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# The Round Tablette

*Founding Editor: James W. Gerber, MD (1951–2009)*

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**Welcome to the second March meeting of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table.** Tonight's speaker is Francis Nicosia, Professor of History and Raul Hilberg Distinguished Professor of Holocaust Studies at the University of Vermont. The author of the upcoming book *Hitler's Germany and the Middle East*, he will talk about German objectives in the Middle East and Allied Operations in the region.

The problems of the Middle East in the Twentieth (or Twenty-first) century began turmoil of World War I. (The Paris Peace Conference bequeathed to the world many problems – including Vietnam.) Shortly before the war ended, British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour wrote a letter to the Baron Rothschild advocating a Jewish Homeland in Palestine. This letter, also published in British newspapers, was written into the Treaty of Sèvres between the Ottoman Empire, which encompassed most of today's Middle East, and the Allies. The Great Powers set up a Mandate system for former holdings of the defeated powers that they deemed not quite ready for full statehood. Turkey became a state in its own right, but the rest of the Empire was divided between the British and the French. The French took control in Lebanon and Syria, and the British in Palestine, Transjordan, and Iraq. Not consulted about the fates of their regions, the native people and, especially, their leaders resented being ruled by another Empire.

Before World War II, the Nazi Regime had little interest in the Middle East, even though the Mediterranean Sea and its portals – the Straits of Gibraltar and the Suez Canal, were the key to Britain's Indian Empire and Far Eastern colonies.

Once war began, the Nazis realized that these critical transportation routes were vulnerable to attack, and that breaking them would yield immense harm to the British war effort.

The Nazi's greatest ally in the region was the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, who fought the British and persecuted the Jewish population of Palestine throughout the 1920s and 1930s. He was exiled from Palestine for his role in the 1936-1939 revolt against the British. He first fled to Lebanon and then to Iraq, before finally escaping to Germany in 1941, where he became the foremost Nazi collaborator in the Arab world. Ironically, the Nazi's placed Arabs amongst the undesirable races alongside the Jews (both are Semitic "races").

Al-Husseini met with Adolf Hitler in November 1941. He and the Germans agreed that he would spread pro-Nazi propaganda, set up spy rings in Europe and the Middle East, and establish Muslim Nazi SS and *Wehrmacht* divisions in the Balkans and North Africa. Through his contacts, he provided the Nazis with a forty-eight hour notice of the Allied landings in North Africa, which the *Wehrmacht* ignored. The Mufti also raised three divisions of Muslims in the Balkans, the largest being the 13 Waffen-SS Division.

Militarily, the Middle East had the potential to be a highly active theater of operations. Many thought the Germans would invade the area for the oil resources of Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Instead the two powers that engaged in the most action were Great Britain and Italy. For the first few months of the war the theater remained quiet until Italy declared war on France and Britain on June 10, 1940. Even though the Italians outnumbered the Allied forces in the region, they proved no match for the British Commonwealth forces. By early

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1941 the Italians were on the verge of being defeated and their colonies in Ethiopia and Somaliland were occupied. The Italians were saved though by the intervention of the German *Afrika Korps* commanded by Erwin Rommel. It took another year and a half, to expel the Axis forces out of North Africa, after which the Middle East once again became a backwater for military operations.

The Nazi designs for the Middle East were based on far-flung dreams of world conquest. Their racial ideology regarding Jews, discredited in the West, became widely accepted in the Arab world. Jewish-Arab relations remain poisoned by this anti-Semitism (that both Arabs and Jews are Semites is beside the point). At war's end, the push for a Jewish Homeland in Palestine gained strength from the horrific revelations of the Holocaust in Europe and the resulting guilt. Unlike Ho Chi Minh's letters and pleadings, the Truman Administration did not ignore the calls for a sovereign Jewish homeland in Palestine. In 1948, the United States became the first country to recognize the new state of Israel, born in battle with the surrounding Arab states.

#### Further Reading:

Francis R. Nicosia, *Zionism and Anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Francis R. Nicosia, *The Third Reich and the Palestine Question* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1985).

Norman Goda, *Tomorrow the World: Hitler, Northwest Africa, and the Path toward America*. (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1998.)

Jeffrey Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

Wolfgang Schwanitz, (ed.). *Germany and the Middle East, 1871-1945* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2004).

Edwin Black, *The Farhud: Roots of the Arab-Nazi Alliance in the Holocaust* (Washington D.C: Dialog Press, 2010)

#### Announcements:

**Twin Cities Civil War Round Table** -

May 21, 2013 the Petersburg Campaign - [www.tccwrt.com](http://www.tccwrt.com)  
- info@tccwrt.com

**St Croix Valley Civil War Round Table** - April 22, 2013  
Herman Haupt - Steve Anderson - 715-386-1268 -

[rossandhaines@comcast.net](mailto:rossandhaines@comcast.net)

**Rochester WWII History Round Table** -507-280-9970;  
[www.wv2roundtable-rochester.org](http://www.wv2roundtable-rochester.org)

**Fort Snelling Civil War Symposium** 13 April 2013,  
<http://www.tccwrt.com/symposium.html> or  
[tccwrt@yahoo.com](mailto:tccwrt@yahoo.com)

**Minnesota Military Museum**, Camp Ripley, 15000

Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345, 320-616-6050,

<http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>

**Air Show - Eden Prairie** - July, 13-14, 2013;

<http://www.airexpo-mn.org/> - 952-746-6100

**Honor Flight** - Jerry Kyser - [crazyjerry45@hotmail.com](mailto:crazyjerry45@hotmail.com) - 651-338-2717

**CAF - Commemorative Air Force** -

[www.cafmn.org](http://www.cafmn.org) or Bill at 952-201-8400

**Minnesota Air Guard Museum** -

[www.mnangmuseum.org](http://www.mnangmuseum.org) 612-713-2523

**Friends of Ft. Snelling**, [www.fortsnelling.com](http://www.fortsnelling.com)

**Fagen Museum** in Granite Falls,

[www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org](http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org). 320-564-6644

**World War II Weekend**, Historic Fort Snelling, 8-9

June 2013, <http://events.mnhs.org/calendar/index.cfm>

**Civil War Weekend**, Historic Fort Snelling, 17-18

August 2013, <http://events.mnhs.org/calendar/index.cfm>

#### Round Table Schedule 2013

11 Apr. Mobilizing the National Guard in WW2

9 May Kampfgruppe Peiper at Malmedy

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