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Holy war games: Iraqi troops train in the desert with British trucks and guns.
Haj Amin El Husseini as he likes Arabs to see him—especially Arabs bearing arms.

JEAN MANZON—EUROPEAN

Hitler of the Holy Land

A first-hand report on the Mufti, master of terrorism

By DAVID W. NUSSBAUM

卐 ONE MORNING in Beirut last fall, Riyad el Solh, prime minister of the pint-sized Arab state of the Lebanon, was getting out of bed when a flustered aide interrupted him with: "Excellency, Haj Amin has just landed in Beirut." "Nonsense," snorted the prime minister, "the Mufti is in Cairo." But a phone call confirmed the fact that an unidentified DC-3 had landed at the airport, bearing a stocky man in flowing Arab robes, with a bodyguard of six young men.

Riyad dressed hurriedly, and minutes later, his official limousine whisked into the airport enclosure. That night, throughout the Arab world, newspapers carried the story that Haj Amin el Husseini, exiled Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, had come to Lebanon to attend a meeting of Arab leaders. The man-

RICHARD BARBER

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Seiner Eminenz dem Großmuf
7. VII. 1943. zur Erinnerung. H. Himmler

From one "war buddy" to another: Heinrich Himmler dedicated this photograph, taken on July 4th, 1943, to "His Eminence, the Grand Mufti, as a remembrance."

ner of his coming demonstrated one reason for Haj Amin's reputation as the mystery man of the East. Wherever he goes, he travels incognito and arrives unannounced. It is the tactic of a man who has spent a lifetime fleeing justice; who, in his struggle for power, counts no man his friend.

Haj Amin had come to Beirut because he thought the time was ripe to apply direct, personal pressure on the leaders of the Arab world in the cause of an Arab state in Palestine. The Arab League, that loosely-knit agglomeration of seven states which had constituted itself two years earlier, had been in session for several days. On the mountainside high above Beirut, the representatives of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the Yemen, Transjordan, Iraq, Syria, and the Lebanon were discussing Arab policy in the face of the United Nations Committee's report approving partition of Palestine.

Even on this burning issue, the League, torn by conflicting interests and personal feuds, had not

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David W. Nussbaum, correspondent and former naval officer, has just returned from the Middle East, where he succeeded in interviewing the Mufti.

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achieved unanimity. Its members had adopted vague resolutions about economic sanctions against the West. Their verbal sabre rattling was not enough for the man who on Hitler's radio had cried time and again, "Kill the Jews wherever you find them. This pleases God—." The Grand Mufti* had come to stiffen their resolution, and he succeeded.

Haj Amin launched his political career twenty-eight years ago by escaping from a jail sentence, and has spent much of his time since then as a political fugitive. He still likes to work under cover. Even at the Arab League sessions, which he attends as an observer only, he is ushered through the crowds by bodyguards and disappears into the back-room cabals.

Although the masses rarely, if ever, see him, his picture is pinned up in every little Arab shop in Palestine, and his name is known to 45,000,000 Arabs throughout the Middle East. They know, too, that about one in every ten Arabs is a follower of the Mufti, and that it is unwise to criticize Haj Amin in public. He is the feared, but respected symbol of a resurgent, fanatical Pan-Arabism, an Arabia for the Arabs.

Haj Amin seldom moves from his heavily guarded villa in the

* A title bestowed by a group of local Moslem judges or community leaders, called Mufti, on one of their number.

During the war, Nazi propagandists deluged the Arab states with millions of copies of this postcard showing "Haj Amin and Hitler at their Berlin meeting."

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A cover of Vienna Illustrated *features the Mufti "heiling" the Waffen SS troops he recruited in Yugoslavia.*

quiet residential suburbs of Cairo. From this small and unimpressive building, he directs the political activities of more people, probably, than any other unofficial figure on earth. For a non-Moslem to penetrate the bodyguards that collect knee-deep around his headquarters requires a major diplomatic offensive. I was hustled through a courtyard where young men in dark blue suits frisked me carefully before ushering me into the presence of their leader.

Unlike the Westernized Arab statesmen who have copied European dress, the Mufti wears the costume of a Moslem religious sheik—a floor length, gold decorated black robe, called an *abayeh,* and a tarboosh circled by a white sash. Without a word, he settled his round figure in a chair, rested a pair of plump hands in his lap, and regarded me silently, impassively, as though wary of opening the conversation. In response to questions, he finally said, "What you see unsheathed in Palestine is the sword of Islam. Whenever they are beset, the Arabs will inevitably unsheath it."

With his Koran-flavored expressions, the Mufti acts the part of a devout and insular religious leader who is instinctively suspicious of outsiders, and not particularly interested in translating his thoughts for the benefit of uncomprehending visitors. When he feels himself under attack, he instantly withdraws, tortoise-wise, into a hard shell of silence. His face would be the envy of any poker-player. With its large Semitic nose and short, gray beard, it is strong and handsome, practically unmarred by the wrinkles that generally furrow the countenance of a man of 54. This granite perfection is the result of a manner habitually cold and inflexible. When he smiles, the movement of his lips is barely noticeable, and his small blue eyes remain somber.

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Like most Arab politicians, Haj Amin has a weakness for the more exotic varieties of food, and his chunky, five-foot-five figure has a tendency to bulge. However, he starts each day with Swedish calisthenics, and as a devout Moslem, he neither smokes nor drinks. Five times a day, without fail, he repeats the Moslem prayers, kneeling, touching his head to the floor eight times in fairly rapid succession. At eight he breakfasts on fruit and bitter, black Bedouin coffee, and then takes until eleven to read through his mail, the Arab press, and a pile of clippings selected by his staff from New York, Paris, and London newspapers. After this he holds a conference with Arab Higher Committee members and other advisers.

From then until after midnight a stream of visitors from all over the Moslem world flows through his small villa. The important ones—presidents, prime ministers, generals, and lieutenants who think nothing of flying 5,000 miles for a week of briefing—are ushered into his main office. The Mufti, wearing his cloth-wrapped tarboosh, sits behind an old table-desk, with his feet, like the late Fiorello La Guardia's, barely touching the floor. He seldom rises to greet his callers, but mumbles quickly the traditional Arab salutations and proceeds immediately to the political subject at hand. Occasionally, his secretary reserves time for plain citizens from the desert. He meets these tent-dwellers in an outer room, but the talk is on the same lofty level.

The Mufti's isolationist personality is no doubt a by-product of his most distinctive feature, a boundless capacity for hate. This has been vented primarily against the British and the Jews, but the flood tide of his umbrage pours over the West in general. He hates Western civilization with undisguised passion, and except when he fled to Germany during the war, has always given it a wide berth. Although he speaks fluent French, knows English and German, his reading has been strictly confined to Arabic literature, particularly its highly introspective, intricate poetry. In music the Mufti is devoted to the atonal Arabic chant, and Western harmonies fill him with disgust.

卐 PARADOXICALLY, his finest opportunity to vent his hatred of the West came during his wartime service to the Germans, when his prolific Arab propaganda bureau almost surpassed Goebbels' in denunciation of the Allied powers.

The corollary of these feelings is an intense Pan-Arabism. When I asked him if he were anticipating an early return to his homeland, he ruminated for a few moments and then said, "Palestine is not my home; it is only one of them. Cairo is home, and so is Syria.

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Whenever I am among my own people, I am home. Whenever I am away from them, I feel like a foreigner."

The Mufti today gives the impression of a man hermetically sealed in a cause, and this self-dedication gives him a personality both humorless and flat-surfaced. His intimate friends can recall few recent instances when he has lapsed into humor or trivialities. His grim fanaticism pervades any room he is in. Asked last winter about the Arabs' presumed lack of men and arms to wage a full scale war, his answer was, "Wait and see." Then he added: "Consequences do not disturb the Arab as they do the Westerner. The Jews do not reckon with this factor. If he is attacked, the Arab fights back regardless of the consequences. The fighting in Palestine has been inevitable since the first Jew set foot there."

But this really understated the Mufti's own role. War in Palestine is the goal that the Mufti set himself in the summer of 1946, and it is the goal that is now being achieved. The struggle now is only whether he, or other Arab rulers, will control the war.

The war had its real beginning near Paris on the soft gray morning of June 8, 1946. That day, the Mufti, who supposedly had been under French surveillance since his escape from Germany the year before, shaved off his beard, wrapped himself in an old mackintosh, trudged out of his house, and took a taxi to the airport. From there he flew to Cairo, where ambitious King Farouk was all too glad to shelter a visitor who would add greatly to Egypt's prestige. Despite the postwar increase in Jewish immigration, the Palestine issue had not fired the Arab masses, and moderate Arab leaders were seeking a compromise solution with Zionism. These were the very reasons why the Mufti chose so suddenly to return home.

Eighteen months later, on November 30, 1947, Haj Amin slipped into a small modern house in the outskirts of Damascus. There he met Fawzi Kawukji, the Junker-trained Arab who had been his military commander in the 1936-39 Palestine riots, his accomplice in the 1941 anti-Allied coup in Iraq, and a fellow exile in wartime Germany.

"The Arab League is falling into line," Haj Amin told his lieutenant. "Now is the time for you to begin again the continual raids against the Jewish communities that we developed in the 1936-1939 campaign."

Casualties in Palestine have steadily risen since that frontier meeting. Volunteers from the Arab states have streamed into Fawzi's camps for military training. The first raids were launched from Syrian territory. Then, in accordance with the Mufti's battle plan,

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Marriage of convenience: Moslem leaders, no love lost among them, at a meeting in Cairo. By harping on Islam's destiny, the fanatic Mufti (seated, left) welds such motley forces as Mohammed Ali Jinnah (next to him), head of India's twin nation, Moslem Pakistan; and moderate, Westernized Azzam Pasha (right), Arab League Secretary. Others are Egyptians, a Saudi Arabian, and a Moslem scholastic.

Fawzi moved his headquarters to the mountainous Nablus-Talkarem-Jenin triangle in northern Palestine. There the Mufti hoped to join him, once the British had gone and left him free to return to his native country.

The Mufti's campaign to persuade the Arab world to support active war in Palestine has combined persistence, intimidation, and shrewd use of extremist groups for his own ends. In Cairo, after his arrival from Paris, he had received no encouragement from Egypt's King Farouk, who was preoccupied with domestic problems, or from the Arab League. Its secretary, Abdul Rahman Azzam Pasha, a moderate in politics and the most Westernized of the Arab statesmen, believed he could settle the Palestine question favorably through international negotiation.

In action, the Mufti is protected by his official religious title from any display of public displeasure. His position in Palestine is based on family position, religious authority, and the strongest political machine in the Middle East. The Husseinis represent the landed aristocracy of Arab Palestine; they are a large family, and

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in a society which is still semi-feudal, Haj Amin is the tribal chief. Since the early '20s he has been president of the Supreme Moslem Council, which appoints local religious leaders throughout Palestine and neighboring Transjordan, and collects tithes for Moslem mosques. Recently, the Jewish Agency of Palestine protested against payment by the Palestine government to the Supreme Moslem Council of back tithes collected by the government during the war. The Jews maintained, with good reason, that this sum, nearly $1,000,000, would be used to swell the Mufti's war chest.

The main political instrument of the Mufti is the Palestine Arab Higher Committee, formed by the Mufti as a counterpart of the Jewish Agency, but never officially recognized by the British mandate government. The Committee, of which the Grand Mufti is chairman, was set up to run the 1936-39 war, and reconstituted in 1946. It holds no mandate from the Arabs; its ten members are appointed, not elected. It imposes taxes to collect a national defense fund, runs newspapers, and speaks for the Palestinian Arabs before the United Nations.

The Mufti enforces his policies in Palestine by ruthlessly intimidating all opposition elements. During the last three years, some two dozen political opponents have been murdered; others have fled the country and fear to return. The times favor extremism. Last fall, Sami Taher, a prominent and progressive Arab trade union leader, was shot down in cold blood in the city of Haifa. A colleague and lifelong friend shook his head sadly at the news and said, "I have always hated the Mufti's methods; he is a reactionary and dangerous. But what can we do? At the moment he is the only man who can save Palestine."

While he tightened his grip on Palestine, the Mufti waged a shrewd campaign within the Arab states. In Egypt, he made effective use of the extremist right-wing Moslem Brotherhood, which, supported by students, staged well-timed demonstrations in Cairo, shouting for revenge against the Jews. Fire-breathing statements began filling the Lebanon papers. In the lobbies of the Arab League conferences, the Mufti hammered away at the idea of *jihad*—the holy war. And as he stepped up the tempo of his propaganda campaign, the League leaders responded with nationalistic speeches, and slowly but surely the cry "Down with the Jews" was picked up all over the Arab world.

When the United Nations voted for partition last November, Azzam Pasha of the Arab League announced that the Arab states would not meet the decision with force. Haj Amin waited only one day and then struck. Demonstrations of un-

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precedented violence shook the major cities of the Middle East. Two days later the word went out again, and the demonstrations were turned off like a faucet. Arab League opposition crumbled. Secretly it voted the Mufti one million Egyptian pounds (roughly $3,000,000) to buy arms. And on February 21, 1948, the League reportedly agreed to prohibit the laying of pipelines by American and British oil firms.

The Arab states, knowing there is a gold mine in oil royalties, had signed contracts permitting transit rights. In Saudi Arabia, an aide of the Mufti failed to persuade King Ibn Saud and Prince Feisal to cancel American oil concessions, but they agreed to go along with any Arab League decision on pipelines. In Syria and the Lebanon, through whose territory the lines would pass, a sensational newspaper campaign by extremist adherents swung those governments, too, into line.

Although the Mufti finds it easy to arouse most Arabs to open their mouths and shout, he has considerably more difficulty in getting them to open their pocketbooks. One of his fund-raising techniques was recently illustrated in Beirut. On three successive nights the quiet Lebanese capital was shaken by explosions and four-alarm fires. The bombed houses belonged to native Jewish merchants who hadn't paid up, but everybody took the hint and donations spurted noticeably.

Many of the other Arab leaders consider Haj Amin their arch enemy. He is hated by the Regent of Iraq, who fled to safety when the Mufti organized a pro-Axis coup in Iraq in 1941, and feared by ambitious King Farouk of Egypt, who aspires to leadership of the Arab League. He is a constant irritant of King Ibn Saud, who cares more for American oil royalties than for Palestine.

But the Mufti's bitterest and potentially most dangerous foe is little King Abdullah of Transjordan. Through a lifetime of disappointment Abdullah has dreamed of creating a Greater Syrian state (including Transjordan, Arab Palestine, Syria, the non-Christian part of Lebanon, and Iraq). His British-trained army, the finest in the Middle East, is right across the border. Only the British and the jealousy of his fellow rulers in the Arab League have deterred him from grabbing the non-Jewish part of Palestine.

Although the Mufti's adherents are firmly in the saddle in Palestine, he is hated by many of the Palestinian Arabs. His last attempt to liquidate the Holy Land's Jews, the series of bloody riots from 1936 to 1939, cost more Arab lives at the hands of other Arabs than Jewish and British lives. Some of Jerusalem's best families accused Haj Amin of gunpoint extortion, appropriating re-

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ligious funds for his own uses, muzzling the press, and adopting assassination as a political weapon.

Considering his diverse crop of enemies, people are constantly wondering who, if anyone, is behind the Mufti. Haj Amin has had uncanny success in his raids on government treasuries. In Iraq in 1940, for example, the Parliament voted to deduct 2 per cent of the salary of every government worker to support him and his staff. The money was immediately used to overthrow the government.

His political career, however, he owes solely to the British. The relations between Haj Amin and Great Britain constitute a major political enigma. Years ago, Winston Churchill called the Mufti "the deadliest enemy of the British Empire." Yet the British Foreign Office has steadfastly refused to recognize him as such, and this odd self-delusion has been maintained regardless of the complexion of the government in power.

Had it not been for the attitude of the British government, Haj Amin would in all likelihood have spent most of his life in jail. As it is, his story reads like a six-part, Saturday-matinee movie serial.

It started in April 1920, when Arab mobs subjected the Jewish quarter of Jerusalem to four days of pillaging and massacre. A British board of inquiry established that the raids had been carefully planned, and at later trials Haj Amin was charged with prime responsibility. He fled to Syria to escape imprisonment.

Trigger man: Fawzi Kawukji, field commander of the Arab guerrilla forces in Palestine, has been fighting the Mufti's battles for almost 15 years.

The next year, the British High Commissioner, Sir Herbert Samuel (the only Jew ever to hold the job) granted the young Husseini a pardon. He followed this by selecting Husseini, over the heads of three other contenders, for the post of Mufti of Jerusalem (to which his associates added the tag of "Grand"). In 1920, a second blaze of disturbances broke out which the then High Commissioner described as "acts of unspeakable savagery." Once more Haj Amin

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was spotted as the ringleader, but this time he was only slapped on the wrist.

Late in 1937, after eighteen months of Arab-instigated terror in the Holy Land, the British finally rounded up the members of the troublesome Arab Higher Committee. But British troops waited four days before searching his Jerusalem hiding-place. He slipped away disguised as a peasant woman. Four years later, in 1941, when British troops marched into Iraq to suppress the Mufti-organized pro-Nazi revolt there, he again eluded them, this time to Berlin.

From 1941 to 1945, the Mufti was the No. 1 non-Axis participant in Hitler's war machine. He formed Moslem parachute groups in the Balkans, a Moslem espionage unit, and finally a full-fledged Arab brigade. Documents read at the Nuremberg trials provided evidence that he had played a central role in the program for the extermination of Europe's Jews.

For these reasons Switzerland refused him sanctuary at the war's end, and he was picked up by French troops. Despite his war record, British Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin declined to ask for his extradition, refused to brand him a war criminal, and left him to house arrest by the French. When he left Paris a year later, the house arrest had been so relaxed that it was unnecessary for him to "escape."

It is commonly assumed that British governments have played this game of cops and robbers with the Mufti in an effort to retain the friendship of the Arabs. The United States seems to have adopted the same attitude. Both should know that this is a feeble hope. Anyone who took ten dollars for every pro-British or pro-American Arab he could find in the Middle East today would starve to death in a week. If the Mufti is ever victorious in Palestine, he will surely become the head of the new Arab state, and he will oppose all Western influence. He is even now contemplating turning the Arab Higher Committee into a government-in-exile, with himself as leader.

Recently, a prominent Arab business man recalled some advice he had given the British Colonial Secretary in 1939.

"I suggested," he told me, "that if Britain wanted to solve all of its problems in the Arab world, it needed only to get the Mufti back to Palestine at once. He would have been bumped off within two days after getting there. Today," my informant continued, "no advice could be further from the mark. The Mufti has now put extremism in the saddle of the Middle East, and there is nothing the moderates can do but follow him. He has become a national hero. If you ask me, he's the coming Fuehrer of Islam."

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"Kill the Jews": At Mufti-inspired demonstrations like this, thousands of Arab tribesmen, whipped into a frenzy, volunteer to fight his war in Palestine.

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