

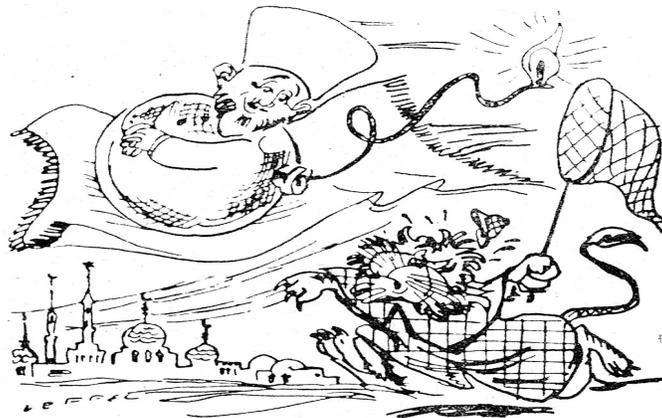


## Nazis on the Run

### *Tripartite Networks in Europe, the Middle East and America*

Gerald Steinacher, a historian from the West Austrian town of Innsbruck, is known for his solid research on the federal state of Tyrol under the Third Reich. His new book reconstructs how Nazis fled from Europe via Italy to South America after the end of World War II. The author also claims that his research proves that stories about a secret organization of former SS members are nothing more than a myth. According to this thesis, ODESSA, the **O**rganisation **D**er **E**hemaligen **S**S **A**ngehörigen (Organization of Former SS Members), did not exist. Before dealing with this finding in the context of the Middle East, an overview of the book is in order.

Steinacher first discusses the southern escape route via Rome to Genoa and other Italian towns. He then explores the mechanism of obtaining a new identity through Red Cross papers, and details how Vatican circles provided assistance. The reader learns all about the “Rat Run” from Germany through Italy and finally to the safe haven of Argentina. Italy, Steinacher notes, was Europe’s backyard. But it was also, like Spain and Portugal, the Middle East’s front yard.



Weltecho, Simon Wiesenthal 1947, 63

1946: On the hunt for Eichmann and the Grand Mufti

Three major organizations helped the Nazis escape from Europe. The Catholic Church believed this effort would contribute to the “re-Christianization” of Europe and feared the threat to Europe of paganism and communism. In the pursuit of its political and spiritual interests, it was quick to forgive Nazi war criminals. The CIA, in the context of the Cold War, was eager to do business and assist former Nazis, such as Klaus Barbie. In addition, the International Red Cross demonstrated great sympathy for war criminals and issued some twenty-five thousand identity documents. Steinacher deals with all this, but some earlier organizations for helping Nazi fugitives are missing such as *Edelweiss*, *Spinne*, and *Sechsgestirn*.

Steinacher also defines three Nazi groups: those who (a) committed suicide at the war's end or later, (b) were indicted or punished, or (c) fled overseas, mostly to Argentina. The real numbers are not available. The author estimates that 180 leading Nazis emigrated to Argentina. Others speak of about three hundred to eight hundred making their way to that country. Uki Goni reported that Argentine still protected about 49 files of Nazi immigrants in 2003.<sup>1</sup> Recently, the independent German researcher Volker Koop estimated that six hundred Nazis emigrated including those with expert knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

Information for the Middle East, which is not a main topic of this book, is hard to find. We know of three dozen cases of Nazi immigrants – in North Africa including Algeria and Tunisia, in Arab neighbors of Israel, and in Saudi Arabia and Iran. Indications also point to Afghanistan and Pakistan.



For Muslim soldiers only: Nazi booklet *Islam and Jewry* containing the Grand Mufti's 1937 appeal to all Muslims to cleanse their lands of Jews

For 1964 onward, estimates of the number of Nazis living in Arab countries climb beyond three thousand with Egypt as their main destination. This may be valid if one includes professional experts and advisers, technicians, and physicians, such as Aribert Heim who died in Cairo in 1992 but became the subject of news reports only in 2008. In addition for the Middle East, there are other categories of former Nazis such as: (d) combatants who fought in wars in 1949, 1956, or 1964 in Palestine/Israel, Egypt, and Algeria; (e) bureaucratic “shadow warriors” in fields of security, prison administration, education and propaganda; (f) military experts and (g) diplomats. For lack of archival access, and because many changed their names when converting to Islam, especially the “shadow warriors” are difficult to trace.

### Clerical Collaborators

Steinacher similarly describes “de-Nazification through conversion” to Catholicism as a means of obtaining assistance. He notes the role of the pro-Nazi bishop Alois Hudal and of the monastery escape route. Hudal tried to build bridges between the Nazi ideology and the Church.<sup>3</sup> In 1937, he sent his book *The Foundations of National Socialism* to Hitler. The Grand Mufti of Jerusalem sought a similar ideological convergence; as early as 1937 Hajj Amin al-Husaini appealed to all Muslims to cleanse their lands of Jews.<sup>4</sup> The Nazis made a booklet of his appeal, added a section on Islam and Bolshevism, and translated it for their Muslim soldiers.<sup>5</sup>

However, there was a difference between these clerical collaborators with the Nazis. Whereas Hudal said that fighting Jews as a race was anti-Christian, al-Husaini aspired to fight them as race. According to Hudal's ideological reasoning, a conflict could be settled if ideologies became compatible. According to al-Husaini's racist approach, the conflict was existential and could only end by the annihilation of the other side, which could never change its race.<sup>6</sup>

As for Nazi military experts (category f), Cairo employed two units as advisers from 1949 to 1956. Ex-general Wilhelm Fahrmbacher led a group of military experts called "Armed Forces" with thirty-one men, and Wilhelm Voss of the Nazis' wartime Škoda factories (he was not one of Hitler's adjutants as claimed on p. 290) led the unit called "Research Center for Explosives and Weapons" with fifteen men in 1953.<sup>7</sup> Their numbers grew, but their contracts were not renewed when the Egyptians became aware that Israel had forged links with them for spies such as Max Bineth. These developments were intertwined with Israel's Lavon Affair, which involved faulty espionage actions in Egypt and led to Defense Minister Pinhas Lavon's resignation in 1954. The affair also gave Jamal Abd an-Nasir a pretext to overthrow and succeed President Muhammad Najib.<sup>8</sup>



1975 Cover of Najib's Memoirs

President Muhammad Najib hired Germans as advisers 1949-56;  
his successor Abd an-Nasir preferred East Germans since 1965

However, with Argentina hoping to attract up to half a million Germans right after the war, and President Juan Perón's former Nazi experts building the country's first jet fighter, the Pulqui II, in 1951, an example was also provided for the Arabs. President Abd an-Nasir hired the aircraft designer and manufacturer Willy Messerschmitt and the missile expert Wolfgang Pilz, who in 1964 got Egypt's first jet fighter, the Hulwan 300, airborne. Since Messerschmitt's company also maintained a presence in Spain, Nazi circles there connected with Cairo as well. When the project ran short of money, India ultimately took over key parts for its Marut 24 jet.

As for the category of former Nazi diplomats (g), this is usually disregarded though it is a missing dimension at least for the Middle East. Some rebuilt old networks. For his part, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer insisted on reemploying so called indispensable experts despite their Nazi backgrounds. Too many became envoys of the Bonn Republic – an outrage that had long-term results. In 1947, West Germans drew up a list of 576 names as candidates for their future Foreign Service. Indeed, that number of people staffed the service at the end of 1952. Of these, 195 had been Nazi Party members, 158 were from the old Foreign Ministry, and fifty-seven had had involvement with the Middle East.<sup>9</sup> More research on these diplomats' ties with emigrant Nazis and their Islamist counterparts is required to substantiate the long-lasting "brown-green" relationship.

New evidence has emerged on how these individuals overtly and covertly interacted. Steinacher mentions the 1974 movie *The Odessa File* based on the book by Frederick Forsyth that appeared two years before. Steinacher warns against falling for a myth that there was one organization under this cover name (7, 16, 296). So far the author's main thesis.

But here is the problem: Beginning in the late 1940s and for the Middle East in the mid-1950s, American agents reported on ODESSA and pointed also at tripartite circles of ex-Nazis in South America, the Middle East, and Europe. After the fall of Perón's regime, the Argentine haven became less hospitable and some ex-Nazis took jobs in the Middle East often with Amin al-Husaini's support.

~~ATTACHMENT 110~~

!! / RANDOM NOTES  
DEM

ODESSA's latest planned escape was for HANS WALTER ZECH-  
NENNTWICH, Ex-Capt. SS. This man was up for trial for the  
mass murder of 5,200 Polish Jews at PINSK. His escape to  
Egypt from BRUNSWICK PRISON.

ODESSA - its initials are for Organization DER ENEMALIGEN  
S. S. ANGEHÖRIGEN (organization of former members of the SS).

This Organization is also known as the "Spider's Web".

Head of ODESSA in Spain is former SS Colonel Otto "Scar-  
face" SKORZENY of resc (?) Mussoline fame.

Of the 2,000 odd ex-members of Hitler's SS Gestapo & SD  
members I list some of the most important on the wanted list  
and also active members of ODESSA: at present in Lima is OMAR  
AMIN VON LEERS who is Johann (or Johannes) von Leers - has  
made contact with Federico Schwend for the buying of queer  
dollar bills. The amount to be bought will be that of the equi-  
valent of \$100,000 real monies. The price set is at 47 on the  
dollar - the plates made for "Operation Berhardt" of \$10, \$20,  
\$50 and \$100 are now in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

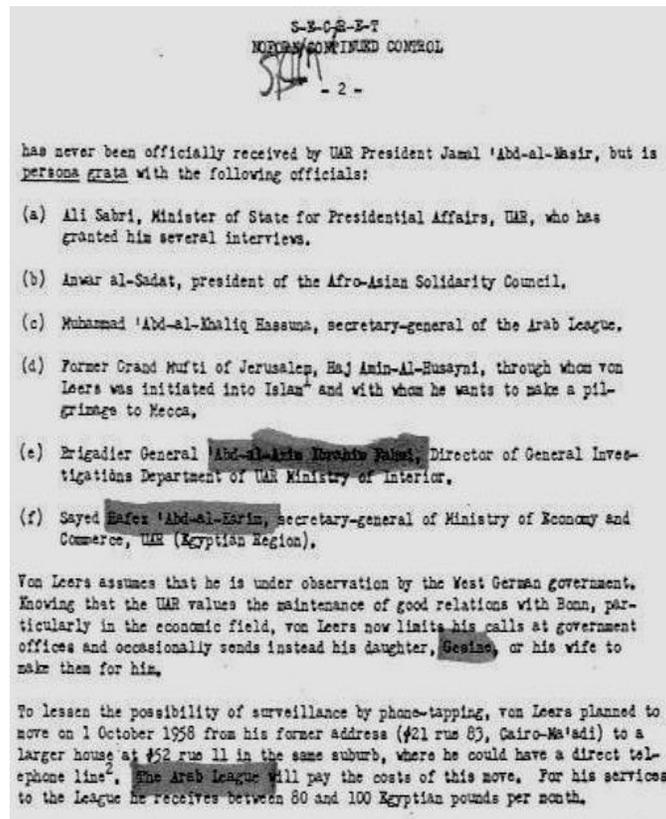
This queer monies are said to be sent to Cuba and then to  
find its way to the US. The \$100,000 in this writing is being  
given by the Egyptian Government.

One of ODESSA's main contact here is Baron Von Sothen at  
present second to the German Ambassador in Peru. At present  
he is now in Rio de Janeiro apparently on a month's vacation  
with wife and children - it is known the Baron von Sothen is  
still an ardent NAZI.

Source: See endnote 11

A 1965 report by the CIA on ODESSA activities in South America and the Middle East. It illuminates the tripartite networks of the *Spider's Web* in Europe, in the Middle East and America. Obvious becomes here the escape of a wanted SS man to Egypt as well.

For example the odious agitator Johann von Leers moved from Buenos Aires to Cairo to work in anti-Israeli campaigns sponsored by Abd an-Nasir's circle and the Arab League.<sup>10</sup> He met men of the former Third Reich such as Anwar as-Sadat, who had been a spy for the Nazis, members of the two above mentioned units (category f), and many (e) "shadow people" in Middle Eastern bureaucracies.



Source: See endnote 10

### 1958 report on Johann von Leers' network in Cairo

American intelligence services monitored Nazi organizations that spanned those three regions. They mentioned for instance "List 1" of two thousand ex-members of the SS and the Gestapo, of which the most important ODESSA members were also on their *Most Wanted* list. Intelligence reports since 1964 often named ODESSA networks. Leers was said to be the new regional leader of the *Spider's Web* network, as it was also known, in Cairo, and former SS colonel Otto Skorzeny was said to be its leader in Spain. In Cairo, Amin al-Husaini met with Skorzeny in early 1953 to work out weapons deals.<sup>11</sup>

### An Outstanding Contribution

Three conclusions emerge. First, ODESSA was very much a reality and an operational term for American intelligence since 1947 when it appeared for the first time in reports. To which degree Simon Wiesenthal contributed by his related reports to the Americans remains an open question.<sup>12</sup>

Although Steinacher is correct in including all the regional networks in his purview, he is not right to claim that ODESSA was nothing but a myth. To maintain this thesis one needs to prove hundreds of American intelligence reports, which used the term ODESSA, to be wrong, or one has to allege that those reports were just inventions by agents.

ODESSA was at least a roof network or common operational platform of cooperating individuals and groups just as Steinacher defines the networks (259). He mentioned Heinz Schnepfen's book on ODESSA but does not discuss his main arguments in detail, although Schnepfen offered examples of early texts on ODESSA like the U.S. intelligence report of 26 February 1948.<sup>13</sup>

Second, for the Middle East we need to include the Middle Eastern brown-green webs of ex-Nazi diplomats and their Islamist counterparts. Not only the Americans utilized ex-Nazis for intelligence and anticommunist purposes. The Muslim leaders did the same, but they also wanted the ex-Nazis' anti-Jewish know-how for the struggle against Israel. In the Middle East, the Nazis' influence, and the camaraderie with them, never ceased. It was also "diplomatically rebuilt" by former Nazi diplomats serving in Bonn again (category g) and passed down through the generations.

As Steinacher shows in a notable example of these interactions, former SS colonel Walter Rauff, hidden by Bishop Giuseppe Siri of Genoa, fled to Damascus in 1947. In late 1949 he used a Red Cross document and the fake name Bauermeister to flee from Genoa to Ecuador. There he worked for the Bayer Corporation and became a "rat runner."

In 1960, Rauff visited his homeland under his real name. During the war, if General Erwin Rommel had been victorious, Rauff would have led an SS unit with the purpose of rounding up the Jews of Cairo and later of Palestine. Rauff also invented the mobile gas vans that killed thousands of Jews, and after the Eichmann trial he was indicted for crimes against humanity,<sup>14</sup> prompting him to flee to Chile. Governments there protected him from further prosecution, and in 1984 he died peacefully in Santiago. His funeral became a gathering of old Nazis who greeted each other with "Heil Hitler!"

Finally, in another representative case, Steinacher notes that Skorzeny introduced Willem M. Sassen, a war reporter and wanted SS man, to Eichmann in Argentina in 1954 (248). Eichmann had arrived there on 14 July 1950 (296) as "Ricardo Klement, technician," carrying Red Cross papers. Hudal's circles had assisted him in his escape route. Thus, all of the above named groups contributed to this endeavor.

There are also new indications that Simon Wiesenthal discovered Eichmann's whereabouts in 1953 and proposed capturing him in Argentina in 1954. Why this actually took place six years later is another matter.

All in all, Steinacher's fine book provides much insight and the possibility to draw comparisons with related developments in the Middle East and elsewhere. For instance, there are many parallels and common characteristics between the functioning of *Al-Qa'ida* and of the networks of *Alte Kameraden*. Steinacher clarifies how the southern escape route worked, including the role of its unrepentant operators. *Nazis on the Run* is an outstanding academic contribution.

Wolfgang G. Schwanitz

**Gerald Steinacher:** Nazis auf der Flucht. Wie Kriegsverbrecher über Italien nach Übersee entkamen (Nazis on the Run: How War Criminals Escaped Overseas via Italy), Studien Verlag, 2008, 380 pp.

<sup>1</sup> Uki Goni, *ODESSA* (Berlin: Assoziation A 2006), 9-10.

<sup>2</sup> Volker Koop, *Hitlers Fünfte Kolonne. Die Auslandsorganisation der NSDAP* (Hitler's Fifth's Column: The Foreign Organization of the NSDAP) (Berlin: Bebra, 2009), 260. [German]

<sup>3</sup> Alois Hudal, *Die Grundlagen des Nationalsozialismus* (The Foundations of National Socialism) (Leipzig: Günther, 1937). [German]

<sup>4</sup> Muhammad Sabri, *Islam-Judentum-Bolschewismus* (Berlin: Juncker-Dünnhaupt, 1938), 5-21 [German], therein also the chapter Amin al-Husaini, *Islam-Judentum* (Berlin: Juncker-Dünnhaupt, 1938), 22-32: "Aufruf des Großmuftis an die islamische Welt" (Appeal of the Grand Mufti to the Islamic World. [1937, German]

<sup>5</sup> For instance, for [Bosniaks](#) in SS units: *Veliki Muftija Jeruzalimski: Islam i Židovstvo* (The Grand Mufti of Jerusalem: Islam and Jewry) (Zagreb: Croat Printing, 1943). [Serbian]

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey Herf, *Hitlers Jihad*, in *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* (2010)2, 280-81: Al-Husaini in an Arabic broadcast from Berlin to the Middle East: Arabs and Jews are in a struggle of races which ends only when one of the sides is finished.

<sup>7</sup> Wolfgang G. Schwanitz, *Deutsche in Nahost 1946-1965* (Germans in the Middle East 1946-1965) (Munich: Haensel-Hohenhausen, 1998), Vol. 1, 208: "List of experts in both units, Cairo 04/30/53." [German]

<sup>8</sup> For more, see reviews by Wolfgang G. Schwanitz on Shabtai Teveth, *Ben-Gurion's Spy: The Story of the Political Scandal That Shaped Modern Israel*, in *Orient*, 38 (1997): 3, 567-570, and of Khalid Muhi ad-Din, *Wa al-An Atakallamu* (Now I Am Talking), in *Der Islam*, 73 (1996): 2, 360-363.

<sup>9</sup> See my review of the [biographical handbook](#) of the [German Foreign Service](#) [German]; Wolfgang G. Schwanitz, "'Doppelte': deutsche Gesandte in Kairo 1953-1963," in Wajih Atek and Wolfgang G. Schwanitz, eds., *Misr wa Almaniya fi al-Qirnain at-Tasi'a Ashara wa al-'Ishrin fi dhau al-Watha'iq* (Egypt and Germany in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries as Reflected in Archives) (Cairo: Dar ath-Thaqafa, 1998), [Part 2](#), [212](#): "NSDAP Member List of 10/20/52;" [German] See also Kurt P. Tauber, *Beyond Eagle and Swastika. German Nationalism since 1945* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press 1967), 229-243.

<sup>10</sup> US National Archives II, RG263, CIA Name/Subject Files, B12, Report on Leers, Cairo 09/19/56, 1; Propaganda Activities of Dr. Johann von Leers against Israel and West Germany [08/28-09/09/58], Secret, Cairo 03/12/59, 3 pp.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., Regional Security Officer, Memorandum on Cesar Ugarte, ODESSA, Nazis, Lists, Cairo 04/29/65, 1-8; Amin al-Husaini, *Muzakkirat al-Hajj Muhammad Amin al-Husaini* (The Memoirs of al-Hajj Muhammad Amin al-Husaini), ed. Abd al-Karim al-Umar (Damascus: Al-Ahali, 1999), 177. [Arabic] For a variation of the CIA information in connection with Federico Schwend see also Guido Knopp: *Die SS. Eine Warnung an die Geschichte* (Munich: Bertelsmann 2002), 343 [German].

<sup>12</sup> Simon Wiesenthal, *Ich jagte Eichmann* (I Haunted Eichmann) (Gütersloh: Mohn 1961) [German]

<sup>13</sup> Heinz Schnepfen, *ODESSA und das Vierte Reich* (ODESSA And The Fourth Reich) (Berlin: Metropol 2007), 19: Counter Intelligence Corps, Alleged Member Of ODESSA Group, German Source, 02/19/48 [German].

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., Ambassador Report, in 05/05/42 Rauff wanted "to discuss the liquidation of the Jews in Cairo following the capture of that city by the German forces. Rommel was disgusted and sent him home." [Cairo 06/01/45, 2.]