



## Amin al-Husaini and the Holocaust

### *What did the Grand Mufti Know?*

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*08 May 2008*

World Politics Review Exclusive

Amin al-Husaini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, remains a controversial figure. As an officer in the Ottoman army during the First World War, he implemented the German idea of organizing jihad and terror behind enemy lines. He fiercely opposed Jewish settlement. But it is, above all, the Grand Mufti's close ties to National Socialist Germany that are the subject of ongoing debates. There is now no room for doubt that Al-Husaini knew about the Nazis' exterminationist policies toward the Jews.

Amin al-Husaini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, remains a controversial figure. The Palestinian leader, who was born in 1895 and died in 1974, first sparked controversy during his lifetime. As an officer in the Ottoman army during the First World War, he implemented the German idea of organizing jihad and terror behind enemy lines. (See my discussion [here](#).) Later, he led the resistance against the British mandate authority in Palestine during uprisings in 1929 and in 1936. He fiercely opposed Jewish settlement.

But it is, above all, the Grand Mufti's close ties to National Socialist Germany that are the subject of ongoing debates. From 1941 to 1945, he lived for the most part in Berlin as a guest of the German government. The Nazis provided office space, vehicles and money, so that the Mufti and his entire entourage could stay active. In return, the Mufti used his influence in the Middle East on the Nazis' behalf and recruited Muslims for the Nazi war effort. On the airwaves of Nazi Germany's Arab language radio service, he called for a Holy War, a jihad, against the Allies and the Jews.

Some German authors, like René Wildangel, claim that it is still unclear whether and to what extent Amin Al-Husaini was informed about the Nazis' exterminationist policies toward the Jews. In a recent review of Klaus Gensicke's biography of the Grand Mufti, John Rosenthal expresses some doubts as well: noting that the fact that members of the Grand Mufti's entourage visited the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in 1942 is not sufficient evidence for concluding that he also knew what was transpiring in the death camps further to the East.

But in fact the full record of the available evidence, including both German and Arabic sources, leaves no room for doubt anymore. Indeed, the Grand Mufti's own words provide the most compelling proof. Memoirs of the Grand Mufti, edited by Abd al-Karim al-Umar, were published in Damascus in 1999. (See cover photo below.) In the memoirs, al-Husaini openly discusses his close relationship to SS chief Heinrich Himmler.



According to his account, he often met Himmler for tea and during these meetings the Nazi leader confided some of the secrets of the German Reich to him. Thus, for example, in the middle of 1943, Himmler is supposed to have told him that German nuclear research had made great progress: In three years, Germany could have an atomic weapon that would guarantee its "ultimate victory." As Rainer Karlsch's recent book on "Hitler's Bomb" has shown, this assessment was not far off. Himmler presumably confided this information to the Grand Mufti on July 4, 1943. That is the date on a photo of the two men with a signed dedication from Himmler: "to his Eminence the Grand Mufti -- a Memento" (see below).



Seiner Eminenz dem Großmufti  
4 VII: 1943. zur Erinnerung.  
H. Himmler.

In the memoirs, the Grand Mufti also describes what Himmler said to him in that summer of 1943 about the persecution of the Jews. Following some tirades on "Jewish war guilt," Himmler told him that "up to now we have exterminated [*abadna*] around three million of them" (p. 126 -- see Arabic excerpt below).

وقد كنت أسمع من هملر كل مرة ما يدل على شدة حقه على اليهود، يتهمهم بأنهم ظالمون، ويزعمون أنهم مظلومون، ويقول أنهم موقدو نيران الحروب، وأنانيون ونحو ذلك، ويبين مقدار الأذى الذي انزلوه بالمانيا في الحرب الماضية، وأنهم دائماً يوقدون نار الحرب ثم يستغلونها لمصالحهم المادية، دون أن يخسروا فيها أي شيء، ولذلك فإننا صممنا في هذه الحرب على ان نذيقهم وبال اعمالهم مقدماً، فقد أبدنا حتى الآن حوالي ثلاثة ملايين منهم. (وكان حديثه هذا في صيف عام ١٩٤٣)

There is evidence, moreover, that the Grand Mufti knew about the Nazis' plans still earlier. In 1946, Dieter Wisliceny, a close collaborator of Adolf Eichmann in the "Jewish Affairs" division of the Reich Central Security Office, provided a written statement on the Grand Mufti to the Nuremberg Tribunal.

According to Wisliceny, at the beginning of 1942 Eichmann made a detailed presentation to al-Husaini on the "solution of the European Jewish question." The presentation took place in Eichmann's "map room" in Berlin: "where he had collected statistical graphics on the Jewish population in the various European countries." The Grand Mufti, Wisliceny recalls, was "very impressed." Furthermore, al-Husaini is supposed to have put in a request to Himmler to have Eichmann send one of his assistants to Jerusalem after Germany had won the war. The representative of Eichmann was to serve as the Grand Mufti's personal advisor: i.e. when the Grand Mufti would then set about "solving the Jewish question in the Middle East."

We can infer from other documentation that this was not just a vague idea. A declassified document on Nazi war crimes from the National Archives in Washington indicates that as of mid-1942 a special SS commando unit had plans to liquidate the Jews of Cairo following the capture of the city by German forces. (See detail below.) Gen. Erwin Rommel was supposedly disgusted by the proposition. The head of the SS unit, Walther Rauff, had earlier been involved in developing vans that served as mobile gas chambers. It should be noted that he was a German and not a Pole, as suggested in the U.S. government document.

The Ambassador said that there is a RAUFF who is a Pole and who organized the gassing of Jews in Poland. In May-June 1942, this RAUFF flew to General ROMMEL's headquarters to discuss with him the liquidation of the Jews in Cairo following the capture of that city by the German forces. Rommel was disgusted and sent him home.

POSSIBLY IDENTICAL WITH SUBJECT OF 201

NOTE: SEE RI/AR 1 June 1945 (Page 2) for similar information.

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THIS IS ALL THE INFORMATION PERTINENT  
TO THE SUBJECT IN THIS DOCUMENT. ✓

In his memoirs, however, the Grand Mufti feigns astonishment at Himmler's remark. On his account, Himmler asked him how he would solve the problem of the Jews in his country. Amin al-Husaini says that he answered that they should go back to where they came from. To which Himmler is supposed then to have replied: "Come back to Germany -- we will never allow them to do that." But the Grand Mufti is here white-washing his own role in history. After all, in Berlin on November 2, 1943, he publicly declared that Muslims should follow the example of the Germans, who had found a "definitive solution to the Jewish problem."

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