

## OTHER NATIONS

*Hitler and  
the Arabs*

"Arab Nationalism and National Socialist Germany, 1933-1939: Ideological and Strategic Incompatibility" by Francis Nicosia, in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (Nov. 1980), Cambridge University Press, 32 East 57th St., New York, N.Y. 10022.

Many historians have assumed that Adolf Hitler was a strong ally of Arab nationalists before World War II, opposing French rule in Syria and British support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Not so, says Nicosia, a historian at St. Michael's College (Vt.). The Führer rejected Arab requests for help; indeed, for a time, the Nazis supported Zionism.

When Hitler rose to power in 1933, Arabs throughout the Middle East rejoiced. Leaders such as the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem admired not only his anti-Jewish policies but also his criticism of the 1919 Versailles Treaty, which had strengthened British and French control over much of the region. Arab nationalists even approached German diplomats with plans to create Arab Nazi parties.

Such appeals conflicted with Hitler's prewar fantasies. He wanted to forge an "all-Aryan" Anglo-German alliance: Germany would endorse the British Empire if Britain endorsed Nazi expansion in Eastern Europe. Though London repeatedly spurned Hitler's offers of friendship, the Führer did not give up hope for almost a year after World War II erupted in 1939. German diplomats were instructed not to meddle in British Palestine's "domestic affairs."

Moreover, in Nazi eyes, the Arabs were at the bottom of the racial hierarchy. In 1935, the German Consul General in Jerusalem approvingly quoted T. E. Lawrence's alleged observation, "I do not know how one can ever take the Arabs seriously. . . . It is not worth the effort." Nazi officials declared that National Socialism was not exportable to Arab countries. Jews, however, were. Before war broke out, the Third Reich promoted Jewish immigration to Palestine to achieve a "racially pure" Germany—over the protests of puzzled Arabs. The Gestapo even helped Zionist groups outwit the British ban on Jewish immigration imposed in 1938 to stem Arab violence.

Only twice did the Nazis briefly support Arab goals. In 1938, before the Munich agreement, German secret agents backed a Palestinian Arab revolt in order to divert British attention from the planned Nazi takeover of Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland. And in the summer of 1939, Germany publicly agreed to sell weapons to Saudi Arabia (the guns were never delivered). The aim: to deter London from opposing the coming Nazi invasion of Poland by threatening to establish a power base in the desert kingdom, strategically located near the Suez Canal. [Later, during the war, Hitler's only serious Middle Eastern intrigue was a failed effort to support a pro-Nazi coup in Iraq.]