

Axis of Denial: Unveiling the Collaboration between Hajj Amin al-Husseini and the Nazi Regime in the Facilitation of the Holocaust and Genocidal Propaganda in the Arab-Islamic Sphere

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Abstract

This paper interrogates and substantiates the pivotal role played by Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, in the ideological and logistical machinery of the Holocaust. Far from being a marginal or symbolic figure, al-Husseini's active collaboration with the Nazi regime between 1941 and 1945, particularly in Berlin, places him within the sphere of complicity in genocidal intent and action. Drawing upon a wide range of primary sources including intercepted communications, records of meetings with Nazi leadership, al-Husseini's own radio broadcasts, and transcripts from the Nuremberg trials this study demonstrates that al-Husseini not only endorsed the extermination of Jews in Europe but actively sought the expansion of the Final Solution to the Middle East.

His efforts to block the transfer of Jewish children from Axis-controlled Europe to Palestine, his antisemitic propaganda disseminated throughout the Islamic world, and his recruitment of Muslim SS units in the Balkans, all suggest a calculated strategy aligning Islamic antisemitism with Nazi ideology. This research challenges postwar attempts to sanitize or obscure al-Husseini's involvement, particularly in Arab nationalist and Islamist narratives, and argues for a reexamination of his historical legacy in light of genocidal complicity. By situating al-Husseini's collaboration within broader geopolitical and theological frameworks, the paper also exposes the underexplored confluence of European fascism and radical Islamism in the mid-twentieth century.

Key words: Holocaust, Final solution, Islam, Nazi, anti-semitism, Palestine, War.

Introduction

The historiography of the Holocaust has, until relatively recently, placed disproportionate emphasis on its European perpetrators and victims, often omitting the international networks that supported, echoed, or expanded its ideological and logistical scope. One of the most controversial and politically sensitive figures in this overlooked transnational framework is Hajj Amin al-Husseini (1897–1974), the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and an influential Arab nationalist and Islamic cleric. His name appears in Nazi archives, Allied intelligence documents, and radio transcripts not as a passive observer, but as an active partner in genocidal ambition.

Al-Husseini's presence in Berlin from 1941 to 1945, during the peak years of the Holocaust, was not incidental. It was the culmination of a deepening alliance between German National Socialism and segments of Arab-Islamic leadership, united by a common enemy: the Jews. Far

from being content with political asylum, al-Husseini used his privileged access to Hitler, Himmler, Ribbentrop, and other Nazi officials to lobby against the emigration of Jews from Europe, promote antisemitic ideology through Arabic-language broadcasts, and advocate for the extension of Nazi-style "solutions" to the Middle East.

A seminal example occurred in November 1941, when al-Husseini met Adolf Hitler and, according to the official German transcript, expressed his hope that "the Jews would be dealt with in the same way as in Germany."¹ This meeting, corroborated by both German and Allied intelligence, serves as a focal point of this paper. Additionally, declassified British intelligence documents and testimonies from the Nuremberg trials confirm that al-Husseini was instrumental in halting negotiations that would have allowed Jewish children to flee to Palestine, declaring it "unacceptable to have more Jews in the Arab world."²

Al-Husseini's wartime broadcasts, aired by the Nazi-controlled Radio Berlin, spewed virulent antisemitism cloaked in Islamic rhetoric. In one 1942 broadcast, he declared: "Kill the Jews wherever you find them this pleases God, history, and religion."³ These messages were not idle incitement; they were part of a coordinated effort to galvanize Muslim populations in North Africa, the Balkans, and the Middle East to align with Axis powers under the banner of religious duty. The Mufti's role in organizing and recruiting for the 13th Waffen Mountain Division of the SS Handschar, composed primarily of Bosnian Muslims, further illustrates the militarized dimension of his alliance with Nazism.⁴

This paper does not aim to conflate Islam or Arabs broadly with Nazism a frequent and dangerous oversimplification but rather to meticulously reconstruct al-Husseini's individual agency and ideological alignment with Nazi objectives. It does so by drawing from a range of documents including the Nuremberg trial transcripts, British Foreign Office memoranda, Nazi communications, the Mufti's own writings, and postwar testimonies.

The stakes of this investigation are significant. In contemporary discourse, particularly among revisionist historians and Islamist apologists, al-Husseini is often portrayed as a nationalist resisting colonialism or as a figure of marginal relevance. This paper contests such narratives, arguing that minimizing al-Husseini's role in the Holocaust amounts to historical denialism. Moreover, understanding this ideological confluence sheds light on the postwar evolution of antisemitic tropes in Middle Eastern discourse and the roots of Islamofascism a term not used lightly, but one that may find historical grounding in the figure of the Mufti.

In illuminating the Mufti's Holocaust complicity, this research not only revises the scope of Holocaust history but also repositions the Arab-Islamic world within the matrix of Axis collaborationism. Such a revision is not merely academic it speaks to ongoing debates about memory, responsibility, and the politicization of history.

I. The Path to Berlin: al-Husseini's Pre-War Antisemitism and British Collaboration

To comprehend the Mufti's eventual alliance with Adolf Hitler, one must first understand the ideological trajectory and political opportunism that defined Hajj Amin al-Husseini's rise to power. Long before he arrived in Berlin or met with Nazi officials, al-Husseini had established himself as a central figure in the transmutation of traditional Islamic anti-Jewish sentiment into

modern political antisemitism. His fusion of pan-Islamic rhetoric with European-style conspiratorial narratives laid the groundwork for what would become a fatal alliance.

1.1 British Patronage and Political Capital in Mandate Palestine

Ironically, the very empire that later condemned al-Husseini's wartime activities was responsible for elevating him to power. In 1921, despite limited religious credentials, the British High Commissioner in Palestine, Herbert Samuel, appointed al-Husseini as Grand Mufti of Jerusalem largely as a concession to Arab nationalist sentiment following the riots of 1920.⁵ Al-Husseini's appointment was as much a colonial maneuver as it was a religious one; the British believed he would be a stabilizing figure in the volatile, multi-ethnic landscape of Mandate Palestine.

Instead, the Mufti used his position to stoke resentment against both Jewish immigrants and British authorities. The Supreme Muslim Council, over which he presided from 1922 onward, became a bastion of political agitation, religious authority, and nationalist incitement. Documents from the British Colonial Office in the 1920s and 1930s reveal growing concern over al-Husseini's manipulation of Islamic institutions to oppose Zionist migration, often employing the rhetoric of jihad and martyrdom.⁶

1.2 1929 Hebron Massacre: A Prelude to Nazi-style Incitement

One of the earliest and bloodiest manifestations of the Mufti's antisemitic agitation came in August 1929, during the riots surrounding the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Al-Husseini falsely claimed that Jews were attempting to seize control of the Haram al-Sharif (Temple Mount), using Friday sermons and pamphlets to incite outrage. The result was a series of coordinated attacks across Palestine, most notoriously the massacre of 67 Jews in Hebron, including women and children.⁷

Although the British held him indirectly responsible, they refrained from punitive measures fearing broader unrest. Yet the pattern was set: al-Husseini would leverage religious authority to stir political violence, always cloaked in the language of Islamic resistance. This rhetorical convergence of the sacred and the political would later mirror the Nazi Gleichschaltung, the fusing of ideology with all societal institutions.

1.3 Al-Husseini's Antisemitism: Religious or Racial?

Historians have long debated whether the Mufti's antisemitism was purely religious rooted in classical Islamic jurisprudence or whether it evolved into a racial hatred akin to European antisemitism. Evidence suggests that al-Husseini adopted both, depending on his audience and strategic needs. In Arabic sermons, he referenced Qur'anic verses portraying Jews as treacherous or accursed (e.g., Surah 5:64), but in his German writings and radio broadcasts, he employed biologically determinist language that mirrored Nazi racial theory.⁸

In a 1937 speech to an Islamic conference in Cairo, al-Husseini declared, "The Jews are the enemies of Islam, of all humanity... They seek to corrupt everything, and their poison has entered the heart of every European society."⁹ This language, abstracted from its religious

framework and universalized into a global threat narrative, aligned closely with the themes of *Mein Kampf* and *Der Stürmer*.

By the late 1930s, al-Husseini had fully adopted the rhetoric of Judeophobia, which framed Jews not merely as political opponents or religious heretics, but as existential threats to civilization a discourse that would make collaboration with Nazi Germany not only possible, but ideologically coherent.

1.4 Alignment with Axis Powers: Exile and Opportunity

Following the failure of the 1936–1939 Arab Revolt largely orchestrated by al-Husseini's factions the British issued a warrant for his arrest. He fled to Lebanon, then Iraq, where he took part in the 1941 pro-Axis coup led by Rashid Ali al-Gaylani. This revolt, backed by German agents and supported by Italian fascists, was an early experiment in extending the Nazi sphere of influence into the Arab world.¹⁰

After the British crushed the rebellion, al-Husseini fled again this time to Fascist Italy, and eventually to Berlin. His journey, funded and facilitated by Axis diplomats, marked not merely a flight from British prosecution but a formal alignment with the fascist cause. By October 1941, he had been received in Berlin as an honored guest, with state housing and direct access to Nazi leaders.

II. In the Heart of the Beast: al-Husseini's Activities in Nazi Germany, 1941–1945

Upon his arrival in Berlin in late 1941, Hajj Amin al-Husseini did not behave like a mere refugee or a guest. Rather, he acted and was treated as a political ally of the Third Reich. Hitler's regime, eager to exploit his religious authority and pan-Islamic influence, granted him privileges unmatched by any other foreign dignitary from the Arab or Muslim world. In return, the Mufti offered more than symbolic support: he gave his voice, his ideological commitment, and his political networks to bolster Nazi Germany's war efforts particularly those targeting the Jews.

2.1 The Hitler-Husseini Meeting: Ideological Convergence

On November 28, 1941, al-Husseini was granted a private audience with Adolf Hitler at the Reich Chancellery. According to the official German minutes of the meeting, preserved in the archives of the *Auswärtiges Amt*, the Mufti declared his full support for the Nazi war effort and requested German assistance in “solving the Jewish question in Palestine and the Arab world.”¹¹ Hitler, in turn, assured the Mufti that once Germany had achieved victory in the East, it would support the “liberation of the Arabs” and the “destruction of the Jewish element residing in the Arab sphere.”¹²

Although no direct commitment to implement the Final Solution in the Middle East was made during the meeting, the ideological symbiosis is undeniable. Hitler saw in al-Husseini a partner who could mobilize Muslims in support of Axis interests; al-Husseini saw in Hitler a tool to eliminate Jewish presence from the region. The Mufti himself later wrote that Hitler told him “the Jews were to be exterminated,” and he claimed to have “repeatedly protested” the possibility of allowing any Jewish emigration to Palestine even if it meant their deaths.¹³

2.2 Halting Jewish Emigration: Advocacy for Extermination

Perhaps the most damning evidence of al-Husseini's complicity in the Holocaust lies in his successful intervention against the transfer of 4,000 Jewish children from Axis-controlled territories to British Palestine. Documents presented at the Nuremberg trials, particularly the testimony of SS officer Dieter Wisliceny (a close aide to Adolf Eichmann), reveal that al-Husseini personally lobbied German and Hungarian authorities to cancel the plan. His rationale? The children might grow up to become "leaders of the Jewish community in Palestine."¹⁴

This act of obstruction, committed with full knowledge of the Nazis' genocidal policies, rendered the Mufti not merely an ideological sympathizer but an operational collaborator in the machinery of death. The children perished in Auschwitz and other extermination camps.

2.3 Arabic Propaganda for the Third Reich: The Radio Campaign

Between 1942 and 1944, the Mufti became the voice of Nazi Germany to the Islamic world. Broadcasting weekly from Radio Berlin, he delivered Arabic-language speeches filled with antisemitic vitriol, anti-British rhetoric, and pan-Islamic appeals to jihad. His broadcasts reached North Africa, the Levant, Iraq, and even parts of India. In a 1944 broadcast, he explicitly urged:

"O Arabs, rise as one and fight for your sacred rights. Kill the Jews wherever you find them. This pleases God, history, and religion. This is your sacred duty."¹⁵

These broadcasts were more than demagoguery. German intelligence and Arabic-speaking Nazi agents coordinated with al-Husseini to ensure that his messages dovetailed with broader military efforts in the Middle East and North Africa. The Mufti's speeches invoked Qur'anic language and Islamic jurisprudence to legitimize violence against Jews and Allied forces, portraying Hitler's war as a cosmic battle between Islam and world Jewry.

2.4 The Bosnian Muslim Waffen-SS Divisions: From Ideology to Armed Collaboration

Perhaps the most material expression of the Mufti's collaboration was his role in the formation of the 13th Waffen Mountain Division of the SS Handschar, composed largely of Bosnian Muslims. With Himmler's approval, al-Husseini traveled to the Balkans in 1943 to recruit Muslims into the Nazi military machine. He preached in mosques, met with local leaders, and framed the campaign as a religious war against Jews, Serbs, and Communists.

In one speech in Sarajevo, the Mufti declared:

> "Jews and their allies are the enemies of Islam. The Führer knows this. You are not only defending your homes, but you are upholding the honor of the Islamic ummah."¹⁶

The Handschar Division became infamous for committing atrocities in Yugoslavia, including massacres of civilians. Al-Husseini's personal visits to training camps and his sermons urging loyalty to Hitler were documented by Allied intelligence, and later presented as evidence of war crimes during postwar tribunals.

III. Post-War Denialism and the Sanitization of the Mufti's Legacy

Following the collapse of the Third Reich and the liberation of the concentration camps, Hajj Amin al-Husseini's wartime collaboration with Nazi Germany became a point of geopolitical tension rather than judicial resolution. Despite ample documentation of his activities including Nazi archival records, wartime broadcasts, and testimony from senior SS officials al-Husseini evaded prosecution at Nuremberg and found protection in the shifting sands of post-war Middle Eastern politics. What followed was not only his personal escape from justice, but a systematic revisionism and erasure of his culpability from large swathes of Arab, Muslim, and even Western academic discourse.

3.1 French Protection and Egyptian Asylum

After the fall of Berlin in 1945, al-Husseini was captured by French forces in the Black Forest and held under nominal house arrest in Paris. But rather than extraditing him to Yugoslavia where he was formally indicted for war crimes or allowing his testimony in the Nuremberg Trials, the French authorities allowed the Mufti to escape, largely due to pressure from Arab states and France's desire to maintain influence in its North African colonies.¹⁷

By 1946, al-Husseini had arrived in Cairo, where he was welcomed by King Farouk and treated as a pan-Arab hero rather than a fascist collaborator. Egypt, then a hub of post-colonial Islamic nationalism, became the sanctuary in which al-Husseini would begin the long process of whitewashing his wartime record. No tribunal, no indictment, no trial despite his central role in Nazi propaganda and recruitment campaigns.

3.2 The Politics of Palestinian Nationalism: Al-Husseini's Reinvention

Far from retreating from public life, al-Husseini resumed political activity with renewed vigor. In 1948, he was appointed President of the All-Palestine Government in Gaza by the Arab League, though the position was largely symbolic. His wartime alliance with the Nazis did not disqualify him in fact, it often served as a badge of anti-Zionist purity. His previous calls to "kill the Jews wherever you find them" were reframed as resistance against colonialism.

This transformation was facilitated by a broader political strategy: to separate al-Husseini's antisemitism from the Holocaust, and to reinterpret his Nazi alliance as a mere act of political expedience. Arab nationalist writers and sympathetic Western academics presented the Mufti as a misunderstood figure, driven not by racial hatred but by anti-colonial urgency. This narrative, however, contradicts the extensive evidence of his knowledge of and involvement in the extermination of European Jewry.

3.3 Suppressed Evidence: The Nuremberg Trials and Allied Complicity

During the Nuremberg Trials, several Allied prosecutors particularly those from the United States and Britain chose not to press charges against al-Husseini. As reported in declassified U.S. intelligence files, the reason was not a lack of evidence but a desire to avoid antagonizing the Arab world during a period of rising Cold War tensions and oil diplomacy.¹⁸

Documents such as PS-1750 (Wisliceny's testimony) and intercepted German-Arab correspondence detailing the Mufti's role in blocking Jewish emigration were entered into the record, but never followed by prosecutorial action. Meanwhile, the Soviets sought to indict al-

Husseini, not for his crimes against Jews, but for his support of pro-Axis Muslims in the Balkans who fought Soviet forces.

This selective justice where political expedience overruled moral obligation allowed al-Husseini to escape not only punishment but even public reckoning. His case is emblematic of the ways in which postwar realpolitik and diplomatic cowardice can shield perpetrators from accountability.

3.4 Intellectual Rehabilitation: Apologia in Arab and Western Thought

From the 1950s onward, a sustained campaign emerged to rehabilitate the Mufti's image. Pan-Arabist ideologues like Michel Aflaq and Nasserist historians downplayed or outright denied al-Husseini's role in the Holocaust. Instead, they framed the narrative in familiar terms: the Mufti was a nationalist forced into alliance with Germany by British treachery and Jewish aggression.

In Western academia, particularly in postcolonial studies, there emerged a tendency to treat critiques of al-Husseini as "Zionist propaganda," thereby dismissing the documented record as politically motivated. Edward Said, while never explicitly defending the Mufti's Nazi alliance, lamented the tendency to "orientalize" Arab leaders by applying European categories of guilt and moral judgment.¹⁹

The result is a historical landscape in which the Mufti's collaboration is both known and ignored a moral ambiguity that continues to affect discourse on Middle Eastern politics, Holocaust memory, and the boundaries of resistance.

IV. Legacy of the Mufti: Echoes of Fascism in Contemporary Islamist Movements

While the physical presence of Hajj Amin al-Husseini disappeared into the shadows after the 1950s, his ideological influence did not. His legacy survived and even thrived in the rhetoric and strategy of contemporary Islamist movements, many of which have inherited not only his uncompromising antisemitism but also his fusion of religious extremism with modern authoritarian political methods. The Mufti's alliance with Nazi Germany was not merely a historical aberration; it planted seeds that would later flourish in organizations that mirror both his theological worldview and fascist aesthetics.

4.1 The Ideological Inheritance: From the Mufti to the Muslim Brotherhood

The postwar period saw an increasing convergence between the Mufti's ideology and that of the Muslim Brotherhood, particularly under the leadership of Sayyid Qutb. Qutb's infamous tract *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq* (Milestones) took the Mufti's anti-Jewish rhetoric and repackaged it in the language of jihadist modernity. In his writings, Qutb invoked the same themes: Jews as eternal enemies of Islam, Zionism as a satanic project, and the necessity of a divine revolution to purge society of Jewish influence.²⁰

Notably, Qutb had traveled to the United States in the late 1940s, but it was Nazi propaganda and Islamic antisemitic traditions that most influenced his worldview. Al-Husseini's presence in Egypt during this time facilitated deeper ties between former Nazi collaborators and the

Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Declassified CIA and MI6 files confirm meetings between the Mufti and Brotherhood leaders, including Hassan al-Banna, in the late 1940s.²¹

This alliance between fascist refugees and Islamist ideologues laid the foundation for the ideological architecture of groups like Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and al-Qaeda all of which have echoed the Mufti's positions in both rhetoric and practice.

4.2 Hamas and the Canonization of the Mufti

The Hamas Charter of 1988, in Article 22, explicitly references "Jewish conspiracies" reminiscent of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion a forgery promoted heavily by al-Husseini during his Nazi broadcasts. Moreover, in multiple speeches and interviews, Hamas leaders have praised the Mufti as a "hero of resistance" and a "guardian of the Islamic ummah" against Zionism.²²

In 2013, senior Hamas official Mahmoud al-Zahar defended the Mufti's alliance with Hitler, stating:

“He did what he had to do. It was not collaboration; it was strategy. The Zionists were the greater enemy.”²³

This open endorsement reflects the normalization of al-Husseini's actions in some Islamic political circles, where his legacy has become emblematic of a perceived authentic resistance to both colonialism and Judaism. That this normalization includes tacit approval of genocide underscores the unresolved moral legacy he left behind.

4.3 Holocaust Denial and Distortion in Arab Discourse

One of the most perverse legacies of al-Husseini's postwar rehabilitation is the rise of Holocaust denial and distortion in Middle Eastern media. From Egypt's state television under Nasser to Iranian-sponsored outlets like Press TV, there exists a persistent tendency to minimize, relativize, or outright deny the Holocaust. This is not a coincidence it is a strategic inheritance.

By severing al-Husseini's Nazi collaboration from broader historical memory, Arab regimes and Islamist groups have been able to weaponize Holocaust relativism to delegitimize Israel's historical narrative and Jewish suffering. This revisionism, in effect, completes what al-Husseini began in the 1940s: transforming antisemitism into a politically viable and even laudable strategy under the banner of anti-Zionism.²⁴

4.4 Toward an Honest Reckoning

The time has come for both the Western and Arab worlds to confront the full extent of Hajj Amin al-Husseini's role in one of humanity's darkest chapters. His collaboration with Hitler was not marginal, nor was it coerced. It was a calculated, ideologically motivated alliance grounded in mutual hatred of Jews and shared visions of authoritarian purity.

To treat the Mufti as merely a nationalist is to erase the screams of the Bosnian civilians murdered by SS Handschar, the Jewish children he condemned to Auschwitz, and the millions who have suffered under the ideologies he helped forge.

Truth demands reckoning. Memory demands responsibility.

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