

# The German Middle Eastern Policy, 1871–1945

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When the German Reich was established in 1871, the neighboring countries of Great Britain, France, and Russia were already expanding their overseas colonies into empires. During the next four decades, while those empires continued to grow, Berlin was forced to develop a policy toward North Africa and West Asia that was quite different from those of the other European powers.<sup>1</sup>

First, there was nothing much left in that region to be claimed. The territories of what became known as the Middle East were already distributed among neighbors of Germany. Thus, keeping the status quo in the region was most likely to serve the national interests.<sup>2</sup> Trade, commerce, and a peaceful penetration especially in open-door areas were cornerstones of Berlin's Middle Eastern policy. This was also true during the *Deutsche Orient-Gründerjahre*. These "German Orient founding years" started in 1884 and lasted three decades.<sup>3</sup> It was a time in which Germany explored new regions in Africa and Asia. Berlin established colonies in West and East Africa, becoming a small colonial power.<sup>4</sup> But it was also an era in which the Germans intensified their economical, cultural, and military relations to the Middle East with its wide lands from Turkey via Palestine and Mesopotamia to Egypt and Mauritania. The first striking feature of Berlin's Middle Eastern policy

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in peacetime appeared: respecting the status quo and refusing any colonies in the region.<sup>5</sup>

Second, the Eastern Question—who would get which part of the declining Ottoman Empire—had caused many conflicts. It was Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, until 1890 the main foreign politician with a distaste of colonial acquisitions, who regarded the Eastern Question as a means for his policy toward the neighbors in Europe. The Middle Eastern policy constituted politics re-directed to neighboring colonial powers. He opined that the European and American policy came first and the Middle Eastern policy had to serve the primary policy. Thus, and this is the second feature, Berlin's Middle Eastern policy was always subordinated to a primary policy toward Europe and America.<sup>6</sup>

Third, the Middle East was not promising enough for a great design of German policy. Otto von Bismarck used to put it this way: the Eastern Question is not worth the bones of a single Pomeranian musketeer. For example, the German policy toward Egypt was then considered a question not between Berlin and Cairo, but between Berlin and London. In the chancellor's eyes there was not much to expect from direct relations with Egypt, but Egypt made an effective "stick"<sup>7</sup> to be used against London to disturb some alliances between neighbors of Germany. He used this *bâton égyptien* diplomatically. Since Berlin had no colonies in the region, it slipped into the role of a key mediator in European conflicts over the Orient. Thus, the third striking feature of Berlin's Middle Eastern policy was a diplomacy of mediation, namely during a series of conferences on African frontiers and Asian topics since the 1880s.<sup>8</sup>

### **1. Policy background and the "German Orient founding years," 1884–1914**

The three features of Berlin's Middle Eastern policy in peacetime were respecting the status quo and renouncing territorial claims in the region, the subordination of this secondary policy to the always primary policy toward Europe and America, and the diplomacy of mediation in Oriental conflicts. Unlike the other great powers, Germany did not rule over any Muslims in the Middle East.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the Germans gained a critical perspective on the Middle Eastern empires of their neighbors and all the troubles they caused. It is no wonder that the mainstream

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of German politicians and academics had a sympathetic view of anti-imperial tendencies and their nationalistic or Islamic expressions. How was the background of Berlin's Middle Eastern policy shaped?

Mainstream politicians were interested in keeping the Ottoman Empire together. Only in this way they would secure their historical, economical, cultural, and military relations with Istanbul (Constantinople) as the foremost regional power. Historically, the German states had established their own contacts before the German Reich was created. Andreas Mordtmann was consul general of the Hanseatic League in Istanbul in 1847 and developed the ties to the Ottoman Empire. Prussia had had Protestant missionaries in Ottoman provinces such as Palestine since 1841. A year later Ernst Gustav Schultz became Prussian consul in Jerusalem. Johann G. Wetzstein was his colleague in Damascus starting in 1848. In 1846 Saxony's parliamentarian Robert Georgi supported the idea of a new Suez Canal in Egypt and promoted the related study mission.<sup>10</sup>

In the economic field, the Deutsche Bank in 1888 won a concession to build a railroad from Izmir to Ankara. It was built as far as Ankara four years later, then extended several times: in 1896 to Konya, in 1914 to Samara, and in 1940 to Baghdad.<sup>11</sup> As Egypt celebrated the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869,<sup>12</sup> Prussia's crown prince, Friedrich Wilhelm (the father of the Emperor Wilhelm II), witnessed the event. From Morocco to Iran, from Greater Syria to Arabia, German capital invested heavily in railroads, raw material processing, financing, engineering, aviation, and automobiles. In 1906 three German banks founded Al-Bank Ash-Sharqī Al-Almānī, the German Orient Bank, under the auspices of Dresdner Bank. It grew among eight similar banks to become the largest overseas bank and played a central role in foreign trade.<sup>13</sup> Until World War I, Germany ranked third—after Great Britain and France—in trade volume with the Ottoman Empire and its provinces. This rank and the exchange pattern of industrial products versus raw materials prevailed until World War I.

The core of Germany's cultural ties to the Middle East—see Stefan Hauser's contribution to this volume—evolved in science and research. Although the Germans did not possess possibilities like the French after Napoleon's conquest of Egypt in 1798, German study of the Orient, or *Orientalistik*, profited from the work of other Europeans. The French *Description de l'Égypte, publiée par les ordres de Napoléon Bonaparte*

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influenced Egyptology, archeology, and the study of Islam, or *Islamwissenschaft*, but the latter field had its own traditions already.<sup>14</sup>

Heidelberg established a professorship in Arabic in 1609. Johann Jacob Reiske founded the discipline of Arab history, literature, and culture, or *Arabistik*, at Leipzig in 1748. Heinrich Leberecht Fleischer of Leipzig was a co-founder of the Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft (German Oriental Society) in 1845. In Berlin Eduard Sachau taught Oriental languages in 1876, succeeded by Eugen Mittwoch. At the start of the “German Orient founding years” the politician August Bebel edited *Die Mohammedanisch-Arabische Kulturperiode* (The Muhammadan-Arab Period of Culture), popularizing findings of Islam scholars such as Alfred von Kremer, Gustav Weil, and Aloys Sprenger. From 1887, dragomans<sup>15</sup> attended the Seminar für orientalische Sprachen (Seminary of Oriental Languages) in Berlin in preparation for the foreign service. Carl Heinrich Becker began teaching Oriental culture in Hamburg in 1908. In Berlin the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Islamkunde (German Society for the Study of Islam) began its periodical *Die Welt des Islams* (The World of Islam) in 1912. In the same year, the Orientalische Kommission (Oriental Commission) was set up at the German Academy of Sciences in Berlin. It served as a nucleus for several academic institutes.<sup>16</sup>

Cultural exchanges with the Middle East included a broad variety in art, medicine, and literature. The travelers and explorers to Arabia were often gifted artists who painted what had impressed them. Johann Ludwig Burckhardt delivered early sketches about Mecca and Medina. A race between the so-called Orient photographers like Rudolf F. Lehnert and Ernst H. Landrock and Orient painters such as Wilhelm Gentz inspired the fantasy of the German public. A kind of Oriental fever led Germans to “orientalize” their architecture. Businessmen discovered markets in the Middle East for pre-fabricated palaces in an Oriental style. Carl Wilhelm Valentin von Diebitsch delivered to the viceroy of Egypt a completely pre-fabricated guesthouse made of cast iron for the ceremony opening the Suez Canal. This *al-qasr al-būrūsī*, or Prussian Palace, is still the best hotel address on the island Al-Gazīra in Cairo. Maximilian Koch, Theodor Bilharz, Robert Koch, Franz Pruner, and Sebastian Fischer laid the foundations of tropical medicine.<sup>17</sup>

A similar tradition developed in literature. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe studied intensively the life of Muhammad and the Qurʾān.

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Friedrich Schiller raised the question of how a Turk would discover and describe Europe. Johann Gottfried Herder collected Oriental literature. The European Enlightenment brought attempts to reconcile three world religions, as Gotthold E. Lessing suggested in his theater show *Nathan, der Weise* (Nathan, the Wise Man). The poet Friedrich Rückert also taught Oriental poetry. Gustav Weil translated the *Thousand and One Nights*. Wilhelm Spitta directed the National Library in Cairo. Thinkers like Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels discussed Oriental history, policy, and literature.<sup>18</sup>

Germans developed military relations with the Middle East in two main ways. They sent missions to the Ottoman Empire and the Arab provinces, and they received Ottomans for training. German physicians formed the medical vanguard in the Ottoman army, as was also the case under Muhammad 'Alī. The Ottomans hired advisers like Colmar von der Goltz in the 1880s. They sent officers like Mukhtar Pasha and Ahmad 'Izzat Pasha for training to Berlin, Potsdam, or Vienna. After Emperor Wilhelm II visited Istanbul in 1898, the exchange of personnel increased. Shevket Pasha organized systematic training of Ottoman troops by Germans in 1909. Most notably, Enver Pasha served as military attaché in Berlin for three years until 1911.<sup>19</sup>

German relations with the Middle East advanced under the wary eyes of London, Paris, and St. Petersburg. The primary policy toward these immediate neighbors framed the secondary German Middle Eastern policy. Politicians in Berlin did cultivate their wish for an alliance with London. Whereas the French were historically too close to the Germans and the Russians economically too far away, they regarded the British as very similar. Apart from the former's Magna Carta, democratic tradition, and colonial empire, the maritime power and the continental power had much in common. Could the British and the Germans really complement each other in world policy? This idea became popular again after Otto von Bismarck left office and Wilhelm II took over the foreign policy. But the old dream of an axis between Berlin and London was not meant to be.

There was still another consideration for Berlin that jeopardized Germany's ability to keep a distance from Oriental affairs. Aligned powers like Austria or Italy could trigger, with their policy in the Ottoman Balkans or in the province of Tripoli, a chain reaction that could force Germany into hostilities against Great Britain and

France. Otto von Bismarck was very much aware of that risk. He avoided such a domino effect that could hit the edges of Europe and ignite an all-out war in the center. But the chancellor's cautious diplomacy was much less rooted in the mind of Wilhelm II, who tried a world policy of his own. He attempted to expand the recently established German Reich from a medium-sized power into a great power.<sup>20</sup>

## **2. Berlin's Middle Eastern policy in wartime and the "Jihad made in Germany"**

Berlin's Middle Eastern policy in peacetime and during the course of the three decades of "German Orient founding years" until 1914 emphasized maintaining the status quo, pursuing a secondary policy with peaceful penetration of the region, and mediating in Oriental conflicts. Then, for reasons that cannot be discussed here, the always-feared "Sarajevo effect" dragged Europe and the world into a war starting in the peripheral Balkans.

If one considers Berlin's switch from a secondary peacetime to a primary wartime Middle Eastern policy against Great Britain, France, and Russia (and their colonial Middle Eastern hinterland) there is one unique feature: The jihad "made in Germany."<sup>21</sup> It was already a topic in the first year of the war. A dispute erupted between two founding fathers of the study of Islam in Europe. Their discussion indicated the general attitude toward the war that was first frenetically welcomed and expected to be very short.

Did the Germans push the Young Turks to proclaim a jihad after entering World War I against the British, the Russians, and the French? Indeed, they did, maintained the leading Dutch Arabist C. Snouck Hurgronje, who blamed his German colleagues—among them Carl Heinrich Becker—for having supported this "jihad fever." The Dutchman insisted this jihad was an intellectual weapon "made in Germany." Supposing this were true, replied the German scholar of Islam: had not Berlin and Istanbul every right to do so? But this, wrote Hurgronje, hurts humanism and religious peace. "There is no taboo for religion," Becker answered.<sup>22</sup>

The jihad developed as a concerted German-Ottoman campaign. It consisted of five stages: Max von Oppenheim's design to revolutionize

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the enemy's colonial hinterland; agitating for jihad by the Berlin-based Oriental News Department; the Ottoman fatwa; Shaykh Sālih's commentary on the fatwa; and the realization of the jihad. It was used as a weapon to globalize the war. However, it was a slap in the face to the Enlightenment. Although Hurgonje's criticism hit the mark, Becker held to a chauvinistic approach. To understand the German Middle Eastern policy, it is worthwhile to look into these five elements of the jihad according to the German design.

Max von Oppenheim served as an archaeologist and diplomat in the Middle East for twenty years, and Wilhelm II read his reports recommending the jihad.<sup>23</sup> After the war began, the German General Chief of Staff, Hellmuth von Moltke, wanted Enver Pasha to proclaim the jihad to weaken the enemies from within. The kaiser asked him to enter the war too: he wanted the sultan to call for a jihad in Asia, India, Egypt, and Africa to get Muslims fighting for the Caliphate. Berlin and Istanbul cooperated closely in planning and realizing the jihad. Even some academics in Berlin expected to see "Islamic fanatics fighting for Germany."<sup>24</sup>

The jihad was the idea of Max von Oppenheim, the German "Abu Jihad." Before the Ottomans entered the war on the side of the Central Powers, he designed a master plan at the end of October 1914: "fomenting rebellion in the Islamic territories of our enemies."<sup>25</sup> The emperor confirmed Oppenheim's suggestion to incite Muslims to jihad under the leadership of the Ottoman sultan-caliph. This was the plan: The sultan proclaims the jihad against the British, the French, and the Russians. Berlin delivers money, experts, and material. The targets are Muslims in British India, French North Africa, and Russian Asia. The call to fight goes out in several languages according to psychological factors. Berlin creates an Oriental News Department in the Foreign Office. The rebelling of Muslims in India is the key to victory. Expeditions are to be sent to Afghanistan to trigger an uprising from there (see the contribution by Thomas L. Hughes). The Germans provide intelligence to the Muslims, while the Turks incite them to rise up against their foreign masters. Islam, concluded Max von Oppenheim, will be one of our sharpest weapons against the British. Let's mount a joint effort to make it a deadly strike.<sup>26</sup>

Max von Oppenheim (later succeeded by Karl E. Schabinger and Eugen Mittwoch) became the head of the Oriental News Department.

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Oppenheim employed a dozen academics and native Muslims. Some called his strategy of jihad a “war by revolution.”<sup>27</sup> But it was an asymmetrical war, waged by incitement to jihad and by anti-imperial uprisings. The aim was a double strategy between front and colonial hinterland to support the fight at the fronts by keeping troops busy in the wide lands of Islam. Of course, it raised some questions. Was the Ottoman sultan accepted as caliph by all Muslims? Was it permitted to them to fight with infidels against infidels and “their” Muslims?

As Max von Oppenheim had suggested, a fatwa answered this. The shaykh of Islam affirmed five points on November 11, 1914.<sup>28</sup> To summarize: After the enemy of Islam attacked the Islamic world, His Majesty the Padishah of Islam orders a jihad as a general mobilization and individual duty for all Muslims in all parts of the world according to the Qurʾān. Since Russia, England, and France are now hostile to the Islamic Caliphate, it is also incumbent upon all Muslims who are being ruled by these governments to proclaim jihad against them and to actually attack them. The protection of the Ottoman Empire depends on the fact that all Muslims hasten to participate in the jihad; if some refrain from doing so, it is a horrible sin and they deserve divine wrath. For Muslims of the named enemy countries it is absolutely forbidden to fight against the troops of Islamic lands even if the enemies force them to do so; otherwise they deserve hellfire for murder. It is a great sin for Muslims under the rule of England, France, Russia, Serbia, Montenegro, and their allies to fight against Germany and Austria, which are the allies of the Supreme Islamic Government.

According to this fatwa the sultan-caliph was the sovereign over all Muslims. It was permitted to them to fight with infidels against infidels and “their” Muslims. The latter not only had no right to fight back, but had to turn against their foreign overlords. Shaykh Sālih ash-Sharīf at-Tūnisī confirmed this new doctrine of jihad on the side of the Austro-German Central Powers. Enver Pasha had asked Shaykh Sālih to travel to Berlin to popularize the jihad among the Germans. For this purpose Shaykh Sālih wrote a commentary. His *Haqīqat al-jihād* (The Truth of Jihad) was published at the beginning of 1915 by the German Society for the Study of Islam. Martin Hartmann of the Seminary of Oriental Languages in Berlin wrote a friendly foreword and the dragoman Karl

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E. Schabinger added an afterword. Both recommended that text as a “development of jihad.” What did it mean? A “partial jihad” was possible: on the side of allied infidels and just against certain enemy infidels. This jihad was an individual duty for all Muslims. A peace between the world of Islam and Europe would be possible if there were no longer any foreign occupation of Islamic lands.<sup>29</sup>

In the end, the execution of the jihad was disappointing for Max von Oppenheim and his Oriental News Department in the Foreign Office. It turned out that the majority of Muslims ignored the jihad, although Germans spent a lot of money for expeditions—such as the one headed by Werner Otto von Hentig and Oskar von Niedermayer to Kabul—and for pan-Islamic propaganda printed in Berlin like the weekly *Al-Jihād*. Nevertheless, Schabinger concluded that the seeds of an uprising had been planted. One day there would be an accumulation of colonial people ready to turn against their rulers.<sup>30</sup> The German General Staff drew a much less favorable conclusion: it was an illusion that the jihad would decide the war.<sup>31</sup> And on the other sides? As early as the middle of 1916 a French source concluded about the declarations of jihad that it had moved many people to action in the name of Islam; “they failed, indeed, but they caused no end of trouble to the Entente Powers.”<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, this jihad was a concerted German-Ottoman action. Planned as an export of an Islamic uprising or revolution into the enemy’s colonial hinterland, its idea was truly made in Germany. It was unfortunate that renowned German Oriental experts like Carl Heinrich Becker, Martin Hartmann, Ernst Jäckh, and Max von Oppenheim unleashed the old genie of pure religious hatred. Others like C. Snouck Hurgronje remained steadfast against this use of jihad and defended basic values of humanism and enlightenment. The most distinctive features of Berlin’s Middle Eastern policy during World War I were not the 30,000 German troops fighting as part of the Ottoman army, the two attempts to capture the Suez Canal, or General Hans von Seeckt’s role as the last Ottoman chief of staff. Of course, from a Middle Eastern viewpoint, the foremost element was that the Ottomans sided with the Germans.<sup>33</sup>

What was unique was, after the switch from a secondary peace to a primary war policy, the “jihad made in Germany.” Thus, the German discipline of Islamic study lost its innocence not long after its birth.

### **3. The Republic of Weimar returns to a secondary Middle Eastern policy**

After the Germans lost the war and overthrew their Emperor along with his “world policy,” the German Reich was no longer a monarchy but became the Republic of Weimar. As such, a one-third smaller Germany was bound to comply with the victors’ demands. Reconstruction and reform was the order of the day. Berlin returned to its secondary Middle Eastern peace policy. As the Treaty of Versailles ruled, Germany lost its Central African colonies. The new republic was even freer to concentrate on trade, commerce, and culture, reestablishing two of the prewar pillars of German Middle Eastern policy: respecting the status quo and disclaiming any territories. The third pillar, mediating in Oriental disputes, was excluded since Germany was given no role in international relations at all, and that promoted thoughts about vengeance in Berlin (see the contribution by Hans-Ulrich Seidt).

The Foreign Office broke with some older traditions by making reforms at the beginning of the 1920s. Both the classical diplomat of noble descent, trained in jurisprudence, and the dragoman, who knew Oriental languages as well as judicial matters, were replaced by a wider range of experts from all disciplines. Thus, it was possible for Berlin to regain most of its lost positions.

Germany again became the third-ranking country in foreign trade with the Middle East. One question that was discussed often in Berlin was whether or not to support industrialization in the region. Finally, the argument that if Germany did not do so, the competition would take this business over, prevailed. The Germans were attractive partners especially for Middle Eastern nationalists who looked for alternative suppliers to new emerging countries like Saudi Arabia (see the contribution by Uwe Pfullman) and Iraq. Students who had studied in Germany since 1920 returned to their homelands. They advanced there professionally and favored Germany in a climate that became hostile to the new British and French Mandatory powers.<sup>34</sup>

The Republic of Weimar applied a secondary Middle Eastern peace policy, cautiously avoiding trouble with London and Paris. Nevertheless, the Germans remained very critical of declining empires in the region<sup>35</sup> and supported Arab nationalists in their desire to rid themselves

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of foreign masters. In this light there was a natural basis for cooperation between the Germans on the one hand and the Arabs, Turks, and Persians on the other. It was not difficult for the old guard of diplomats like Dr. Fritz Grobba to exploit all the feelings that were nurtured by the experience of having fought and lost on the same side in the war. After the Treaty of Versailles, Berlin possessed no navy or other military tools. Thus, it had a diminished interest in the Middle East. Apart from economical and cultural relations, the region lacked importance for Berlin and returned to playing a marginal role.

London had decided to support a Jewish homeland in Palestine. As the waves of new Jewish immigrants, *olim chadashim*, arrived there, Palestine became a focal point. Berlin tried not to get involved in this project and kept its distance. Nevertheless, anti-Semitism was on the rise in Germany and did influence the fate of the region, indirectly at first. Moreover, some politicians in Berlin saw the emigration of Jews to Palestine as a solution to problems in Central Europe. But the most dangerous development was that the advanced Jewish assimilation in Germany was in jeopardy and with it some of the most important results of the European Enlightenment. Throughout the 1920s the inhumane nature of German racism became obvious. What appeared in the following decade was in no way a surprise. Even founding fathers of Islamic studies like Carl Heinrich Becker tended to divide humankind into “higher” and “lower” races.

### **4. The secondary and the primary Middle Eastern policy of Nazi Germany**

From his election in 1933 until World War II, Adolf Hitler pursued a secondary peace policy toward the Middle East. He was much more interested in a division of labor with London: he accepted the British Empire while believing that Eastern Europe ought to be a completely German domain for *Lebensraum*. He readily left political “responsibilities” for the Middle East to Great Britain and Italy,<sup>36</sup> maintaining the tradition established by the first chancellor Otto von Bismarck, who regarded colonial outposts in Africa and Asia as nothing but trouble. Hitler’s racial views, known to the public since 1920, must have influenced his lack of interest in creating German colonies or territories in the lands of “colored people.”

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An examination of German Middle Eastern policy under Hitler confirms that the region was of no concern to him. He built a Berlin-Rome axis with clear functions for Italy in the Middle East, and hoped for an understanding with London. Arab nationalists like Grand Mufti Amin al-Husaini of Jerusalem were more interested in him than vice versa. An additional factor on the German side was the shortage of convertible money because most of it was being spent on re-armament. All this was to be changed by three factors.

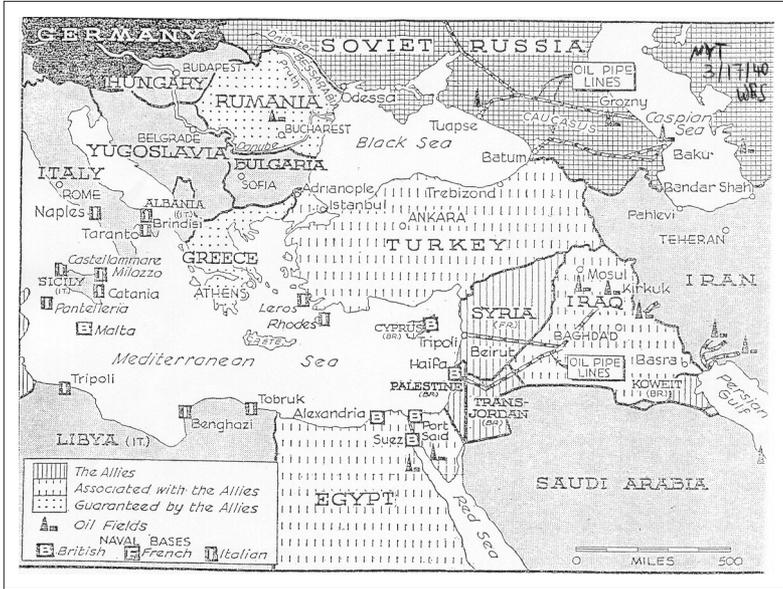
First, if a disagreement or war arose with London, Paris, or Moscow, the Middle East could become one of the major battlegrounds. For this reason, even in peacetime, German planners were interested in French- and British-influenced territories and immediate neighbors of Russia such as Afghanistan and Turkey. That Franz von Papen became Hitler's ambassador to Ankara showed the major importance of this country for him (see the contribution by Karl Heinz Roth).

Second, the Middle East could become a primary matter if positions of Axis partners like Italy and Japan were in danger. Then Berlin could be dragged into conflicts. A common German policy was to avoid such risks in a region of secondary importance. The Middle East was not even important to Germany as a source of raw materials. Instead, Germans relied on Europe for raw materials like oil from the Balkans, and rare materials like tungsten from Portugal or chrome ore from Turkey. There was no need for deliveries from the Middle East or for military bases there.

The third possibility for increasing Berlin's interest in the Middle East was in case the plan of *Blitzkriege* ("lightning wars") in Europe failed. In that event, the region would become more important as a battlefield to entangle as many enemy troops as possible, as a source of fighting support, and as a base for reaching war targets in Russia or blocking British access to the Suez Canal. Just for this eventuality, the concept of a "jihad made in Germany" became important again. But Hitler, of course, did not expect it to be needed. Thus, the region was supposed to be mainly reserved for Italians. The Germans and Japanese had only economic interests. Accordingly, the Tripartite Treaty of Berlin codified the areas of influence a year after World War II began.

After Germany started World War II in September 1939, all three of the above scenarios played roles. Hitler did not achieve an agreement with London. Instead, a war against Great Britain followed. Most Brit-

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**Map 1.** The most critical time for the Allies in the Middle East between mid-1940 and 1942. (Source: *The New York Times*, March 17, 1940. Copyright © 1940 by the New York Times. Reprinted by permission.)

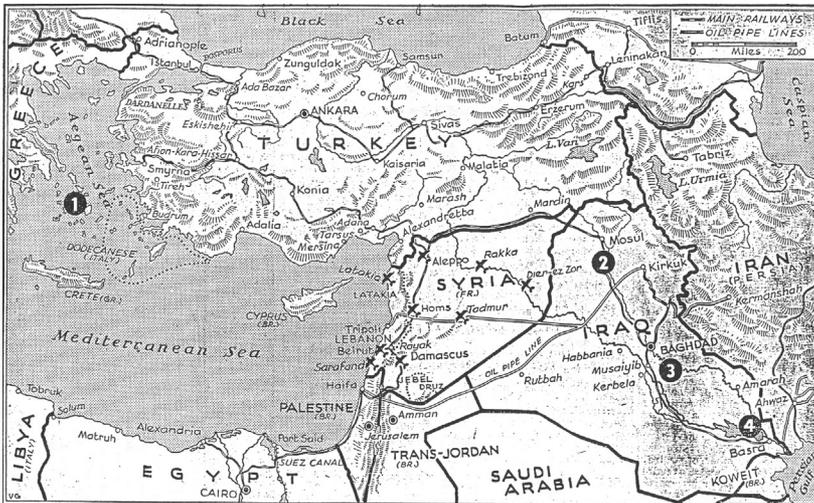
ish-influenced countries like Egypt broke off their relations with Berlin at the beginning of World War II. Going a step further, they declared war on Germany shortly before the end of the war. Berlin then switched from a secondary Middle Eastern peace policy to a primary Middle Eastern war policy. Although this policy was directed against London, Berlin played no major role in the Middle East, since it had to take the Italian policy in the region into account. After the fall of France in mid-1940 the Middle East became more accessible for the Germans. But Hitler showed no interest in French colonies.<sup>38</sup> Again, he concentrated on continental Europe.

In the most critical period of World War II, from June 1940 until November 1942 (see map 1), Hitler regarded the Middle East as a potential battleground, but never as a field of a greater engagement—a position that only a victory against Russia could have changed. To be prepared, his Order Number 32 called for German Middle Eastern plans to pave the way for later battles against the British. There, too, he would inflict an “uncompromising war against the Jews.” Furthermore, he explained to the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem at the end of November 1941 that this

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relentless war naturally would include an active opposition to the Jewish national home in Palestine. Germany would be “willing to solve the Jewish problem step by step and it would appeal at the proper time to non-European nations as well.” The current battle against the “Judeo-Communist Empire in Europe” would decide the fate of the Arab world too. He hoped that the coming year would it make possible for Germany to thrust open the Caucasian gate to the Middle East, but his *Blitzkrieg* failed at the Stalingrad front in November 1942. In the same month, General Erwin Rommel lost the battle of Al-'Alamain in an attempt to reach the Suez Canal, and the Allied forces landed in Morocco and Algeria. Hitler's plan had failed.

Besides, the Germans at first had had no foot in the Middle Eastern door, except briefly after an anti-British development in Iraq (see map 2). Rashīd 'Alī al-Kailānī began a military coup in April 1941 in Bagh-



German planes, flying presumably from the Nazis' newly acquired island bases in the Aegean Sea (1), are said to be arriving in Syria for action in Iraq. Many of Syria's military airdromes, the chief ones of which are shown on the map by airplane devices, are reported to be already under German control and thus subject to British attack. Nazi planes are declared to have landed around Mosul (2), where there are extensive oil fields, and north of Baghdad (3), the Iraqi capital. British bombers raided the railway near Baghdad, a small arms factory at Musaiyib in the same area and barracks at Amarah in the neighborhood of the port of Basra (4).

**Map 2.** Iraq: For a brief period a German foothold in the Middle Eastern door in May 1941. (Source: *The New York Times*, May 16, 1941. Copyright © 1941 by the New York Times. Reprinted by permission.)

dad. The Germans intervened there by airplanes at the beginning of May. But at the end of that month the British forces prevailed, forcing the Iraqi premier and his followers to flee, though Hitler had ordered limited support for them. Rashīd ‘Alī al-Kailānī—like Grand Mufti Amīn al-Husainī—ended up in exile in Berlin, and both spent the war-time there as guests of the German government. Both conspired from there against the Allies (see the American evaluation in document 1, “Axis Propaganda in the Moslem World,” 1941).

The Grand Mufti helped the Germans by declaring a jihad against the Allies in broadcasts to the Middle East, and the Palestinian leader found German supporters. At the critical juncture after the fall of Paris, Max von Oppenheim forwarded an adapted version of his old jihad plan. The time had come, he wrote, to oppose England in the Middle East. There were two tasks: getting reliable news from the region and inciting rebellion in Syria and its neighbors. General aims were keeping British troops there, cutting off the oil supply for the British navy, and blocking Suez Canal traffic. Dr. Grobba would be best suited, in cooperation with influential natives like Shakīb Arslān of Greater Syria, to organize the uprisings that would weaken British positions in Egypt and India. A government under the leadership of Amīn al-Husainī should be established in Palestine, and only the Jews who had lived there before the First World War should be allowed to stay.<sup>39</sup>

A most challenging, but more or less unwanted, Middle Eastern involvement started for Berlin after the Italian dictator asked his German counterpart to support his troops against the British in Libya. Thirty days after Benito Mussolini requested help, German troops landed there. A month later General Rommel arrived, leading the newly founded German Africa Corps into the battles that would direct them close to Alexandria. Since the Germans also occupied Crete, it looked as if the Middle East would be the next big battleground. But Hitler had already ordered the attack against the USSR for late June 1941. Its outcome spared the Jews in the Middle East from the Holocaust and the region from a terrible experience.

Many Middle Easterners, like many Germans, did not recognize the nature of Nazi Germany. But some leading thinkers, among them the Egyptian poet Taufīq al-Hakīm, grasped it better. On the other hand, young Egyptian officers like ‘Abd an-Nāsir and Anwar as-Sādāt placed their hopes of ridding their country of the British on the Germans. It

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The Arab is a born dissenter and a lover of intrigue. In a country as small as Palestine, there have at times been as many as six different political parties functioning at once. Under such circumstances, there will always be found groups who will lend themselves to Axis propaganda, if only to spite their enemies.<sup>1</sup>

The Arabs are, however, united in one general purpose: To free their world from the domination of French and British masters. Arabs in Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and Iraq are apparently blinded to Italian imperialism in Libya and Ethiopia and to German domination of Europe by their anxiety to get rid of British control. This arises not only from a desire to play all European powers off against each other but from a naïveté which assumes that anyone who is against Britain is automatically a friend of the Moslems. They fail to realize that, in case of a British defeat, there would be a substitution of Axis for British imperialism.

<sup>1</sup> An example seems to be the pro-Axis minority among the predominantly pro-British Druzes.

The Zeesen radio has lately been giving unusual attention to the exile and persecution of Arab leaders by Britain, and this cannot help but have considerable effect upon the Arabs.

The Assyrians who were at one time entirely pro-British now contain a considerable element which denounces Britain for having let the Assyrians down in Iraq.

The Arabs are very sensitive and bitterly resent the attitude of superiority of many Britons whom they meet.

### B. Anti-American sentiment.

This is of recent growth. It is a result of two things: (1) The expression by American public officials of sympathy with political Zionism (which they usually misjudge as being purely religious and cultural) in Palestine. This has resulted in a tendency in all parts of the Arab world (strongest in Palestine and Syria) to suspect the United States of siding with the Jews against the Arabs in Palestine. (2) America's increasingly close alliance with Britain has led the Arabs to believe that we support Britain's policies in the Arab world. The attitude of India toward the United States has taken a very definite turn for the worse as a result of the promulgation of the Atlantic Charter, from which India was specifically excluded. All these factors are being fully exploited by the Zeesen radio in broadcasts to the Near East and India as evidence of the hypocritical attitude of the United States in preaching independence and self-determination for minorities on the one hand, while supporting British imperialism on the other.

3

Arab animosity toward foreigners and non-Moslems may be discriminated as follows:

### A. Anti-British sentiment.

Despite the wishful thinking that continues to exist in Britain,<sup>2</sup> dislike and mistrust of Britain are strong throughout the Arab world, as well as in Iran and India. There are two reasons for this: One is British support of the Jews in Palestine and of other minorities for the apparent purpose of dividing and ruling the Arab states; the other is the reluctance of Britain to grant independence to mandated territories. The Arabs place little trust in British promises, which have been often broken in the past. Their distrust of British methods leads them to look for ulterior motives in every move made by Britain. If anything adverse happens, they automatically blame the British, without bothering to look into the facts of the case. This makes it easy for Axis propaganda to stir up Arab feeling; how easy is shown by the killing of the British Consul Mason at Mosul after German propaganda had accused the British of being responsible for the death of King Ghazi. The acquisition by Iraq and Egypt of their independence only after years of rebellion have convinced the Arabs that force is the only means by which they can extract what they regard as their rights from the British.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> But see the realistic article, *Arab Nationalism and the War*, in *Round Table* (London), September 1941, pp. 698-708.

<sup>3</sup> An illustration of the strength of this attitude is the unpopularity of the Nashashibi faction in Palestine and the support by the Arab population, both in and out of Palestine, of the Mufti Hajj Amin, who is the apostle of force against the British. What success the Axis powers have had in playing up to this state of mind can be judged from the fact that the Mufti is now in Berlin.

2

### C. Anti-Jewish feeling.

While Palestine is the focus of the problem, anti-Semitism has had an important effect on the Arabs of Syria and even of Saudi Arabia, within whose boundaries there is hardly a single Jew. There can be no doubt that the situation created by the Zionist program in Palestine has caused the position of the Jews to deteriorate throughout the Arab world. Despite what Zionists say abroad for outside consumption, there are too many Jews in Palestine (and abroad) who adhere to the attitude expressed by William B. Ziff in *The Rape of Palestine: The Jews are entering Palestine by divine right and intend to "make the Arabs go back to the desert where they came from."* In North Africa there are grounds for anti-Jewish feeling which are separate from the Palestinian problem. Ever since the Arab invasion, the Jews there have been a despised element of the population, and this antipathy has been increased since the nineteenth century by the undoubted part which the Jews have played in facilitating foreign control of both French and Spanish Morocco.

Zeesen has recently been reading anti-Jewish passages from the Koran, emphasizing that the Jews are the "enemies of Islam."

### D. Anti-French feeling.

This flourishes in all areas where the French are in control and existed even before the end of World War I: Witness the testimony of the King-Crane report which expressly states that under no circumstances did either the Syrians or Iraqis want a French mandate, a mandate which Syria subsequently was

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## Document 1. An American evaluation of the Axis propaganda in the Muslim world in 1941.

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forced to accept. Anti-French feeling is relatively useless as an Axis propaganda implement as long as German-controlled Vichy retains holdings in the Arab East, except under the aspect of anti-de Gaullism in regions which might come under Free French control. Moreover, the setting up by the Free French of an "independent" Syrian state has stolen some of the Axis thunder. Zeesen propaganda blasts concentrate on denouncing Taj-al-Din, its head, as merely a de Gaullist-British tool.

### E. *Anti-Bolshevik feeling.*

The educated and propertied classes among the Arabs, who largely control public opinion, are extremely apprehensive of socialism and more particularly of a Bolshevik socialist revolution. Through broadcasts and other means of propaganda, the Axis powers have succeeded in impressing on the Arab world the belief that they are engaged in saving capitalist civilization from the menace of Bolshevism. Propertied Arabs feel that a Nazi regime would not seriously damage their position, whereas a Bolshevik regime would exterminate them and the system under which they are accustomed to live. Ambitious Arab leaders tend to conceive of themselves as future heads of states, freed from British or French domination, each a miniature Reich with its Fuehrer or Duce, subservient perhaps to the Axis, but each with a considerable measure of "absolute" power.

### F. *Moslem conservatism and prejudice.*

This makes an appeal to conservative Moslems throughout the entire East, from Morocco to India.

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Many approaches can be used to exploit this: Anti-Christian bias, xenophobia, concern for Moslem minorities, etc. Recently Zeesen has been playing up the alleged suppression of the Moslem minorities in Russia; another curious anti-British blast from Zeesen accuses the British of being Pagans like the pre-Islamic Arabs and thus the natural enemies of Islam. It is doubtful whether such ridiculous appeals to presumed Moslem ignorance are going to help the Axis cause.

### G. *Food shortage and economic ruin.*

The German radio at Zeesen has repeatedly stated that the food shortage in Morocco (especially in the Spanish Zone and Tangier) is being caused by the British blockade. In German broadcasts to the rest of the Moslem world, including Palestine, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, it is made out that the British army is systematically stripping these countries, leaving the population to starve. At present the food situation does not appear to be bad except in Spanish Morocco and Tangier, but if it should become serious in other Moslem countries, this propaganda might have serious results. The announcement that Britain is stripping India of food is often repeated by Zeesen which adds that Britain means to sacrifice millions of Indian lives in a vain attempt to resist the Axis.

6

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was not German racism or anti-Semitism that attracted them, but the thorough and fast modernization of Germany under the Nazi dictatorship. Arab nationalists originally admired the fascism of Mussolini, and consequently also Hitler, as an alternative to Anglo-Saxon democracy and as a modernistic movement. Berlin used this tendency in a selfish and ultimately antihuman manner to create trouble for the Allied Powers. Thus, the German Middle Eastern policy found a wider echo within radical Arab nationalism. The Middle East became again just a means for German "out-of-area" aims toward Europe and America. As Middle Easterners became aware of this nationalistic approach, their disappointment accumulated, along with their potential for anti-Westernism.

### 5. Germany's Middle Eastern policy: Patterns and prospects

Otto von Bismarck based Berlin's secondary Middle Eastern peace policy on three pillars: respecting the status quo, renouncing territorial claims, and mediating conflicts. The most striking paradigm was the subordination of this policy to the always-primary policy toward Europe and America. Although the German Middle Eastern policy was

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direct and active, especially in trade, commerce, and cultural exchange, there was the same ranking of regional priorities as in the primary policy. First came the Turkish heartland, then the countries under British or French influence, most notably Greater Syria (*bilād ash-shām*, including Palestine and Lebanon), then the other French-influenced territories, especially Algeria and Morocco, and finally the Russian Muslim lands in Central Asia.

This order of priorities did not change during either world war. What changed was Berlin's switch to a primary Middle Eastern war policy directed against Great Britain, France, and Russia. Even then the warfare was asymmetrical, weakening the enemies' colonial hinterlands from within by incitement to jihad. During World War I the Ottoman sultan-caliph, the shaykh of Islam, and a Tunisian mufti promoted the concept, whereas during the Second World War it was the exiled Iraqi prime minister and the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem who promoted it. In both cases, the result was a new mixture of critical approaches to European Middle Eastern empires and of nationalistic aspirations in the declining or former Ottoman Empire.

During both wars, Berlin had no explicit design for the Middle East, and no direct goals other than two unsuccessful attempts to conquer the Suez Canal: once with the Ottomans from the East, the other time with the Italians from the West. But this direct military involvement resulted from claims of its coalition partners. Berlin's original aim in World War I was to fight the European great powers and to keep the Ottoman Empire as it was. After it broke apart, Berlin was willing to respect the national independence of former provinces of the Ottoman Empire. During World War II, Germans favored the idea of a Greater Arabian Empire or a federation associated with free countries of the region such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Of course they were to be allied with the Axis powers. Clearly, Berlin would not follow the lead of Rome for long. On the contrary, it would end up dictating the Middle Eastern policy of its junior partner.

Some politicians and academics claimed after World War II that Berlin lost its biggest chance for victory after the fall of Paris: had Hitler chosen the Middle East rather than Soviet Russia as the next big battleground, he might well have succeeded in the fight against London. Although Winston Churchill supported this speculation in his memoirs, the nature of Hitler and the racism of the Nazi system made such a

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choice unlikely. The dictator was completely oriented toward Eastern Europe. He excluded the Middle East from the beginning as an area for a greater engagement in the sense of a special German expansion.

On the other hand, some officers in the Foreign Office worked against Hitler. According to the foremost German envoy to Arab countries, Fritz Grobba, they prevented Hitler from discovering the “Middle Eastern chance”—if it existed—in the short period of the anti-British revolt in Iraq. It is no wonder that Hitler talked in the final days in his bunker about the failed agreement with London. If the senseless war against the British could have been avoided even until early 1941, he said, America would not have entered the war. The “false great powers,” France and Italy, he claimed, could have dropped their untimely “policy of greatness.” That would have allowed the Germans a “bold policy of friendship with Islam.” Thus, without the war against the British, Adolf Hitler reasoned further, London could have turned to the Empire whereas Germany could have concentrated on her real mission: the eradication of Bolshevism.<sup>42</sup>

This reasoning leads to another conclusion about Berlin’s Middle Eastern policy. In wartime it became as ideologically oriented as it had been secondary and commercially oriented during peacetime. Its central goal became supporting the war through the export of certain ideologies. During World War I this meant the export of an Islamic revolution. Germans incited jihad in a subtler fashion during World War II. The Nazis added the deadly racism leading to the Holocaust in Europe and the instigation of anti-Jewish sentiments in the Middle East. This was oil on the fire of the Arab-Jewish dispute about Palestine. The project of Jewish assimilation failed in Europe because of the mass extermination of Jews by Germans. Thus, the question of Palestine arose in a new light in the region. There were also Arabs among prisoners in the Nazis’ concentration camps. On the other hand, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and the Iraqi premier sent their envoys to visit a concentration camp near Berlin, as a recently discovered report by Dr. Fritz Grobba indicates (see document 4). Thus, both leaders and their entourage knew about such camps and were able to anticipate their use in the coming genocide (see the contribution by Gerhard Höpp).

After World War II, Middle Eastern policy was not a high priority for the governments of the divided Germany. East Germany essentially

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went along with the Soviet Union and the Warsaw pact, while West Germany followed the United States and NATO, subordinating German interests to those of their allies. For example, when Bonn recognized the state of Israel in the mid-1960s, ten Arab states broke off diplomatic relations with West Germany and most of them recognized East Germany at the end of that decade. Germany also had and still has to deal with the burden of the Third Reich; often its policies regarding Israel have been based on moral rather than political criteria.<sup>43</sup>

Now, after reunification, Germany finally has the opportunity to pursue a genuine primary Middle Eastern peace policy of its own. The new hierarchy in Berlin's policy-making toward the Middle East seems to be:

- Firstly, the focus on truly bilateral or multilateral questions that are framed regionally between Central Europe and the Middle East.
- Secondly, the influence of bilateral or multilateral security matters on relations with the U.S. and other third parties.
- Thirdly, the influence of this bilateral and regional policy toward growing problems of multiple identities in Europe and the Middle East.

Berlin's new primary Middle Eastern policy indicates a paradigmatic change from the traditional threefold secondary style (respecting status quo, renouncing territorial claims, mediating conflicts) to a primary style. This is an opportunity that also implies risk.

Regionally, Berlin's Middle Eastern peace policy will be influenced by the cultural patchwork that Europe is becoming. In the past, the East-West divide determined Germany's alignment. Now regional and even local factors related to North-South conflicts play a larger role. Berlin takes into account its growing minorities of Jews and Muslims in shaping its Middle Eastern policy, and there is a sensitive mixture of foreign and domestic policy factors in the new period of globalization.<sup>44</sup> Until recently, Berlin had made the trans-Atlantic relationship a fundamental pillar of its foreign policy. This pillar was shaken during the Iraq crisis of 2003, when some German politicians opposed the attack by a U.S.

and British coalition. Whether Germany in the future will follow NATO or the EU, and what role a common European defense and possible European military intervention force will play, remain to be seen.

### Notes

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  32. "Secret French Report, 01.06.1916," in Jacob M. Landau, *The Politics of Pan-Islam. Ideology and Organization* (Oxford, 1994), 102.
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