



The sheikh and the Shoah

Mar. 24, 2009

WOLFGANG G SCHWANITZ , THE JERUSALEM POST

Etgar Lefkovits asks if the US Holocaust Memorial Museum is whitewashing the grand mufti's biography on-line ("**US museum draws flak for pro-Nazi mufti bio**," March 18). Not at all. It's not bad intention, but the wrong approach that has led to the thesis of "ideological and strategic incompatibility between Nazism and Arab nationalism."

The main events of Hajj Amin al-Husseini's life were kept in the dark before the millennium. Then the mufti's memoirs and other studies appeared in Arabic. Obviously the museum's authors - surely not Middle East historians - do not know those books or that language.

Big chunks of knowledge have been left out in the museum's narrative. Almost nothing relates to the 29 years he lived after World War II, though there is the fairy tale of his "escape" from Paris to Cairo in 1946. But escape? Before this happened, the French said he was free to go.

Missing is his help in getting thousands of Nazis jobs in the Middle East in the military, security or propaganda (most converted to Islam). You wonder from where the deadly ideology came that pushed Israel into a spiral of struggle for survival. Here you learn nothing about the mufti's bases in Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iran, Indonesia or Pakistan. Nor is anything said about his involvement in the murder of those willing to come to terms with the young Jewish state, people like Jordan's King Abdullah I.

Missing is the mufti's worldwide incitement of terror against Israel and Jews, the support for his protégé Yasser Arafat and his role in finding retreats for Muslim Brothers in cities like Geneva or Munich. You don't read anything about the global Islamic organizations he built until his death in 1974.

Even the mufti's year of birth is in quotation marks, although he stated clearly it was 1897. It goes on with misguiding sections, mistakes and omissions. Hitler certainly recognized the Arabs' wish for independence, and the mufti as their foremost speaker. He stressed his basic position in a 1939 meeting with Ibn Saud's envoy, and publicly at the end of 1940, giving further secret assurances to the mufti in person a year later. The text of the museum misrepresents facts and evidence.

Berlin and Rome had already done a joint broadcast declaring support for Arab aspirations. Hitler repeated it orally and in writing. The dictator was most compatible with the mufti. Until the very end, Hitler ordered full support for him - as explained by propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels in 1944. They even prepared a new financial agreement with the mufti as late as April 5, 1945.

Hitler needed the mufti as an accomplice in the Holocaust planned for the Middle East and as an adviser in Muslim affairs. For his part, the mufti found much common ground with Hitler. Just read his appeal of 1937 to all Muslims (not mentioned in the text). In a time when even Berlin still had various projects on the table about "how to solve the Jewish question," the mufti called on Muslims for jihad to rid their lands of Jews. In a mixture of religious and racist hatred, he likened them to "microbes and scum of all countries."

No chance that close relations arose at the end of 1937 when Adolf Eichmann traveled to Cairo, because he failed to meet the mufti in Palestine. So Husseini approached the Nazis in turn with a deal: For German help and weapons to prevent the rise of a national Jewish home, he would spread Nazi ideology and "keep up the terror in all Mandatory areas."

Though the relations went through various phases, he soon had liaison officers in the four most powerful German offices. He enjoyed a steady relationship with the SS since 1937 (not 1943, as the museum claims). So close did the mufti feel to Hitler that he offered him a risky venture in September 1944: a mediation between Hitler and Stalin. The mufti's protests against the release of Jews to Palestine had the desired impact. He discusses this and more in his memoirs, without mercy

or regret.

It is also wrong to say Husseini conditioned his call for a general uprising on some declaration. On the contrary, he was the Nazis' most willing executioner among the Arabs. In the Middle East he also kept a wide institutional basis for authority over Muslims in other parts of the world. He got plenty of money and aides.

Displaying a biography today and not mentioning what happened in Germany in the middle of 1943 is astounding. In his memoirs, the mufti admitted that Heinrich Himmler, one of the chief architects of the Holocaust, told him secrets of the German empire. Besides "research for a nuclear bomb," he told him on the persecution of Jews: "Up to now we have exterminated [abadna] around three million of them." This admission discovered in his memoirs in 1999 ended decades of heated debate on what the mufti knew about the Holocaust.

All in all, the museum displays a deeply flawed text. Carol Greenwald of Holocaust Museum Watch has alerted us rightly (for the second time) and the museum has homework to do in reaching a respectable academic standard.

The writer is working on a biography of the Grand Mufti.

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