



Pan-Islamism

Understanding Origins of Pan-Islamism in World War One

The German-Ottoman [jihadization](#) of Islam during World War I led to the development of the first Sunni theory of Islamism. It called for Islamic lands to run their regions under one global brotherhood and to fight enemies according to Islamic rules. Abd al-Malik Hamza Bey developed the theory during World War I; he favored an interfaith coalition with “friendly states” (the Central Powers) against “enemy states” (the Allied Powers of England, France, and Russia). Once glorious lands would seek peace when the colonialists left, assured Hamza, who justified an anticolonial jihad. Since his theory led Islamists into global struggles, it is important to analyze the text that he printed with his co-editor Abd al-Aziz Jawish.

Before the Great War, Hamza worked as a secretary of Egypt’s National Party, which Mustafa Kamil had built in 1907. In the 1905 Morocco crisis, as France wanted to dominate this not-yet colonized North African country, Kamil wrote an article in *Berliner Tageblatt* on “Kaiser Wilhelm and Islam.” He lauded him for his 1898 visit to Sultan-Caliph Abdülhamid II, who was shunned for prior Armenian massacres. In 1917, the Kaiser made a follow-up visit to the caliph’s successor Mehmed V and Istanbul’s Shaik of Islam Musa Kazim (photo, in white). Wilhelm acted as “protector of 300 million Muslims,” stressed Kamil. He touted Wilhelm’s speech in Morocco for defending that land’s integrity. On a horse given to him by Sultan Abd al-Aziz in Tangier, the Kaiser even proclaimed to protect Morocco’s independence and favored an “open door policy.” Paris was shocked, while Morocco and Egypt were enthused. Thus, Kamil suggested a joint action by Paris and Berlin against London to also secure the Nile state’s independence, since 1882 a de facto and 1914 a real British protectorate.

10/1917 Musa Kazim, Wilhelm II, Mehmed V, Enver Pasha



After Kamil’s death in 1908, Muhammad Farid took the helm to see the British leave Egypt. Both had advanced an enlightened nationalism, proudly tied to 3,500 years of Pharaonic civilization, where Islam was the cornerstone since 642. The nationalists were inspired, too, by French republican values of liberty, equality, and fraternity. To reach their goal, the Egyptians tried to game the Great Powers. After the Egyptians pitted the French against the British and Russians, the Germans offered more support in the second Morocco crisis of 1911 as the Kaiser ordered a German gunboat to Agadir as an answer to more French troop deployments there. This ended in a typical deal as France took over Morocco as a protectorate and made territorial concessions to Berlin in French Congo. Meanwhile, Hamza adopted some of Farid’s ideas after the latter took a trip to Germany. But global views carried local conflicts: European ideas collided with Islamic life and shed light on the minorities’ position.

German Lobbies

Hamza wanted to bring Berlin into the fold against the Allied Powers on the path to modernity, or as Farid put it: Colonial Powers do not wish other peoples ascending who in turn do not desire foreign masters. In this anti-imperial fight, the non-colonial German offer was attractive: We provide you with means, and you keep your empire and disturb the colonial hinterland of our rivals with Islamist revolts until their empires crumble. Jawish explained to Hamza how Prussia formed a nation by uniting the states after a victory over France in 1871. To him, Prussia was a model for Arabs. Jawish edited the first Arabic number of *The Islamic World* in 1912 and asked, “How did Europe corrupt our lands and Pan-Islamism, الجامعة الإسلامية, do they turn it against us?”

Abd al-Aziz Jawish



(Pan-) Islamism

During the Great War, the Kaiser supported anti-colonial revolts in the Middle East with guns, money, and experts. In parallel, Ottoman War Minister Enver Pasha tasked the Tunisian Salih ash-Sharif at-Tunisi to adapt the dogma of jihad to a global coalition war and to spread it in Europe. Enver also sent Hamza and Jawish to Berlin into the Foreign Office News Organization for the Orient to work on jihad based on Islamism, الإسلامية. This old Arabic term gained a broader political sense but was not yet tied to a clear theory.

To change it, Hamza and Jawish edited the illustrated monthly *The Islamic World* in German for Europe from 1916 to 1918. Their target groups were rulers, diplomats, and clerics in the Middle East as well. The two also tried to reach nationalists and Islamists like Amin al-Husaini, later Jerusalem’s grand mufti; Shakib Arslan in the Ottoman parliament and a sponsor of Berlin’s Islam Institute; Mustafa Mansur Rifat, editor of the nationalist paper *Al-Liwa’*; Abd ar-Rahman Azzam, the first secretary general of the Arab League; and reformers of Arabia via Iran to India. In 1916, Hamza edited *The Pan-Islamism*, as he synonymously uses “Islamism” in the hope “to have clearly stated the theory of Islamism”: to unify all Muslims in one brotherhood and to overcome enemies.

1917 Cover *The Islamic World*



Mission and Model

Hamza sketches a mission: Individuals and groups help each other to defend against attacks. The nature of this pan-Islamic unity relates to nationalism and patriotism. However, it has another origin: unity of religion with similar customs, interests, and prospects without regard of nationality, race, or color. In Europe, Hamza explains, patriotic and national feelings grow on the unity of race. Great results of a group correlate with its size. The larger the area of rule, the more borders vanish between the peoples the better. Although nationalism and patriotism have a higher ethical and practical value than tribalism, the highest goal is philanthropy and unification. Hamza quotes poet Friedrich Schiller that “all humans equally born are a noble kind.”

Hamzas model for Arabs is Germany after 40 years of its unity. He warns, though, if a union turns aggressive, then it is the right and duty of nations to fight it. Islamism rescinded the racial reasons of disputes among Arab tribes: a great Islamic Empire grew into a high culture. The fraternization reduced clashes of Islamic races like Persians, Indians, and

Egyptians. Confusion about Islamism led non-Muslims to think that its only sense is Islamic unity for aggressive aims. In truth, argues Hamza, the call for Islamism advertises for humankind’s brotherhood based on the unity of faith. He quotes Koranic rules, such as to fight attackers, but do not exceed in defense; and pacts with non-Muslim peoples are viable who do not fight Islam, drive out Muslims, or take their land.

Allies and Brotherhoods

Hamza adds non-religious roots of Islamism: the poor economic state of peoples. Even worse is the political condition of masses due to the colonial policy of France in Tunis, Algiers, and Morocco. The same is true in India and Egypt after the loss of their sovereignty to the British. Persia lost her independence, and Russia rules over many Muslims. Russia had also just tried to destroy the Ottoman Empire’s independence with Paris and London. As a result, Hamza says the people need a great unity and force to resist imperial foes. Muslims will awake, predicts Hamza, and rise against the tyrannical despotism of France, England, and Russia. The goal of Islamism lies in uniting a large part of the world by liberating peoples of foreign rule. Muslims fell to their enemies’ greed and failed to adapt to the faster pace of the new times. Islamism will be a thorn in the eye of those who want to plunder nations. However, this does not include Germany, where Islamism meets broad understanding and official support.

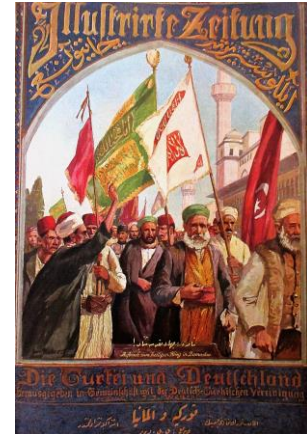
Then, Hamza announces his article on *Pan-Islamism’s Practical Goals*. In mid-1917, he names Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani the spiritual founder of Islamism, but Hamza laments that the Islamist movement lacks a “programmatic organization and action.” There is a need to create a political society in Istanbul with affiliates in other capitals to unite Muslims and to get help for their economies.

Minorities and Gaps

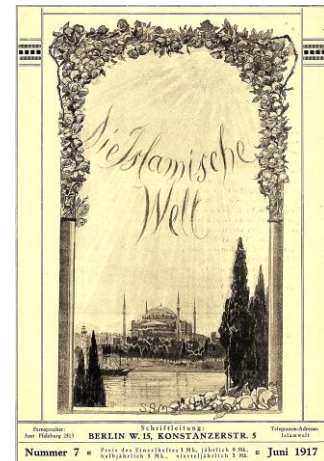
As Hamza edited his *Theory of Islamism*, the Great War intensified. The Ottoman call for a coalition **jihad** turned also against **local** minorities: an attempted genocide hit Jews in Greater **Syria** and a realized genocide killed Christians as Armenians, Greeks, and Assyrians. Grand Vizier Talat Pasha “wanted to **disperse** the Armenians like the Jews in western Europe,” while Enver Pasha confirmed an ongoing extermination in late **1915**. Hamza ignores all these atrocities.

To live without regard of nationality, race, or color is a great revolutionary idea, though only to be done inclusively. Hamza’s ideal goes beyond tribes for a higher unity of faith. Looking to the roots of his ideology and *the* Muslim Brotherhood, his theory seems to be its birth certificate. He blames colonialists for all miseries, asking about Islamic lands: Why did some fail to adapt to a faster pace of modern times? Hamza implies that something went wrong *before* the colonial era. If those lands would have been a **solid** state, then colonization could not have taken place there. Hamza disregards this longer Islamic colonization that Jawish describes in his mid-1917 text as “expansion by wars of faith.”

1916 German Paper: Syria’s Jihad



Jawish on Islamic Colonization 1917



Current Islamism's Historical Roots

Co-editor Jawish asks about the misuse of Islamism against its own interests. The German-Ottoman jihadization that he advanced was a “revolutionary” blow against the usually moderate if not conservative modernism. In the then-unleashed radicalization, Berlin was driven less by an affinity to Islam, but rather by the potential of jihadist revolts against the empires of London, Paris, and Saint Petersburg.

Mehmed V, Wilhelm II in 1917 Istanbul



Half a century ago, colonies gained independence, and formal liberation succeeded. Most leaders turned to nation building. After nationhood, some countries and leaders departed from Islamism—just to revive it in the new millennium. Consider Jawish: Mustafa Kemal put him on top of an Islamism campaign. Jawish also swayed Hasan al-Banna who kept the Muslim Brotherhood going in the Egyptian town of al-Ismailiyya. In 1917, as shown, Hamza already suggested the creation of an avant-gardist political organization as one Muslim Brotherhood with affiliates in other Islamic capitals. There is still a missing historical connection between Hamza's theory and al-Banna's founding of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928.

It was a stop-and-go story with disruptions and revivals. A 1917 report claimed that before World War I, Jawish's task was to create Muslim brotherhoods in Arabia and India. Berlin used them to spread jihad. Hamza envisaged just one Muslim Brotherhood with affiliates. Suddenly, Kemal stopped all Islamism and planned pan-Islamic unions between Turkey, Russia, and Iran. He abolished the sultanate and caliphate. Since 1931, as Egypt's ambassador to Ankara, Hamza watched a bold foreign policy unfold—without Islamism.

After half a century without colonies, some regard the current wave of Islamism as a third totalitarian ideology. If true, activists advanced it by studying related experiences in Europe and Asia. Islamists of the “Islamic State” acted against minorities, repeating the old patterns. Due to migration, national and global Islamists also apply their ideology in the West where fundraising is worthwhile. Hamza had expected a post-colonial peace. Instead, long asymmetrical warfare is going on.

Conversely, both anti-Islamism and Islamism grow in many parts of the Middle East, where Russia and China returned as great powers and America is leaving. Among regional powers, Israel and Iran built new groups. The great powers active in the region know perhaps a German experience that there is no need to directly own lands to steer them in a power center's favor.

Thus, there might start a new indirect type of colonization by dissolving borders, defenses of nation states and massive migration, which could cause a further wave of radicalization. However, moderation also spreads based on the pan-Islamic Charter of Makkah that was approved by leaders of 139 countries and the Muslim World League in 2019. Time will tell which of those political currents will win the day.

Wolfgang G. Schwanitz

This analysis first appeared in the Middle East Program of the Foreign Policy Research Institute as [Understanding the Origins of Pan-Islamism during World War I](#). Here updated and some links were added.