HAJI MOHAMED-ADOLF HITLER FROM ARAB PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

Different opinions about Adolf Hitler's personality, views and political activities were also expressed within the Arab world. The initial attempts to forge links between the Führer and certain leading figures in the Arab world, the impact of Nazi propaganda in the Arab world, and the ideas of Arab writers who commented on or portrayed Hitler undoubtedly contributed to the sometimes contradictory image of the Third Reich chancellor. The authors aim to provide insights into this complex image of Hitler in official political circles and media. For the sake of a more nuanced portrayal of the personality, the presentation concludes with noteworthy (funny and ironic) news about the Nazi leader.

Keywords: Adolf Hitler, Arab World, Egypt, Nazi propaganda, Anis Mansour

Introduction:

The well-known Egyptian writer and publicist Mohamed Fahmy aptly summed up the attention paid to the Nazi politician in just a few sentences: „*I did not notice the interest that Adolf Hitler enjoyed. The press still deals with him regularly to this day, despite the fact that he committed suicide decades ago. Until now he has occupied the front pages of newspapers and magazines and the lines written about him have increased distribution, popularised the print press and media sources. It can be numerically demonstrated that Hitler is the man for the cover pages and the front pages. Post-war international magazines have featured his picture on their front pages countless times. In this respect, Hitler set a record that no other politician had ever achieved before*."[1]

In any case, the complex and multifaceted relationship between Adolf Hitler and the Arabs should be examined from a number of different contexts. However, a common starting point is clearly the British edition of the Balfour Declaration ("Balfour's promise" in Arabic) of 1917. The Declaration and the subsequent arrival of increasing numbers of Jewish settlers created an atmosphere of tension and then

open confrontation in the region that promised encouraging opportunities for Nazi Germany and its leader Hitler, who made ambitious claims to power in the 1930s. The failure of the Arab uprisings in Palestine clearly demonstrated to the local indigenous population that they could not assert their demands on their own. The findings of the various British Commissions of Inquiry, which at best regulated Jewish immigration to Palestine only by quotas, but did not stop it, were also without any meaningful consequences. The failure of this political search for a way out has, over time, simultaneously reinforced the popularity of nationalist and anti-Semitic views in the Palestinian Arab community. And Germany, which, like the Arab world, regarded the 1919 Paris Peace Accords as a diktat, the revision of which was a high priority in the foreign policy of the 1930s, was an obvious partner for the realisation of the objectives set. However, in parallel with the need for a common platform against British imperialism, a common platform on anti-Semitism also gained ground, especially after Hitler's rise to power in 1933. Extremist views clearly contributed to the increase in sympathy for a geographically distant Germany, notwithstanding the fact that it was precisely the Nazi leadership's Jewish policies and the growing persecution of the religious community that clearly acted as a catalyst for the immigration of Jewish families who had fled to Palestine.

However, it is essential to note that Germany was only one and not an exclusive alternative for the contemporary inhabitants of the Arab lands in their struggle against British Mandate for Palestine (1920–1948) and Jewish settlement. It is an undeniable fact that there are many prominent Arab political and religious figures who have covertly or even openly declared their sympathy with Nazism. Ideological identification, on the other hand, was more likely to be expressed by personalities than by complete communities. However, also in the case of the individuals, it is important to stress that this effort was seen as a tool and/or a basis for a common dialogue to build a closer alliance with the Germans. In contrast, a much larger proportion of individuals and groups still saw Germany as the former colonial empire. As a result, they distrusted - and often misunderstood - Berlin's policies and wanted to gain their independence within the political framework, essentially through peaceful means and compromises. The latter, too, and not only the physical presence of British armed forces, is therefore a key factor in explaining why, with sporadic exceptions such as the 1941 coup in Iraq, local Arab populations or Arab states did not join the Axis armies en masse when they were fighting in Africa or the Middle East. It is also the reason for the collective rejection of Nazi ideology in the region after the Second World War, and not only because of the Allied victory or the emigration of Arabs closely associated with the Nazi leadership.

Our point about the Arab "few" being motivated by interest in making contacts was doubly valid for Adolf Hitler. This was already brilliantly demonstrated in his first concrete personal meeting with the influential Arab personality, one Khalid al-Hud al-Gargani,[2] on 17 June 1939. In the course of the conversation, the Führer outlined Germany's anti-Semitic policy to the Saudi monarch's special envoy in a remarkably one-sided manner, defining the Jews as a common enemy in Palestine

and stressing the importance of the struggle against them to his interlocutor. However, Gilbert Achcar[3] aptly pointed out that the Führer did not say a word to his Arab guest about the fact that during the negotiations he had also encouraged German Jews to emigrate to Palestine and had helped Zionist organisations to oppose the restrictions imposed by Britain on Jewish immigration.[4]

Finally, it can be said without a doubt that the spiritual father of Arab relations with Nazi Germany was Sheikh Amin al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and the most prominent Palestinian leader of his time. In his book 'The Nazis and the Mufti of Jerusalem', the German historian Klaus Gensicke himself points out that his 1941 meeting with Hitler can be considered as the first real and meaningful starting point of Nazi-Arab relations. Indeed, the Palestinian religious leader subsequently acted as a 'bridge' between the Arab world and Berlin on a number of occasions, when he acted as a mediator between certain Arab leaders and the Führer.[5]

Hitler and al-Husseini on 28 November 1941.

Hitler's propaganda in the Arab world:

In addition to their personal contacts with certain Arab leaders, the Nazis made a conscious effort to ensure that the wider Arab public, beyond the political-religious leaders, was also exposed to the essence of their ideology. In this spirit, media campaigns were conducted on Arabic-language radio stations, in various propaganda posters and magazines, featuring pictures and quotes from Hitler and Nazi leaders. These tools promoted the Nazi ideology and alliance with Germany in the Arab world, on the one hand, by showing pictures of Nazi leaders and quotes from them, and, on the other hand, by highlighting the anti-Semitic and anti-British nature of German National Socialist policies.

Addressing the broader social elite was made easier for Hitler and his subordinates by their awareness not only of the problems of the Arab world, but often also of the spirit, feeling and mentality of the indigenous population living there. They were therefore also aware of the content and means by which they could quickly and meaningfully influence the Arab mindset. The result was a well-constructed and carefully thought-out strategy for the Middle East and North Africa that consistently sought to portray Hitler as the defender of the Islam in the period 1930–1945. In addition to the slogans associated with this, this impression is also emphasised/reinforced, for example, by the photos taken with the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin al-Husseini, among others. However, Hitler went even further, in order to use the Muslim religion for his own ends, when he practically tried to imply on various occasions and forums that he was the legitimate vicegerent of Allah on earth. This claim to a certain kind of sacral power was evident, for example, in a song broadcast on German radio at the time, the refrain of which repeated the phrase „

Allah above us in heaven, and Hitler with us on earth."[6] On other occasions, however, the Führer has not even given the appearance of comparing himself openly to Prophet Mohamed and declaring himself his almost legitimate heir, not least to the powers and authority once held by the Prophet. This was clearly reflected in the slogan aptly quoted by David Motadel[7] in his book 'Les musulmans et la machine de guerre nazie' (The Muslims and the Nazi War Machine). For the slogan in question was then already referentially proclaiming to the Muslim world that "*Hitler had come to finish the work begun by the Prophet*".[8] According to Nazi propaganda, Hitler had secretly converted to Islam and had taken the name Haji[9] Mohamed Hitler in his new religious community.[10]

In addition to quoting the slogan, Motadel also provides a thorough insight into the different approaches and the wide range of tools the Third Reich used to reach out to the Muslim world and win the sympathy of the population: "*At the height of the Second World War, in 1941/42, when German troops invaded Muslim countries in the Balkans, North Africa, the Crimea and the Caucasus, Islam began to be seen as a politically important factor in Berlin. Step by step, the Nazi regime began to win over Muslims as allies and involve them in ... war*. [...] *In Muslim-inhabited areas, the Germans carried out extensive religious propaganda. At the beginning of 1941, before they appeared in North Africa, the Nazi army distributed a booklet entitled "Islam" to the soldiers to teach them how to treat Muslims. On the Eastern front, in the Crimea and the Caucasus, where Stalin had violently suppressed Islam before the war, the German occupiers built mosques and Koranic schools in the hope of ending Soviet hegemony. German propaganda men worked to politicise religious texts or jihad in order to turn Muslims against the Allies*."[11]

It is also widely believed among Arabs that Hitler specifically studied Islam and Arab civilisation. This was, however, due to an unjustified exaggeration of the importance of certain fundamentally irrelevant facts and to the erroneous conclusions drawn from them. Thus, the mere fact that Hitler praised the Arab region in some of his statements did not in the least imply either an increased commitment to the region or an increased personal interest in it. His statements, including their content, were nothing more than purely topical, often less than sincere, and often primarily interest-oriented statements. In the light of all this, the image of Muslim fighters fighting in the Waffen-SS in the Arab world is not only false or even shocking, but also highly distorted. The image of the Muslim volunteers of the German armed forces was explicitly sought to be that of a pure, moral soldier who would both fight resolutely against infidels and apostates - especially the atheist communists - and lead a pious life in accordance with the Koranic precepts during the breaks from fighting. This also meant, of course, that the free practice of the Muslim religion was given special emphasis in centrally constructed Nazi communication. But the Goebbels propaganda machine proved so effective in this area (too) that its impact far exceeded initial expectations: on the basis of the image it created and disseminated, the supposed unconditional and unquestioning respect for Muslims, in the spirit of which even the Führer did not begin his speech until his true believers had completed their prayers in

accordance with the Islamic precepts, became a firm conviction in certain sections and groups of the Muslim world.[12]

This impression was reinforced by Hitler's repeated references to or use of specific quotations from the Koran, which became a recurrent practice, especially after the campaign against the Soviet Union. A striking example of this was the occasion when the Führer, under the influence and guidance of an Iraqi writer living in Germany, specifically crowned his speech with a verse from the Koran, when he opened his monologue with the line „ *The Hour (of Judgment) is nigh, and the moon is cleft asunder.*"[13] However, this move was not primarily intended as a gesture, but rather as an encouragement to the tens of thousands of Bosniak, Albanian, Crimean Tatar, Caucasian and Central Asian Muslim soldiers who had already joined the German armed forces, as well as to potential volunteers.[14]

Of course, prominent Arab thinkers and public figures who cooperated with the Nazi leadership and its local representatives and agents on the basis of the principle of 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend' also played an indisputable role in the spread of German propaganda in the Arab public mind. Of all of them, however, it was perhaps Sheikh Mohamed al-Shazli al-Sinousi who stood out among Arabs for his commitment to the Third Reich and his role in spreading Nazi propaganda.

Paradoxically, however, al-Sinousi began his pro-German activities just as the Axis powers' star was in decline. His misjudgement and misperception of the situation - and not only his own! - the first period of his propaganda career in Tunisia was an excellent example. He, like many of his compatriots, saw the German invasion of Tunisia in november 1942 as a hope and a chance to overthrow French colonial rule. However, he failed to notice, or simply refused to acknowledge, that the Germans had entered their country not as saviours but as occupiers, not voluntarily but under duress, after the defeat of the Allies in the east in the second battle of El Alamein, town in the northern Marsa Matrouh Governorate of Egypt, and the landing of some 65,000 Allied troops in the west during Operation Torch. He saw only the opportunity of a lifetime to win Tunisia's long-sought independence, which he successfully joined the local German radio station to promote. But the war situation again intervened, and he had barely started work in early 1943. Due to the retreat of the Axis powers in Africa and the loss of space, he was transferred first to Rome and then, after a three-month stay, to the headquarters of German radio in Berlin, where he mainly produced programmes for the cultural section. In the few years that followed, al-Sinousi gained notoriety as a staunch supporter of the German official position and for his lavish lifestyle. He was so closely linked to the Nazi empire by so many ties that his fate was almost predestined to follow. He was particularly badly affected in early 1945, when the bombing of the German capital destroyed his home, which had been furnished with lavish luxuries, and he himself suffered burns so severe that he had to spend three months in hospital in a desperate attempt to save his possessions. After his escape, he had virtually nothing left and lost everything he had believed in. His disillusionment was compounded by the capitulation of Germany in May 1945. His body, which had not fully recovered from the injuries sustained in the

fire, was attacked and weakened by illness until he died a broken man on 24 July 1945. His ashes were laid to rest in the refugee cemetery in the village of Acht Dorf, where the German government had a marble tomb carved in his memory in recognition of his work. A plaque was also placed at his final resting place, inscribed with the following words in Arabic: „*Here lies the Arab Mujahid, Mr. Mohamed al-Shazli al-Sinussi of Tunis, the first-class teacher of al-Zaytuna al-Maamour Mosque*.[15„16]

In addition to Al-Sinousi, the activities of the renowned and influential reporter Younis Bahri[17], who regularly promoted Hitler and the Nazi dictator's regime in his Arabic-language radio programme *'Here Berlin - Arab Territory'*, were also noteworthy. His admiration and unconditional loyalty to the Führer was perfectly evident when he used words and phrases such as „*Hitler captured the hearts of Arab nationalists'. He is the source of hope for salvation from colonialism and the Jewish yoke that wanted to set traps in Palestine*".[18]

Nazi propaganda, despite its best efforts, had a rather ambivalent effect on the independence aspirations of individual Arab countries during the Second World War. Thus, although it managed to gain some popularity and support in the Arab world, it proved unable to bring about comprehensive or lasting change. In contrast, nationalist Arab leaders who sought to restore their country's sovereignty independently, free from any outside influence, were able to build a growing social base.

The Arab 'Hitlers':

However, after the Nazi dictator's death, his image in the Arab world lived on, despite the fact that the ideology and system he represented failed to take root there. For this reason, it was not his political achievements or ideological identity, but rather his personality traits, including certain specific attitudes, that were repeatedly projected onto certain local Arab politicians, mainly with the intention of stigmatising and openly condemning him. This negative approach, however, did not necessarily elicit the expected stimuli and reactions from ordinary Arabs, who often had at best a superficial knowledge of the actions of the Nazi dictator and whose value judgements were influenced not by the past but by current politics, i.e. by anti-Western and anti-Israeli sentiment arising from the Cold War context.

In the case of Israel in particular, it was often the case that their communications projected Hitler's political image and activities onto the Arab political opponents of the Jewish state. Despite the fact that such efforts failed to achieve their point, which was to turn Arab public opinion against its leading political elite, they had many advantages. First and foremost, they strengthened social cohesion within Israeli society, they could also serve as a kind of legitimation to justify the launching of military actions and the justification of the operations carried out, their message could have a global impact beyond the borders of the Jewish state and, in the context of the Cold War, they could prompt the Soviet Union, which was both a major foreign patron of the Arab region and a leader in the fight against Nazism, to adopt a more cautious policy - or at least a stance. In the context of the

opinions and statements propagated about Egyptian President Gamal Abdel-Nasser, it was noted, for example, that David Ben-Gurion, in his speech to the Knesset, used the epithet 'Hitlerism' to describe the Egyptian President with the express purpose of giving greater weight to his call for preparations for war against Egypt. To provoke the necessary reaction, however, he went further, when, to emphasize the struggle for self-defence, he declared that „*the danger posed by the Egyptian tyrant is comparable to the danger to the Jews of Europe*." [19] The German writer Daniel Schwammenthal, director of the AJC Transatlantic Institute, also said of Nasser that he „*felt sympathy for the Nazis* [...] *and thought like Hitler"*.[20] Finally, we should also refer to Joel Benin's[21] long article in which the author talks about the similarities between Hitler and Nasser.

However, all these characterisations and parallels are interesting not only for their content, but also for the context in which they are presented. Whereas in the case of Nasser, at least the Nazi scientists and military officers who escaped prosecution and joined the Egyptian administration provided some basis for criticism, his successor, President Sadat, who signed the special Israeli-Egyptian peace accord, received little criticism of this kind, despite his well-known admiration for Hitler and his active collaboration with the Axis troops during the Second World War. Moreover, his admiration long outlived the Fuhrer, who was still remembered years later as a German patriot, when other former Egyptian ministers had already clearly distanced themselves from the Nazi leader and collectively condemned his actions in the columns of the al-Musawwir[22] newspaper.[23]

The other well-known Arab political figure who was repeatedly branded as a 'Hitler' was Arafat, the chairman of the Palestinian National Liberation Movement (PLO). In the aftermath of the Oslo Accords, Israeli official Dov Shilansky,[24] for example, mockingly commented on the Palestinian leader's planned visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, saying, „*Arafat is going to Auschwitz to learn from his teacher, Hitler, how to destroy us*." [25] The stalemate was not broken in 1998, when US President Bill Clinton's administration persuaded Arafat to visit the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, signalling Palestinian openness to Israelis. But the idea failed precisely because of the museum's opposition, when it stubbornly blocked the proposal. The Washington Post also published an article on the matter, which included a warning from members of the American Jewish community to museum director Walter Reich that „*this Arafat is Hitler*".[26] Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made similar statements about Arafat when he openly questioned and disputed the legitimacy of awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to the Palestinian leader. This message, however, did not go unanswered. In response to the Israeli Prime Minister's remarks, Ahmed al-Bardisi, a well-known Egyptian publicist, shared his thoughts in the Egyptian state daily al-Gumhoriya: „*There is not a moment's doubt that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is deliberately defending himself on a false, illegal, unprincipled, immoral and baseless issue. Netanyahu is like a professional seller of illusions, who is not ashamed or embarrassed to sell false goods, because in Europe and America he can always find*

those who not only buy these illusions, lies and falsehoods from him, but are also willing to pay a high enough price for them. The scales have tipped in this world, and there are no longer fair and stable yardsticks for the principles of peace, truth and justice. [...] *The Israeli Prime Minister compares Arafat to Hitler. He claims that he does not deserve the Nobel Prize because he has led and planned so many acts of terrorism, which profoundly devalues the prize and diminishes its moral value. On what basis does Netanyahu make such claims about Arafat, who has killed countless innocent Palestinians, Lebanese and Syrians? Is this strange claim logical? Is this man not ashamed of himself*?!" [27]

Hitler-related accusations have also hit Lebanese Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah for his role in the Lebanese resistance and his close ties with Iran and Syria. Former Prime Minister and Defence Minister Ehud Barak himself admitted that „*Israel sees in Nasrallah a new Hitler*".[28] After all, the image of the Nazi leader was often associated not only with the leading figures of the terrorist organisation, but also with the leading politico-religious figures of Iran behind them, notably when reacting to their strident anti-Israeli statements/exclamations. Thus, for example, it was (also) because of his Holocaust-denying statements that former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad[29] also became a Hitler in the eyes of the Israeli government and public, saying „*He is a new Hitler who threatens the world with war in which the Jews will be annihilated*."[30]

However, the use of the Hitler image was not only a specific feature of Israeli opinion-forming and expression, but was also often applied by the feuding Arab states to each other, or even to Persian Iran, especially after the escalation of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry for regional leadership. Saudi Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman, for example, also once described Ali Khamenei, Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as 'Hitler'. Sheikh Nabil Kaouk, a member of Hezbollah's Central Council, responded by saying that „*it was bin Salman who slaughtered children, women and the elderly in Yemen, created a bloodbath and laid siege to poor people*. [...] *He is the Hitler of the age and of the Arabs, because he spreads hatred and anger and spends money to turn people against each other. As for Iran, it is the country that helped Iraq and Syria to face the threat of ISIS expansion. Without its sacrificial help, ISIS could have taken control of the Gulf states and been able to penetrate deep into the heart of Europe*". [31]

Finally, there are also instances where certain Arab authors have tried to highlight the similarities between the policies of Western states and the crimes of the Nazi regime in their violent, emotionally based anti-Western rants. An excellent example of this was the subjective reflection of the journalist Ahmed Ezz al-Arab, who, reacting to the assorted torture, humiliation and inhuman treatment at Abu Ghraib prison, stated that „*modern history reveals another bloody picture of the gang regime currently ruling Washington, which is similar to the Nazi regime in Germany under the rule of the bloodthirsty tyrant Adolf Hitler. In his infamous book Mein Kampf, the latter made it explicitly clear that the German race was destined to rule over other inferior human beings.* [...] *But the meanness of the American leadership*

and the soldiers in Iraq went even beyond Hitler, as they were happy to torture prisoners forced to strip naked."[32]

Hitler in the eyes of the Arabs:

Within the Arab world, mainly due to its heterogeneity and different political tendencies, there were varying views and different reactions to Adolf Hitler's person and activities. In our view, there are three main categories of attitudes towards Nazi Germany and its leader that can be identified:

1. Several Arab leaders and activists with nationalist sentiments supported Hitler's views and ideology. These individuals were sympathetic to Nazi Germany because of its anti-Semitic and anti-colonialist messages. They wanted to use the alliance with the Germans in the fight against the British and French colonialists to win their independence and to regain the lost Palestinian territories.

2. Among groups with a nationalist orientation, those who abstained from Hitler and support for Nazi ideology were much more represented. They also saw the Germans as a threat of outside influence and were determined to avoid at all costs being under German occupation after the possible expulsion of the British-French administration. Consequently, they wanted to achieve the ultimate goal of gaining sovereignty essentially by their own efforts, or at least independently of the European states.

3. The highest percentage of those who were completely unaware of Nazi propaganda. This may have been due to their embeddedness in the colonial system and their close links with the British-French administration. Since their way of life depended on the continued physical presence of the Western colonialists, they were not interested in destroying the existing structure. The other, equally decisive reason for ignoring Nazi rhetoric, however, was the specific, essentially local character of Arab societies. In the circumstances of the time, the majority of the population, especially in rural communities, which were essentially agricultural, had little outward visibility. The basic problem in this respect was not the paucity of mass media or the lack of basic background knowledge due to a lack of prior education. The reason for their apathy towards Nazism was much simpler and more prosaic: they were completely preoccupied with their daily routine activities and family life. As a result, they had neither the time nor the affinity to follow events and their shapers, which were taking place independently of them, often continents away, in a continuous and detailed way.

Rejectionist positions:

Abbas Mahmoud al-Aqqad[33], a renowned innovator in 20th-century Arab poetry and criticism, wrote '*Hitler on the Scales*' at a time when the star of Nazism was rising and the armies of the Third Reich were winning their successive victories in Europe. But unlike the anti-British sections of the Egyptian public, al-Aqqad was not at all impressed by the success of the Nazi regime, which he saw as a bloody dictatorship rather than a potential ally. In this spirit, he was firmly committed to the cause of the Allies and called on his fellow countrymen to join the cause of freedom,

peace and democracy. To persuade his compatriots, he made a point of detailing the darker side of the German dictator's personality. In the latter context, he exhaustively studied the Führer's career from his upbringing through the defining moments of his life, with the express intention of understanding and sharing with readers his psychological make-up and motivations. [34]

Anis Mansour,[35] the well-known Arab philosopher and President Sadat's closest friend, experienced the consequences of Nazism first-hand when he led an Egyptian delegation on an official visit to West Germany in 1950. His impressions of the still present legacy of the Great War and its cause were summed up in the following words: „*The people are like the streets they walk in*. [...] *Everything around us is a ruin. Germany has become synonymous with material and moral destruction and historical humiliation. It has become streets of torture, rooms of humiliation and cities of hunger. The Allies agreed to humiliate the defeated German people and to punish them for their crimes. In addition, books, films and plays were published that portrayed the Germans as monsters or vampires for following Hitler in corrupting the world*."[36] In another article, he expressed the rather naive and utopian conviction that what had happened could never happen again: „*At the end of April 1945, humanity erased Nazi leader Hitler and fascist Benito Mussolini from the list of living people* [...] *I believe that mankind will not allow any more of the same*".[37]

Another article published on the Arabic website Quora gave a very apt characterization of the specifics of Nazi ideology, of the fake-interested Arab policy of German foreign policy, and of his real ideas about the Arab peoples: „*In his book Mein Kampf, Hitler established an ethnic ranking, with the Jews at the bottom. The situation of the Arabs, whom he also placed at the bottom of this list, was similar. The same was true of the Arabs, who were also included in the list of "Hitler's enemies", but political circumstances made it necessary to use Muslims and Arabs in his war until victory was achieved, and then to expel and betray them in the same way as Britain had done to them during the First World War*. [...] *The Germans were no different from the British, even if they were no worse than the British. Even some Arabs sympathised with them only because they hated the Jews. But this was more an emotional reason, which had nothing to do with rational and logical thinking*. [...] *Hitler was a racist dictator who was unable to respect Arabs. Although he despised the Semitic peoples, he courted the Arabs and tried to flatter them in order to win their support*. [...] *If he had won, he would certainly have revealed his true racist face*."[38]

The renowned and influential Kuwaiti journalist Khalil Ali Haidar wrote a long article on the website of al-Ayam, the most widely read political daily in Beirut, in which he asked the specific question: „*Has our political and emotional understanding of Hitler's war and Nazi ideas matured, or has our thinking not changed for years and decades? Sadly, many people see nothing wrong with some of his political manifestations, because he did not wage war against the Arab and Islamic countries, he did not destroy any Arab capitals, and he did not burn Muslims and Arabs in concentration camps!* [...] *Some people love Hitler because he hated the*

Zionists, the British and the Americans. Others adore him and admire him as a national hero who conquered countless countries and fought on several fronts at once. In fact, they constantly justify his actions and his defeat by claiming that the multitude finally overcame the bravery. The fact that he destroyed Germany, Europe and North Africa in the process does not matter to them, because that's what wars are to them!" [39] Haidar also asked the pertinent question: what has actually become of the fate of the Arab question in the ruins of Berlin? In response, he quoted the thoughts of Jordanian historian and university lecturer Ali Muhafza:[40] „*After the withdrawal of German forces from the Soviet front and North Africa, the Arab question became secondary, and after mid-1943 Germany's main objective was to maintain its positions on the European fronts. The liberation of the Arab countries therefore became out of reach. The Arab leaders who had been cooperating with the Nazis were aware of this, and began to openly criticise German policy*." [41]

Gamal Badawy, a well-known Egyptian journalist, took an even more damning view when he argued that Hitler's „*stupidity and arrogance caused the outbreak of the greatest war of aggression of the twentieth century*."[42]

Pro-German manifestations:

During the Second World War, there were many demonstrations against the British occupation in the streets of Egypt, with protesters marching with 'Forward, Rommel' banners. However, this sympathy for Nazi Germany was not only manifested among the general population, but also at the highest levels of the ruling elite. In the latter context, Egyptian historian and journalist Mohamed Udah,[43] in his book *'How did the monarchy fall in Egypt? Farouk, the Beginning and the End*', states that Hitler and the Egyptian king of Farouk, with the help of intermediaries, had virtually made a deal with each other that if the Axis forces succeeded in defeating the British forces on the African front, they would be able to win the war, the Egyptian ruler would provide logistical and political support to ensure a smooth passage to the Suez Canal and, once across, to seize the oil fields in the (Arabian-) Persian Gulf and Iran. However, one of the decisive elements in the subsequent failure of the concept was precisely the mentality of the king, who did not even give the appearance of concealing his German orientation. Instead, on several occasions, he paid sincere tribute to Hitler and the German people, openly expressing his hope for „*an early German victory over Great Britain*".[44] This, of course, was not lost on London. As former Egyptian culture minister Mohamed Sabir Arab[45] was quoted as saying in his book „*The Attack on the Royal Palace ... Incident of 4 February 1942*", it was vital for Britain to keep Egypt at war on the Allied side. It was prepared, therefore, to defy the will of the monarch even by a show of force, and to force the resignation of Hussein Serry Pasha[46], who was regarded as the king's puppet, by the armed encirclement of the Abdin Palace, and the appointment of the clearly pro-Western al-Nahhas Pasha[47] as prime minister.[48] The events, followed by Hitler's suicide, were seen by King Farouk as a complete failure of political conviction. For a time, he even seriously considered resigning, especially after he perceived a decline in anti-British feeling at home and internationally.

In addition to the clear presence of a German orientation in Egyptian political decision-making at the highest level, at least two specific instances of essentially symbolic significance have been documented, where Egyptian leaders have sought to give a concrete sign of their commitment to Germany. Both occurred during the Axis troop victory streak at the beginning of the Battle of El Alamein, when the defeat of the British forces seemed to many to be certain. However, neither the idea of Aziz al-Masri Pasha[49] to send an aircraft to support General Erwin Rommel's troops nor the mission of Abdul Khalek Hassouna Pasha[50], Governor of Alexandria, whom the government led by the al-Wafd Party[51] wanted to send to greet the victorious German-Italian forces, came to fruition. However, both gestures were soon rendered futile after General Montgomery defeated and permanently expelled the Afrika Korps from Egyptian territory.[52]

The authoritarian Nazi regime and its leader had such a strong influence on Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, that he considered it a role model to follow. Indeed, al-Banna rejected the use of multi-party systems in Arab countries because he believed that political parties had essentially the same programme. His commitment to the issue was demonstrated by the fact that, in addition to his unabashed praise of Hitler, he had held separate talks with an-Nahas Pasha and King Farouk to introduce the German model in Egypt.[53] The existence of this ideological attachment was confirmed by Mahmoud Abdel-Halim, the semi-official historian of the Muslim Brotherhood, in his book Events in History. According to his description, „*Hitler's speeches have reached us in their entirety, copies of which are then made to take to the front, where our members are educated to Hitler's speeches, spread his ideas and ideals and feed their minds*.”[54]

The clearest sign of commitment to Germany, however, was in Iraq, where the Nazi leadership had already secretly contacted King Gazi in 1933.[55] In his book, *'Modern History of Iraq - Part I'*, Iraqi historian Hamid al-Hamdani explains the consequences of the Germans' success in getting a modern radio station to the ruler in British-occupied Baghdad. The set was installed in the King az-Zuhur's 'Palace of Flowers', from where it regularly broadcast its anti-British and pro-German broadcasts. However, on the morning of 5 April 1939, the pro-German King Gazi was killed in a car accident. He was succeeded by his son, the barely four-year-old Prince Abdul-Ilah bin Ali II, who was appointed regent.[56] However, despite what happened, the Germans did not lose their influence in Iraq. From 1940 onwards, secret negotiations had been going on in the background between Berlin and former Prime Minister Rashid Ali al-Gaylani and the so-called 'Golden Quadrilateral' of influential Sunni military officers behind him. As a result of these talks, the Iraqi conspirators carried out a coup d'état with the help of German intelligence on 1 April 1941. As a result of the takeover, al-Gaylani regained the premiership and the pro-German Prince Sharaf bin Rajeh was appointed regent. There followed a wave of purges of known British sympathisers, the Baghdad government attempted to restrict London's exercise of its prerogatives in Iraq, and in mid-April requested direct military support from Germany in the event of war with Britain.

The criticality of the situation was well illustrated from the British point of view by a telegram sent by British Ambassador Cornwallis[57] to British Prime Minister Winston Churchill: „*Either send sufficient troops to Iraq or wait until the country is completely in German hands*". Britain, recognising the threat, sent substantial reinforcements of troops from India, Palestine and the Transjordan. The first significant combat action took place on 2 May 1941, when Royal Air Force fighter planes raided a military base near Lake Habbaniya. The ensuing British advance proved overwhelming and the Iraqi insurgents were defeated before they had access to the German military aid that had been sent on its way. Al-Gaylani and his supporters fled the country on 29 May, and after the fall of the revolution, Britain reinstated Prince Abdul-Ilah as regent on 1 June.[58]

The 1943 meeting between Hitler and al-Galjani in Berlin.

The Egyptian and Iraqi examples detailed above show that Arab attempts at rapprochement with Germany were essentially motivated by a sense of necessity and were largely motivated by the desire to throw off colonial rule. At the same time, there was a wide range of when and what they found attractive in the Nazi regime and what kind and level of cooperation with it they considered conceivable and feasible.

Notable news and references about Hitler in the Arab world:

One indicator of Hitler's prestige and popularity in the Arab world, if not a fully accurate one, is that during the Second World War, especially at the height of the German victories, many Arab families named their newborn sons after him. This led not only to some rather amusing but also embarrassing situations in later years. Of the latter, it was perhaps the unfortunate case of General Hitler Tantawy[59] that provoked the greatest resonance. According to the later recollection of the Egyptian politician Mustafa el-Feki,[60] the high-ranking Egyptian military officer was inadvertently and carelessly delegated to the West German capital of Bonn as a military attaché. The mistake was only discovered after the huge public outcry that followed the nomination, and Tantawy was quickly changed and sent to Sudan. It was also telling that the incident had no influence on the career of the military officer, who went on to hold influential positions within the Egyptian security services, and became the Secretary General of the Egyptian Ministry of Defence, then the Head of the Administrative Control Authority between 1996 and 2004. All of this, the Bonn

fiasco and the subsequent military career of the Egyptian officer, illustrated the level of disillusionment in Egyptian society with the German victories of the time. It was also an excellent illustration of how far removed Hitler's activities and the essential features of Nazi ideology were from the minds of the majority of Egyptians. Finally, the presence of the Axis powers in Africa was accompanied by the oblivion of the essential elements of the Hitler myth, which meant that the name of the Führer had lost its charisma and it was no more than a name for a variety of first names, without any motivation or underlying meaning.[61]

This new perspective on the Hitler phenomenon was also evident in an interview with Fouad el-Mohandes, one of the best-known Egyptian actors. The Arab filmmaker saw the Nazi leader as no more than one of the many political figures in history. It was therefore professionalism and not any ideological identification that motivated his statement that he would have liked to portray the Nazi dictator on the screen. The fact that he wanted to focus on the comic qualities of the Führer, which would have led to a fictional work of parody for the entertainment of the audience rather than a realistic film based on historical accuracy, also gave a clue to his position on the matter.[62]

In conclusion, there were very different views and reactions to Hitler within the Arab world. Thus, it is undeniable that many Arab leaders and influential figures and groups supported Germany in the 1930s and 1940s. After the end of the Second World War, this interest in the Nazis and Hitler declined markedly, but did not disappear completely. It was also found that, despite the best efforts of the Nazi propaganda machine, the dominant, central theme in the Arab world was always the struggle for independence and against colonial powers. In this respect, Nazism was more of a divisive factor, which, alongside internal conflicts, external power interests and regional geopolitical dynamics, further weakened the achievement of Arab unity and made it difficult to achieve common political goals.

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[2] Khalid al-Hud al-Gargani (1882–1971) was a Libyan businessman who was one of the most influential advisers to the founder of the Saudi kingdom, Abdul-Aziz ibn Saud. In addition to being a member of the eight-member political committee of the Saudi royal court, Khalid was the king's chief envoy for arms purchases from European states. During his stay there he also held talks with Nazi Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and Adolf Hitler. On the latter occasion, he gave King Abdul-Aziz's personal letter to Hitler, who stated at the meeting that Nazi Germany would be happy to have good relations with Saudi Arabia, as both states shared the same enemy, the Jewish people. Overall, Khalid's mission initially appeared to be a success, as the Germans agreed to supply the arms requested by Saudi Arabia. However, the deal that was struck did not materialise in the end, due to the outbreak of the Second World War less than two and a half months later.

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[4] GILBERT ACHCAR: Les Arabes et la Shoah – La gurre israélo-arabe des récits. Actes Sud, Paris, 2009. Translated by Bashir al-Sebae, published by the Egyptian National Centre for Translation in 2010. See: 157–191. p.

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[7] David Motadel is Associate Professor at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). He focuses on the history of modern Europe and the continent's global interconnections. His work includes a synthesis of the life of Muslim communities under German rule in World War II (Harvard University Press, 2014; translated into nine languages).

[8] https://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=741108 (Accessed 01 October 2023)

[9] The title is given to the person who performed the Mecca pilgrimage, the fifth pillar of Islam. Sometimes spelled Hadji, Haji, Alhaji, Al-Hadj, Al-Haj or El-Hajj. It is the duty of every Muslim to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, the Holy Mosque, at least once in his or her life, if he or she can, and is to be made between the 8th and 10th day of the 12th month of the Muslim lunar calendar.

[10] https://akhbarak.net/news/10649193/articles/24842102/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%91%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%85%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%B8%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AC (Accessed 01 October 2023)

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[35] Anis Mansour (1924–2011) is an Egyptian writer. He graduated in philosophy from Cairo University in 1947. He started his career as a journalist with Al-Asas newspaper, and worked for other newspapers. He also spoke Arabic, English, French, Italian, Greek and Hebrew, and worked as a translator for Al-Ahram. He has published over 170 books on various subjects (travel,

philosophy, politics), some of which have been translated into French, Dutch and Russian. He has also translated some 200 German, French and English short stories and 24 plays into Arabic, as well as 15 comedies and a further 12 television drama series. See more: Az arab világ történeti és kulturális kislexikona (eds. Abdallah Abdel-Ati Al-Naggar – Prantner Zoltán). Budapest, Eötvös Loránd University, 2021, 71–72 p.

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[47] Mustafa al-Nahhas (1879–1965) was one of the most important Egyptian politicians of the 20th century. He was Prime Minister of Egypt, Speaker of the National Assembly and leader of the al-Wafd Party from 1927 to 1952.

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[50] Mohamed *Abdulkhalek* El Sayed *Hassouna* (1898–1992) was an Egyptian-Palestinian diplomat and the second Secretary General of the Arab League. Hassouna was Deputy State Secretary at the Ministry of Social Affairs from 1939 to 1942 and Governor of Alexandria from 1942 to 1948. He was Minister of Social Affairs from 1949 to 1952 and Minister of Education and Foreign Affairs in 1952.

[51] The Wafd was one of the most popular and influential nationalist-liberal parties in Egypt from the end of World War I until the 1930s. During this period, it played an important role in the drafting of the 1923 constitution and supported the idea of establishing a constitutional monarchy in Egypt. The party was dissolved after the 1952 Egyptian revolution.

[52] https://www.independentarabia.com/node/202371/%D8%A2%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A1/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8-%D8%B1%D8%A4%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AE%D9%8A%D8%A9 (Accessed 27 September 2023)

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[60] Mustafa al-Feki is an Egyptian thinker, politician and diplomat. Former Secretary to the President of the Republic for Information and Follow-up. He was also Director General of the world-famous Library of Alexandria.

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