews and idol worshipers!... Jews who have always been and are also today the enemies of Islam and the Muslims and who try with all means to wage war against both Islam and the Muslims.”⁸⁵

By emphasizing the anti-Jewish parts of the Quran and mixing them with stories of present-day successful Jewish conspiracies against Islam, Nazi propagandists and their radical Muslim collaborators engaged in what the historian Jeffrey Herf calls “selective tradition” - emphasizing some elements while diminishing others.⁸⁶ This was an attempt to overcome the old image of the Jew as the despised loser of history and replace it with the image of the super-powerful Jewish conspiracy that was responsible for the sorry state of Islam. For many of the Nazi officials involved in creating this kind of propaganda, this project amounted to the cynical manipulation of religious feelings to bend them in an anti-Jewish and anti-Allied direction. For al-Husseini and his allies, who appeared to have been true believers both in Islam and in the existence of an super-powerful international Jewish conspiracy, this accusation could lead to revolutionary conclusions - revolutionary not just against the British Empire or European domination but against status-quo Islam itself which had been infiltrated and corrupted by the Jewish conspiracy. Note also the lack of any identification in the above examples of what

⁷⁸ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 197

⁷⁹ Kirk, “General Summary”, p. 4

⁸⁰ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 51.

⁸¹ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 52.

⁸² Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 53.

⁸³ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 142.

⁸⁴ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, pp. 52-53.

⁸⁵ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 53.

⁸⁶ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, pp. 3-4.

exactly the Jewish-introduced innovations were. This would have allowed all manner of Arab Muslims who may have listened to the broadcast, Sunni or Shi'a, to decide for themselves exactly what these evil innovations were.

The propaganda campaign was not only concerned with spiritual matters. Political Zionism was another obvious target, and the campaign sometimes used language that would be familiar to future anti-Zionist campaigners: "The greedy Jews, not content with seizing Arab land, intend to turn Palestine into the industrial center of the Middle East to establish further their claims to dominion of that part of the world."⁸⁷ The broadcasts translated the idea of a worldwide Jewish conspiracy into constant political attacks on the Allies, and especially the British. This propaganda tack began before the war, as related by a 1937 British dispatch that Nazi propaganda in Arabic was trying to "undermine the confidence of the public in the strength of the democracies and to associate the latter with the sinister machinations of the Jews."⁸⁸ After war broke out the Nazis blamed the war on these Jewish machinations, portraying the conflict as a struggle of self-defense against Anglo-Jewish "peaceful conquest." Take for example this spring 1942 broadcast that warns of the consequences of peace on Allied terms:

"Jewish Capitalism and British Imperialism shall dominate the world. If anyone tries to get rid of these two evils, he is immediately accused by the Anglo-Saxons that he is working against peace. We do not understand such a peace, and we want war, a destructive war which will liberate us definitely from such evils."⁸⁹

Nazi propaganda in Arabic often included the idea that the leaders of American and Britain were in fact under control of the Jews. According to a May 1942 broadcast the Jews always acted "behind the scenes. They supported Churchill and had "elected Roosevelt..." Now these stooges were yielding to Jewish demands, enabling the Jews "to extend their domination throughout the world." In a frank admission of the genocide occurring in Europe, Nazi radio declared: "The National Socialist Government, realizing the danger and realizing the evil consequences which the world would suffer from the Jews, immediately set about annihilating them before it was too late. History will record this action as one of the wisest steps ever taken."⁹⁰

These two accusations against the Jews, of corrupting Islam and of controlling the Allies, were not separate. After all, an organization powerful enough to deliberately corrupt Islam over generations would certainly be powerful enough to control a government or two. In a March 1943 broadcast al-Husseini declared that there was "hardly one Moslem country that is spared the control and tyranny of aggressive enemies, be it directly or indirectly." and that Jews "had control over England and the U.S.A."⁹¹ The interests of the rulers of the Western Allies were presented as intertwined with the Jews, a result both of their imperial ambitions and also their subservience to Jewish interests (especially regarding Zionism) and this was declared to be directly related to the supposed Allied and Jewish campaign against Islam. The broadcasts

⁸⁷ Kirk, "General Summary", pp. 4, 5.

⁸⁸ Martyn Frampton, *The Muslim Brotherhood and the West: A History of Enmity and Engagement*, (Harvard University Press, 2018), p. 49.

⁸⁹ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 106.

⁹⁰ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 106.

⁹¹ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 170.

were not consistent in describing the Allied powers as either tools or partners of the grand Jewish conspiracy. Take this broadcast that seems to say that the British were the allies of the Jews but the Americans were the toy:

“The Zionist world movement depends on Britain in order that this movement may realize its oppressive hopes, and the Jews have plotted with Britain to strangle Islam. Not only that, but the Jewish movement also enjoys great support from the U.S.A. and the Jews in America have supreme influence. President Roosevelt is a toy in Jewish hands and he has dragged his country to war bowing to Jewish orders.”⁹²

While Britain was sometimes declared a servant of the Jews and sometimes declared their ally, America was always just a tool. Perhaps in response to the increasingly obvious dominance of America over Britain in the conduct of the war, even in the Middle East, an August 1942 broadcast declared “that when the Americans seize the British Empire they intend handing over Palestine to their masters - the Jews.”⁹³ In September 1941, before Germany declared war on America but when Roosevelt was taking increasingly aggressive measures to help the Allies a Nazi propaganda broadcast in Arabic declared that “Jews control American finance and commerce and are influencing the President to pursue an aggressive policy.” and that the US had “a direct interest in encouraging aggression in the Middle East because of American interest in oil fields and even more so in the Jews in Palestine.”⁹⁴ A 1942 broadcast claimed that America came to the “orient...in service of the Jews. He is sent here by the Jews, even if he does not know it. The Jews are the wire-pullers of the Americans.”⁹⁵

The “wire-puller of the Americans” line is a manifestation of the tried-and-true argument of conspiracy theory propaganda: if a super-powerful conspiracy exists, then democracy is merely one of their tools. A Nazi broadcast declared that democracy was just a “sweet word” that the British used to fool the Muslims.⁹⁶ In a likely indirect reference to the *Protocols* and other such documents, one broadcast spoke of “a number of Jewish documents have been found dealing with the Jewish plan to control public opinion throughout the world.” The Jews had plans to “dominate all the governments of the world secretly by means of controlling public opinion.” As expected, this control over public opinion was to be exercised via control of the press.⁹⁷ Nazi radio told Arabs that the Jews owned 97% of US newspapers, 90% of American radio stations, all the cinemas, and 98% of the banks.⁹⁸ A different broadcast also made the familiar argument that the Jewish conspiracy could use money to bribe and make campaign donations to pliant politicians and usurp power indirectly. An August 1942 broadcast said that Roosevelt had stated “that one of his reasons for entering the war was to support and strengthen Judaism. There is nothing strange about this, since the highest American officials are puppets of the Jews. They have reached their high places of office through Jewish money and thus the Jews are able to dominate public opinion through them.”⁹⁹ A different broadcast

⁹² Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 103.

⁹³ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 102.

⁹⁴ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 72.

⁹⁵ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 127.

⁹⁶ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 108.

⁹⁷ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 176.

⁹⁸ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 105.

⁹⁹ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 134.

from 1942 emphasized that the US was the most Jewish country in the world, with 7 million Jews: "One influential Jew... [was] enough to demoralize a whole country to say nothing of what 7 million will do. They could demoralize the whole world and the rest of the planet as well. The low level to which the U.S. society has sunk can be clearly attributed to the influence of the Jews and this is instanced in American films where prostitution, immorality and crime are depicted as acts of heroism and encouraged in the film industry. Furthermore the Americans are well known to be slaves to money making to satisfy their physical appetite and their gluttony for food and drink."¹⁰⁰

After Hitler broke his pact with Stalin and invaded the USSR, the Arabic broadcasts also attacked communism. Nazi propaganda targeted towards Muslims harped on communist atheism and the oppression of Muslims in the USSR. Radio broadcasts claimed that the communists had killed four million Muslims (likely a reference to the Muslims who died in the massive famines caused by Soviet collectivization in Central Asia)¹⁰¹ and told their listeners that England would soon turn over Iraq, Iran, and other Arab countries to be ravaged by the Bolsheviks.¹⁰² The Judeo-Bolshevik canard was useful in this context as well: "The Jews are the biggest enemies of the Arabs. Bolshevism is mere Judaism. Therefore the Bolsheviks are the enemies of the Arabs and Moslems."¹⁰³

This propaganda campaign also directed its listeners to oppose their Allied-aligned governments and routinely spread the idea that the reason governments in the region were Allied-aligned was not because of strategic calculation or personal ties or even (as in the case of Iran) the coercive actions of the Allies, but because of Jewish machinations. According to an April 1942 summary of German Propaganda in Arabic prepared by Alexander Kirk, the Germans depicted the Iranian government as Jew-dominated: "There are 6 Jews in the Iranian Cabinet which accounts for the Jewish exploitation in Iran"¹⁰⁴ "The Iranian Cabinet is full of Jews and Jewish greed is devouring the country..."¹⁰⁵ British imperialism was combined with the now-familiar story of Jewish rule through financial dominance: "The Jews have penetrated into other Arab countries to take over the control of their financial affairs..."¹⁰⁶

In late 1942 as Axis troops fought their way across North Africa towards the Nile the propaganda became especially concerned with the supposed Jewish menace in Egypt, and told its listeners that the Jews ran the country. This broadcast from April 1942 is a good example of the standard theme that Zionism is about much more than a homeland in Palestine, but was really about usurping power in other countries, and in Egypt in particular. Note at the end the accusation that the reason the Jews have been so successful in Palestine is because they have managed to corrupt the government of Egypt:

¹⁰⁰ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 82.

¹⁰¹ Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-famine*, (Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 190.

¹⁰² Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 100.

¹⁰³ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, pp. 219-220.

¹⁰⁴ Kirk, "General Summary", pp. 4-5.

¹⁰⁵ Kirk, "General Summary", pp. 5, 9-10.

¹⁰⁶ State Department translation of the Voice of Free Arabism, 7:30 PM, April 24, 1942, in "Broadcasts in Arabic for the Period April 23-April 30" Cairo, May 5 1942, No 366, US National Archives, Roll 982, 166, p. 2

"We feel it our duty to keep the Arabs informed of the activities of the Jews, so that they may unite in their struggle against them... In the first place it must be admitted that Egypt has never fully realized the Jewish danger and has never fulfilled her obligations to her Arab cousins. In fact, the Egyptians allow the Jews to plunder their country and to lay their hands on Egypt's wealth and trade. They allow the Jews to worm their way into Egyptian administration to such an extent that the whole country became nothing more than an appetizing meal for them. Whether as doctors, lawyers, merchants or public servants, the Jews are controlling the destiny of Egypt. They dominate the Egyptian Press and the large industrial concerns.

It is inevitable that the Jews with their enormous power should exercise a great influence on the internal and foreign policy of the country. This is not astonishing as Zionism has been trying for some time to occupy not only Egypt, but also the other Arab countries. Their aim of establishing their national home in Palestine is not confined to Palestine alone but extends also to the neighboring countries. As Egypt, however, is the richest of the Arab countries, they have naturally focused their attentions on her.... There is little doubt that, had Egypt offered determined resistance, the Arabs of Palestine would have been successful in their struggle against the Jews and neither the Jews nor the British could have made of Palestine a Zionist colony."¹⁰⁷

In the summer of 1942, as Rommel's army entered Egypt, Nazi propaganda urged Egyptians to "write down the names of the owners of Jewish firms and those belonging to the traitors, de Gaullists, British and Americans. In this manner, we shall be able to put our fingers upon those who have sucked the blood of the nation and enslaved our country."¹⁰⁸ This was likely propaganda preparation for a massacre of Egyptian Jews. Around the same time the SS was preparing to dispatch one of their mobile death units to North Africa, expecting to annihilate the Jews living in Palestine after Rommel conquered it. The *Einsatzgruppe Afrika* unit consisted of seven officers and seventeen enlisted men, and included an SS specialist in Arab issues who had recently served as the liaison between Himmler's office and al-Husseini. The unit was commanded by Walter Rauff, one of the SS officers behind the invention of the mobile gas vans used to massacre Jews in Eastern Europe.¹⁰⁹ This seems like a relatively small unit given the size of the German and British armies preparing for the decisive battle in Egypt, but it was probably just an advanced team that would have grown as the mission grew. Besides, these genocide operations recruited and organized local collaborators as a matter of course. For example, an 8 - 10 man equivalent SS unit organized the murder of 137,346 Jews in Lithuania.¹¹⁰ After Rommel's defeat at El-Alamein the unit was instead deployed to Tunisia.¹¹¹

As the fortunes of the Axis waned a German Arabic broadcast in April 1943 declared "The British have not won the war yet; but we must confess that we have to prepare ourselves for the obscure future awaiting us, should the British, the Jews and their Allies emerge from the war as victors. It is our duty to prepare for the future and to be ready to fight those imperialists who would make of man, animals, and of life, a hell."¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ State Department translation of the Voice of Free Arabism, 9:15 PM, April 30, 1942, in "Broadcasts in Arabic for the Period April 23-April 30" Cairo, May 5 1942, No 366, US National Archives, Roll 982, 166, pp. 22-23

¹⁰⁸ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 112.

¹⁰⁹ Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Martin Cüpper, *Nazi Palestine: The Plans for the Extermination of the Jews in Palestine*, (Enigma Books, 2005), p. 118-119.

¹¹⁰ Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Martin Cüpper, p. 124.

¹¹¹ Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Martin Cüpper, p. 172.

¹¹² Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Martin Cüpper, p. 172.

After the war

Argentina is usually thought of as the primary destination for Nazis fleeing defeat, but between 4 and 8 times more Nazis escaped to the Middle East than to Argentina.¹¹³ More importantly, a few Arabs who had worked with the Nazis on their propaganda campaign made their way home as well, where at least two of them continued to work in propaganda. According to a 1948 American report, a group calling itself the “Palestine Liberation Army” (not to be confused with the entity founded in 1964) had started broadcasting a radio program in English, Hebrew, and Arabic directed by one Sa’adi Basbous, who had worked for Nazi propaganda during WWII.¹¹⁴ The most famous Arab returnee from Nazi Germany was al-Husseini.

Al-Husseini had fled to Switzerland as the Third Reich collapsed, and the Swiss authorities handed him over to the French. The British could have prosecuted him for collaborating with Nazi intelligence, subversion, and propaganda efforts, not to mention his work in establishing a Bosnian Muslim SS Division, but they did not.¹¹⁵ A 1945 OSS report stated that the British would probably decline to prosecute the Mufti and his Arab companions, as they would not want “to risk antagonizing Palestine Arab public opinion...”¹¹⁶ Al-Husseini made his way back to Palestine and continued to cultivate relationships with some of the governments in the region. During this period al-Husseini was still considered the leader of the Palestinians.¹¹⁷ In 1946 the recently-formed Arab League established a special committee to represent Palestinian interests called the Arab Higher Executive. Al-Husseini was chosen as the head of this committee,¹¹⁸ but his reputation soon went into decline. The league began to organize an “Arab Liberation Army” to storm into Palestine after the expected British withdrawal and prevent the emergence of a Jewish state. However, the Arab governments that made up the Arab League sidelined al-Husseini from a role in organizing this army, and instead he formed his own parallel force, the al-Jihad al-Muqaddas. This “The Army of the Holy War” was commanded by his loyal supporters who had participated in his revolt in the 1930s and those who had followed him to Iraq and Europe during WWII.¹¹⁹ The forces were disorganized and quarreled with the forces sent by the Arab League. Eventually al-Jihad al-Muqaddas was disarmed by the other Arab forces. Al-Husseini’s reputation suffered because of this and because he remained in Egypt during this time and did not make a return to Palestine.¹²⁰ In September 1948, in the middle of the war, he attempted to set up a Palestinian government in Gaza, but the Egyptians forced him to return across the border after only eight days.¹²¹

In the period following the failure of the Arab governments to crush Israel, al-Husseini continually worked to create a united anti-Israeli front under his leadership. During this period al-

¹¹³ Barry Rubin and Wolfgang G. Schwanitz, p. 209.

¹¹⁴ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 253.

¹¹⁵ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 233.

¹¹⁶ Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 237.

¹¹⁷ Zvi Elpeleg, *The Grand Mufti: Haj Amin al-Hussaini, Founder of the Palestinian National Movement*, David Harvey trans., (Routledge, 2007), Kindle Edition, location 1682.

¹¹⁸ Elpeleg, Locations 1752-1763.

¹¹⁹ Elpeleg, Location 1822.

¹²⁰ Elpeleg, Locations 2015-2062.

¹²¹ Elpeleg, Location 2151.

Husseini was also involved in Saudi-sponsored Palestinian raids into Israeli territory.¹²² His popularity with various Arab governments changed with the shifting political alignments, and this was especially true with regards to the most populous Arab country, Egypt. Initially popular with the nationalist officers who overthrew the Egyptian government in 1952, and in particular with the future president Gamal Abdul Nasser whom he had known since before 1948, al-Husseini fell out with them because of his close ties to Saudi Arabia, the bitter enemy of the Egyptian Revolutionaries.¹²³ Later, after Israeli retaliation against raids based out of Gaza connected to al-Husseini, the Egyptian government embraced him and his cause for a time, only to vilify him in 1959 after he became closer to the Iraqi government, a rival of Egypt for regional dominance.¹²⁴ Disappointed with the antics of the various Arab governments, al-Husseini cultivated his ties with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, which had gone underground after falling out with the victors of the 1952 Revolution.¹²⁵

All during this period al-Husseini continually propagandized his belief in a massive Jewish threat to Islam, and insisted that this was directly connected to the plight of the Palestinians: "If the enemies of Islam remain the rulers of Palestine, the day will come when they will try to conquer other Muslim countries."¹²⁶

Al-Husseini's friendship with many Nazis is sometimes fingered as a critical link that brought Nazis to the Middle East, and therefore also brought Nazi ideas there. While the importance of Nazis in the Middle East is difficult to measure, it appears that the extent of the influence of these Nazis linked to al-Husseini has been exaggerated. There was no Arabian *Aufbau*. Take for example the case of Johann von Leers, who was once a leading Nazi propagandist against the Jews. Leers had become acquainted with al-Husseini at some point during the war.¹²⁷ In 1952 al-Husseini invited him to come to Egypt. Leers accepted the invitation and left Argentina in 1956. His going away party was attended by many notorious Nazis living in Argentina, including Josef Mengele and Adolf Eichmann.¹²⁸ Leers got a job as a translator at the Egyptian Ministry of Information and appeared to generally live an unostentatious life as an exile and converted to Islam under the teaching of his old acquaintance al-Husseini.¹²⁹ The residence of such a prominent Nazi ideologue in Cairo during this period and his public conversion to Islam made many contemporaries suspect that there was some kind of Nazi plot behind the increasingly vitriolic anti-Jewish/anti-Israel/anti-Anglo-Saxon propaganda coming out of Egypt, but recent scholarship suggests that this was not the case. The talk in the international press about Leers even got the attention of the Mossad, which dispatched an agent to investigate him. They lost interest after discovering that he was politically isolated and poor.¹³⁰

Probably much more important than anything al-Husseini or his Nazi friends did after the war was the continuing effect of their wartime propaganda campaign and their successful

¹²² Shlaim, p. 86.

¹²³ Elpeleg, Location 2662.

¹²⁴ Elpeleg, Locations 2726-2818.

¹²⁵ Elpeleg, Location 2589.

¹²⁶ Elpeleg, Location 2604-2605.

¹²⁷ Marco Sennholz, *Johann Von Leers*, (Bebra Verlag, 2013), p. 325.

¹²⁸ Sennholz, p. 312-313.

¹²⁹ Sennholz, p. 316.

¹³⁰ Sennholz, p. 335-336.

interpretation of European anti-Jewish conspiracy theories through an Islamic lens. This, combined with Jewish success in establishing Israel in the face of Arab opposition, likely assisted in the transformation of the image of the Jew in the minds of many Middle Easterners away from a traditional one of the Jew despised and powerless minority into an image of a super-powerful band of conspirators.

An example of how easily post-war propagandists could become involved with rhetoric and ideas from Nazi propaganda without any direct link to Nazism was a US-assisted anti-communist campaign conducted by the Iraqi government in 1952. At the request of the Iraqi Director General of Propaganda, the United States Information Service (USIS) provided anti-communist materials for the Iraqi government to feed into the local press. The resulting campaign became quite anti-Jewish and anti-Zionist, rehashing the old Judeo-Bolshevik myth. The USIS was wary of this, as anti-Zionism could also be easily linked with anti-Americanism, but according to their analysis at the time, the only way to get outlets independent outlets in Iraq to participate in anti-communist propaganda was to appeal to anti-Israeli ideas.¹³¹

Al-Husseini spent the rest of his life moving between different Arab capitals looking for more support in his anti-Israel campaigns, weaving among the shifting Arab enmities and alliances. He continued to receive the support of Saudi Arabia through thick and thin. By the 1960s his influence among the Palestinians had shrunk, and he was eventually overshadowed by the Palestine Liberation Organization, which he opposed.¹³² He died in Beirut in 1974.

Nasser - Arab nationalism spreads the Grand Conspiracy Theory

The 1952 Revolution in Egypt eventually brought the Nationalist officer Gamal Abdul Nasser to power. He was a staunch opponent of British imperialism, which had dominated his country for 70 years, and of the corrupt Egyptian monarch, and initially Nasser was staunchly anti-communist and nominally pro-American.¹³³ His beliefs were reflected in his regime. At first the Americans saw him as a potential ally in the Cold War, despite his hostility towards the United Kingdom. Some US strategists believed his brand of Arab nationalism could have served as an antidote to communism in the region.¹³⁴ The CIA gave Nasser a powerful radio broadcasting system that allowed his propagandists to beam their messages across the entire Arab world and sent experts in propaganda psychological warfare to train Egyptian propagandists.¹³⁵ Despite these American efforts to consolidate an alliance Nasser eventually rejected one with the United States and instead made an alliance with the Soviet Union, and his propaganda embraced radical anti-Jewish conspiracy theories, though of a more “anti-imperialist” variety. (Though it should be noted that variants of the Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy theory were broadcast before the deterioration of Egypt’s relations with the United States.)¹³⁶ A

¹³¹ Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War*, (University of Kansas Press, 2018), p. 136.

¹³² Elpeleg, locations 3153, 3128, 3114.

¹³³ Peter Mansfield, “Nasser and Nasserism,” *International Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 4, The Arab States and Israel (Autumn, 1973), pp. 670-688, p. 670.

¹³⁴ Michael Doran, *Ike’s Gamble: America’s Rise to Dominance in the Middle East*, (Free Press, 2016), p. 3.

¹³⁵ Doran, p. 10, 83.

¹³⁶ See for example ZIONISTS FURTHER SPREAD OF COMMUNISM, Source Cairo, Voice of the Arabs Date 25 June 1955, Translated into English and published in: Report DAILY REPORT. FOREIGN RADIO

September 1955 Egyptian radio broadcast declared that Israel "...was conceived and delivered in order to give vent to imperialist desire... to tear apart the great Arab homeland and to create a state which will constitute a barrier cutting the road linking the Arab countries, keeping them from exerting efforts for what is good and beneficial to the Arab nation and the whole world..."¹³⁷

Nasser's propaganda seemingly re-iterated many of the anti-Jewish themes from Nazi propaganda along with the common anti-Zionist-imperialist themes that harmonized with the ideology of his new patron, the USSR. Egyptian propaganda during this period emphasized that Israel was a tool of Western imperialism, designed to drain "the energy of the Arab nation" and prevent its rise.¹³⁸

On one occasion the first post-Revolutionary president of Egypt Mohammed Naguib accused the imperialists of engaging in a conspiracy against Islam:

"The imperialists realized that Islam is the religion of honor and fraternity, the religion of dignity and strength, and that if the people had access to such a source of power, they would rid themselves of the despots and crush them. Therefore, the first arrow they thrust into the heart of the region was to divest it of its ultimate truth... the imperialists exploited religion to bring forth practices prohibited by religion itself."¹³⁹

This echoed the wartime Nazi propaganda that the British were conspiring to corrupt Islam in order to weaken and exploit the Muslims.

Nasser's regime did welcome some Nazis as technical experts or just as refugees, like Von Leers, but it would be a mistake to draw a direct line between Nazism and Nasserism. Nasser's championing of anti-Jewish conspiracy theories was not inevitable and was not initially an inherent part of his regime. The adoption of anti-Jewish conspiracy theories may have taken some inspiration from Nazi propaganda and the ideas of al-Husseini, but Nasser's propaganda machine went beyond their ideas. For example, the *Protocols* had not played a major role in Nazi Arabic propaganda, however it was adopted by propagandists working for the Egyptian government. The *Protocols* was already available in Arabic and circulating before the Second World War, and as mentioned before, believers in an anti-Jewish conspiracy theory would likely eventually seek out the "classic" text of anti-Jewish conspiracy theory. A prominent Egyptian writer named 'Abbas Mahumd al-'Aqqad had already written about the *Protocols* in articles about the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and again in his 1956 book *International Zionism* published as part of an series of books put out by the Egyptian government. Abbas Mahumd al-'Aqqad had been a critic of Nazism, and in this work he used the *Protocols* to point out what he thought were similarities between Nazism and Zionism.¹⁴⁰

BROADCASTS (FBIS-FRB-55-124) Date 27 June 1955 or NASIR ATTACKS REACTIONARIES, COMMUNISTS Source Cairo, Egyptian Home Service Date 30 April 1954 + show more detail Translated into English and published in: Report DAILY REPORT. FOREIGN RADIO BROADCASTS (FBIS-FRB-54-085) Date 03 May 1954.

¹³⁷ "The Jews," FBIS DAILY REPORT. FOREIGN RADIO BROADCASTS (FBIS-FRB-55-176), 09 September 1955, page A4.

¹³⁸ Pipes, *The Hidden Hand*, p. 146.

¹³⁹ NAGIB ASSAILS IMPERIALIST EXPLOITATION, Source Cairo, Egyptian Home Service Date 23 January 1954 + show more detail Translated into English and published in: Report DAILY REPORT. FOREIGN RADIO BROADCASTS (FBIS-FRB-54-016) Date 25 January 1954, p. mm2.

¹⁴⁰ Webman, pp. 202-203.

Promotion of the *Protocols* was also carried out via Egyptian radio at least once (and likely many more times that have not been recorded.) Unfortunately most of the records of the Egyptian radio propaganda service “Voice of the Arabs” were destroyed after Nasser’s death.¹⁴¹ However, in September 1958 a US monitoring service recorded an interview of Nasser with an Indian journalist, broadcast (presumably in Arabic) that dealt with many subjects.¹⁴² Nasser blamed the continuing strife and disorder in the region on imperialism saying ‘It does not want us to build or raise the standard of living. Therefore, imperialism is untiring in its attempts to threaten stability in the area by creating an atmosphere of dismemberment and disorder and by fabricating crises and problems.’¹⁴³ He held that all the major problems of the region were the result of an imperialist plan to bring “the Arab East, which had revolted against imperialism, back into its sphere of influence.”¹⁴⁴ When the journalist questioned him about Western accusations that he had imperialist ambitions himself, portraying “him as a Hitler in Arab dress” Nasser responded not only that “imperialism and Zionism go side by side” (as he says later in the interview) but that there was a grand Zionist conspiracy which itself manipulated the imperialist nations, and that the *Protocols* is a description of this conspiracy:

“I am surprised that educated people who are supposed to be civilized believe such nonsense. This comparison is unreasonable. Therefore, we must look for the reasons and for the sources of such campaigns. In fact, they are the work of world Zionism which desires to create hatred against us. This is the real danger which threatens the establishment of a new Hitlerism. We are not the cause. A French journalist recently told me how France is gradually coming under Zionist influence, while the Americans themselves complain of Zionist control of their propaganda. The same situation is true with respect to the British... I do not know if you have seen a book called ‘The Protocols of the Elders of Zion’ or not, but I consider it to be an important book. I will give you a copy of it in English. What is published in it will show clearly to you that the fate of the European continent is in the hands of 300 Zionists, each of whom knows all the others, and that they choose their allies from their followers...”¹⁴⁵

The translator noted that a shortened version of same interview (including this section) was rebroadcast in Iraq later that day.¹⁴⁶

The *Protocols* became useful for Arab propagandists and radicals of all stripes.¹⁴⁷ Before the Six-Day War the *Protocols* were known all throughout the Middle East. By 1967 there were at minimum nine Arabic translations of the *Protocols* and in Egypt there were at least 50 books which referenced the *Protocols*. The *Protocols* was taught in the curriculum of the Egyptian army. On at least one occasion it was personally handed out by Nasser to a journalist. It had

¹⁴¹ Anas Alahmed, “Voice of the Arabs Radio: Its Effects and Political Power During the Nasser Era (1953-1967),” Paper for The Joint Journalism Historians Conference at the Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute, New York University, March 12, 2011, p. 4.

¹⁴² “NASIR LINKS CRUSADES, ZION PROTOCOLS,” Cairo, Egyptian Home Service, 29 September 1958, Translated into English and published in: DAILY REPORT. Foreign Radio Broadcasts (FBIS-FRB-58-190), 30 September 1958, UNITED ARAB REPUBLIC.

¹⁴³ Ibid. p. B2.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. p. B4.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. p. B6.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. p. B10.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 203.

also become well known in countries opposed to Nasser and it was distributed by Saudi Embassies and used as evidence in a trial in Baghdad, ¹⁴⁸

Soviet propaganda against “Zionist-imperialism”

Early Soviet anti-Zionism presented Zionism through Lenin’s conspiracy-theory of Imperialism. In 1947, however, the USSR briefly became pro-Zionist, in a way, when the USSR voted at the UN in favor of the Palestine partition plan that would result in the founding of Israel as an independent state. Stalin may have believed that Israel could be molded into a Soviet ally, ¹⁴⁹ or that the Israelis would be a wedge against the British and their Arab allies and clients in the region. ¹⁵⁰ After a few years the USSR was back to calling Zionism an evil imperialist plot and proclaiming that Zionist plotters exist almost everywhere there were Jews. The public turning point for this was the Doctors Plot, when Soviet intelligence under Stalin’s orders “uncovered” a plot of murderous Jewish doctors supposedly working for Anglo-American intelligence. Soviet anti-Zionist (or anti-Jewish) rhetoric dropped off a bit after Stalin’s death, but it did not totally dissipate. ¹⁵¹

Soviet ideologues and propagandists dealt with the cognitive dissonance of obviously anti-Jewish conspiracy theories existing alongside an ideology that officially rejected “anti-Semitism” and associated it with the Tsarist past by resurrecting Brafman’s *Kahal* conspiracy theory: the idea that Jews qua Jews were just like anyone else, but that in Judaism there exists a clandestine, traditional, tiered system of oppression, with a small group of exploiters at the top who deliberately keep the Jewish masses isolated and ignorant in order to satisfy their own ends. These Jewish exploiters of Jews were linked to efforts to establish a Jewish state (Zionism) and to the machinations of the Anglo-American imperialist conspiracy. Take these quotations from the article on Jews in the second edition of the Large Soviet Encyclopedia, published in 1952. The article includes sections on anti-Semitism and makes sure to point out the oppression of Jews in the United States, where: “Under the conditions of intensified fascism, American imperialists use anti-Semitism as one tool of racist ideology... (Jews) are not allowed in state service; in educational institutions there is actually a percentage rate for admission of Jewish students, the Jewish poor, like the poor of other national minorities, live in special quarters in the conditions of extreme crowding...” It also expounds Brafman’s 19th century idea of the “oppressive” *Kahal* conspiracy and names Zionism as a tool of a neo-*Kahal*, and a tool of Anglo-American imperialism:

“Exploitative elements among the Jews sought to preserve and develop the national isolation of the Jews. The tool in their hands was religion. Until the middle of the 19th century the self-governing body of the Jews was the kahal organization, grouped around the synagogue and the rabbi, the interpreter of religions laws. Through the kahal community the Jewish bourgeoisie and clergy cruelly exploited labor. The Jewish community, led by the rabbi, played an extremely reactionary role in relation to the working people of the Jews, artificially creating their isolation from the working

¹⁴⁸ Webman, p. 203.

¹⁴⁹ Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The World was Going our Way : the KGB and the Battle for the Third World*, (Basic Books, 2005), pp. 222-223.

¹⁵⁰ Daniel Pipes, *Conspiracy*, p. 97.

¹⁵¹ Andrew and Mitrokhin, p. 224.

people of other nationalities. The leaders of the Jewish communities sought to obscure class stratification and the class struggle among the Jews, to weaken the class consciousness of the Jewish proletariat and the working poor. The most harmful role in obscuring class antagonisms was played and is still played abroad by Zionism - reactionary bourgeois nationalism. The supporters of which, while advocating the unification of the Jews in the territory of Palestine, deny the class struggle and try to isolate the Jewish working masses from the common struggle of the proletariat... Imperialists of the United States and other countries use Zionism in order to blunt the class struggle of the Jewish workers. Zionists kindle nationalism even among those Jewish groups which were almost assimilated with the local population during the Middle Ages (e.g. in Northern Africa). Zionists are agents of the American / English imperialists..."¹⁵²

In the Soviet Union the same kind of themes and ideas and some of the symbolism that are present in explicitly anti-Jewish versions of the Grand Conspiracy Theory were used in Soviet conspiracy theories of imperialist finance capital, though anti-Semitism was officially condemned. Soviet campaigns against Jews were couched as "anti-Zionist" or as general anti-religious activity. The themes they used in these campaigns may have been directly inspired by the *Protocols* and similar documents, but they were not directly cited.¹⁵³ Even though the USSR officially condemned anti-Semitism, as demonstrated in the preceding chapter Lenin's ideas about imperialism were heavily influenced by Hobson's anti-Jewish conspiracy theory, and there might be an element of convergence here as latter-day Leninists returned to their "roots" and attacked "Western finance" with a wink, knowing who was "really" in charge of Western finance.

Middle Eastern populations had already been plied with Nazi and Nasserite and other propaganda campaigns describing Zionist perfidy and links to Western imperialism. The Soviet description of Lenin's theory of imperialist conspiracy could fit snugly into the flows of these narratives, though with finance capital as the "ultimate" enemy and Zionism as a tool. For a very direct example take this Arabic broadcast from Moscow in December 1959:

"Why is Zionism hampering the cause of peace in the Near East? Why should a small country such as Israel, with so few people and such a small area compared to the Arab countries, pursue an aggressive policy towards the Arabs?... Who is pushing Israel towards this heinous path of adventures? The people of Israel, as all peoples of the world, want peace and hate war. However, the policy of this small country is not dictated by the people. There are other forces which are pushing this small country on to the path of aggression. These forces are the representatives of the new Israeli capitalism... Israeli capitalism is nothing but an agency which is working in the service of the original owners of capital, the imperialists of the West.

The links between Zionism and imperialism were established with the birth of Zionism... The international Zionist organization fell under the influence of the millionaires of London and New York as soon as it was established. They financed it... [the imperialist bankers] saw that the Near East would soon become a profitable market for employment of capital and the source of huge

¹⁵² "ЕВРЕИ" (Jews), in *Большая Советская Энциклопедия* (Great Soviet Encyclopedia) Vol. 15, Б. А. Введенский ed., Second edition, 1952, p. 378.

¹⁵³ Bernard Lewis "The Arab World Discovers Anti-Semitism," in *Anti-Semitism in Times of Crisis*, Sander L. Gilman and Steven T. Katz eds., (New York University Press, 1991), p. 343.

profits for imperialism. The Zionists, in the view of the British and American capitalists, were very suitable agents and salesmen for penetration in the Near East.”¹⁵⁴

The final conspiracy between Zionism and imperialism did not come about until the third decade of this century. The whole world began to smell the oil of the Near East... The millionaires then became in greater need than ever before of trustworthy agents to work for them in the Arab east. The international Zionist organization offered its services, and a deal in every meaning of the word was concluded. This took place in 1929. The executive committee of the international Zionist organization was reorganized to include a group of prominent monopolies in Britain, America, and Germany... This joint organization came to be known as the Jewish Agency.”¹⁵⁵

“...Why are the extremist leaders of Zionism dangerously playing with the fate of their people and why are they following an adventurous aggressive policy? The answer is that they do not represent the people, but the owners of coffers in America and Western Europe.”¹⁵⁶

Several observers noted an increase in the intensity of Soviet anti-Zionist propaganda after the 1967 Six Day War.¹⁵⁷ Zionism was soon regularly portrayed in Soviet propaganda as the shock troops of international finance capital, involved in all manner of imperialist plots to destroy socialism.¹⁵⁸ A *Pravda* article from 1971 succinctly described the Soviet view of the relationship between Zionism and imperialism: “This kind of Zionist activity, anti-Soviet, anti-Communist in nature, is completely satisfied with the forces of imperialism. That is why the ruling circles of the largest imperialist powers support the Zionists in every possible way, using Zionism as one of their political tools.”^{159 160}

Sometime before March 1970 the Central Committee of the Soviet Union codified a “Plan for Basic Organizational and Propaganda Measures Connected with the Middle East and Intensifying the Struggle with Zionism.” which has never been made public.¹⁶¹ We know of it through a March 1970 report from the head of the Soviet Propaganda Department to the Central Committee discussing a plan to hold a well-publicized press conference against Zionism.¹⁶² A 1971 document from the Deputy Head of the Department of Propaganda to the Central

¹⁵⁴ “SERIES OF TALKS EXPOSES ZIONIST LINKS” Moscow, Soviet Near Eastern Service, 18 December 1959, Translated and published in the FBIS DAILY REPORT. Foreign Radio Broadcasts (FBIS-FRB-59-248), 22 December 1959, Page BB8.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. p. bb9.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. p. bb10.

¹⁵⁷ Baruch A. Hazan, *Soviet Propaganda, a case study of the middle east conflict*, (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1976), p. 148.

¹⁵⁸ William Korey, *Russian Antisemitism, Pamyat, and the Demonology of Zionism*, (Harwood academic publishers, 1995), p. 19.

¹⁵⁹ В. Большаков, “БАНКРОТЫ ИЗ СИОНИСТСКОГО КОНЦЕРНА” (Bankrupts from the Zionist Concern,) *Pravda*, No.131, May 11, 1971, Moscow.

¹⁶⁰ As witnessed in earlier eras, conspiracy theorists and propagandists pushing conspiracy theories often borrow conspiracy theory narratives from sources outside their ideological “home” and modify it to suit their needs. The main organ of the Young Communist league published an article in October 1967 that described the sinister Zionist influence all over the world and especially in the United States, both in the media and with those “engaged in secret work on the preparation of weapons for mass destruction.” This document was based on an Egyptian pamphlet from 1957. See Korey, p. 17.

¹⁶¹ Åsmund Borgen Gjerde, *Reinterpreting Soviet “Anti-Zionism,”* MA Thesis prepared for the University of Oslo, 2011, p. 96.

¹⁶² Ibid., also “Memorandum from V. Stepanov to the CPSU Central Committee”, March 3, 1970, in *Documents on Soviet Jewish Emigration*, Boris Mozorov ed., (Frank Class Publishers, 1999), p. 71.

Committee of the Soviet Communist Party reported that they had published books “which unmask the reactionary, anti-Soviet essence of the theory and practice of contemporary Zionism” and reported that these books were disseminated in multiple languages, including Arabic: “In 1970-71, 59 books were published with a total circulation of more than 2 million copies, in Russian, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, English, French, German, Spanish and Arabic.”¹⁶³

While these anti-Zionist Soviet books in Arabic were probably disseminated by loyal communists all throughout the Middle East, the Soviets used radio to reach a much larger audience without the need of local networks of agents. Soviet Radio in Arabic regularly pumped out the lines about the plots of international imperialism using Zionism as a tool. For example, Moscow radio in Arabic told its listeners on December 19, 1973 that “the chief reason for the U.S.A.’s continued support for Israel lies in the fact that the U.S. imperialist monopolies try with all their power to maintain the exploitation of the natural resources in the Arab countries.”¹⁶⁴

Other communist parties under the USSR’s influence or control also contributed to this propaganda. In October 1973 the clandestine radio station of the *Tudeh* party, the Iranian Communist party, broadcast a message during the Yom Kippur war:

“The Israeli aggressors and their imperialist supporters thought they could forever occupy the occupied Arab territories by force alone, that they could trample on the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, and that they could ignore the resolutions of the U.N. Security Council and ridicule world public opinion... In their sacred and just war, the Arab people enjoy the support of the socialist community and progressive and anti-imperialist forces throughout the world... The Iranian people have always followed with great interest the just struggle of the Arab people against imperialism and Zionism.”¹⁶⁵

The propaganda broadcast took this opportunity to attack the Iranian government for being in league with imperialism and Zionism:

“The Iranian people have always followed with great interest the just struggle of the Arab people against imperialism and Zionism...reactionary Iranian ruling quarters, despite their intentions, have never dared to take an open political stand in support of the Israeli Aggressors and their imperialist supporters... [in] their cooperation with imperialism and Zionism, Iranian ruling quarters have repeatedly shown their real faces and actual intentions.”¹⁶⁶

While the anti-Zionist/anti-imperialist propaganda activity of the USSR may not have been as intense as the anti-Jewish propaganda of Nazi Germany during World War II, it was more sustained. Like with Nazi propaganda, certain kinds of Soviet propaganda that harped on anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist themes could find eager audiences in the Middle East, where many had first-hand experience of real European imperialism or felt a connection to the Palestinians or (in the case of Palestinians) had been first ruled by the British and then had direct experience of conflict with Jews.

¹⁶³ *Documents on Soviet Jewish Emigration*, p. 126-127.

¹⁶⁴ Hazan, p. 185.

¹⁶⁵ “TUDEH PARTY HAILS ARAB FIGHT AGAINST ISRAELIS,” Radio Iran Courier (Clandestine), 19 October 1973, From Joint Publications Research Service (JPRS) Report, Translations on Near East : No. 1058 (JPRS-60469), 06 November 1973, p. 28.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 29.

Conspiracy theories about Zionism

Nazi propaganda, Nasserite Propaganda, and Soviet propaganda all supported the idea that “Zionism” or the “Jews” were connected with imperialism. The Nazis tended to place the Jewish conspiracy as the master or the partner of imperialists. The Soviets on the other hand emphasized that Zionism was a tool of an imperialist conspiracy, and based on surviving material, Nasserite propaganda seemed to take either position depending on the circumstances. “Imperialists” and “imperialism” in these cases were almost always associated with England and America.¹⁶⁷ A researcher writing in 1987 noticed the ubiquity of talk about an Imperialist-Zionist conspiracy in the Middle East. In this kind of rhetoric Zionism is described as the right hand of imperialism and the “reactionary” (anti-communist) regimes as the left hand, both working in tandem as part of a grand imperialist conspiracy against Arab nationalism.¹⁶⁸ The Nasserite Egyptian National Charter declared that “Israel is the base of imperialism, [and] was brought into existence by means of plots with the object of intimidating the Arab Nation and tearing it apart.”¹⁶⁹ Article 22 of the Palestinian National Covenant reads “Zionism is a political movement organically associated with international imperialism... Israel is the instrument of the Zionist movement, and a geographical base for world imperialism placed strategically in the midst of the Arab homeland to combat the hopes of the Arab Nation for liberation, unity and progress.”¹⁷⁰ One Palestinian scholar described the conspiracy theory of imperialist Zionism in narrative form:

“...the ‘dangers’ of an independent [Arab] state... [and] the spread of Arab nationalist sentiment... prompted the major imperialist figures to propose the idea of creating a client Jewish settler state in Palestine, primarily designed to block the fulfilment of unity and independence in that important area of the world, and to serve the interest of the imperialist sponsors and protectors of the state. The events of the latter part of the [nineteenth] century were conducive to the creation of what amounted to a consensus of opinion among the imperialist and western politicians, with the cooperation of western Jewish capital and anti-semites everywhere in favour of Zionism and the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine.”¹⁷¹

All this talk of conspiracies could lead the suspicion that anyone who interacted with Israel or its “imperialist” bosses/allies could be part of the conspiracy. Some even went further and held that even those who did not fight Israel and/or the imperialists in the correct way were in fact working as a part of the conspiracy. As Nasser wrote in 1958:

“Imperialism always coveted the Middle East. Sometimes they used violence and sometimes cunning intrigues... It was always the rulers who surrendered. They were puppets of the imperialists, and served as a means by which imperialism overcame the people. The imperialists created artificial barriers and unnatural frontiers. They fomented discord whenever unity arose and cunningly sowed dissention...”¹⁷²

¹⁶⁷ Pipes, *The Hidden Hand*, p. 103.

¹⁶⁸ Björge, p. 107.

¹⁶⁹ Björge, p. 104.

¹⁷⁰ Björge, p. 104.

¹⁷¹ Abdul Waab Kayyali, “Zionism and Imperialism: the Historical Origins,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Spring 1977, pp. 98-99, from Björge.

¹⁷² Björge, pp. 108-109.

Conclusion: mixing conspiracy theories in the Middle Eastern context

In this chapter we examined three major propaganda campaigns, Nazi, Nasserite, and Soviet, that used variants of the Grand Conspiracy Theory revolving around the Jews, Zionism, and imperialism. Each of them came from different contexts, but all of them emphasized the idea that there was a massive conspiracy of Jews/Zionists and western imperialists that had the Middle East in its grip. The Nazi campaign spread Islamist-based anti-Jewish conspiracy theories and the Soviet and Nasserite campaigns focused on anti-Imperialist agitation that also eventually included conspiracy theory narratives that closely mirrored the Nazi ones. While the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy theory and the Leninist “imperialism” conspiracy theory were both of European origin, the 20th century propaganda campaigns ensured that these narratives were spread far and wide.

An important theme from Nazi propaganda directed towards Muslims in this period was the idea that the Jews and their tools or allies (America and Britain) were involved in a conspiracy to deliberately weaken Islam in order to make the people of the region more pliant. These imperialist conspirators were also interested in the oil resources of the Middle East. Soviet propaganda (being overtly atheist) did not seem to make much commentary on Islam, but it did emphasize the importance of oil and the other natural resources of the Middle East to the grand imperialist conspiracy, of which Zionism was a very important tool. All shades of these conspiracy theories emphasized deception and the incredible powers the conspirators had to manipulate politics and opinion, in their home countries and in the Middle East. In subsequent chapters we will examine how believers in different strains of these conspiracy theories would adopt these ideas as justifications for, and perhaps as the ultimate motivations for, extremist violence.