Leading Nazi propagandist urged Europe to unite under Islam according to 1957 CIA report | The ‘epiphany’ and conversion of Johann von Leers | وجماعة الإخوان المسلمين

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johann-von-leers

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“…. In 1932, I withdrew from the Christian Church after I found that it was a Jewish sect and no path to religion.”41 He added that “the Christendom of the West is on the road to decay, and the destiny of its churches is moral disintegration, so that they became the allies of international Zionism and medium of Israeli propaganda.”42 …

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Part of Leers’ political attitude is apparently due to his conversion to Islam, which was accompanied by a change in his name to Dr. Omar Amin von Leers. He is becoming more and more a religious zealot, even to the extent of advocating an expansion of Islam in Europe in order to bring about stronger unity through a common religion. This expansion he believes can come not only from contact with the Arabs in the Near East and Africa but with Islamic elements in the USSR. The results he envisions as the formation of a political bloc against which neither East nor West could prevail… […]

Some of his major ideas which, at the time, seemed beyond belief include: spreading political antisemitism and anti-Zionism to the Third World and bringing about the Islamization of Europe by encouraging mass migration in order to change its demographics and to undermine its Christian traditions and culture.”

In fact, Nazis and the Muslim collaborators highly successful in bringing political antisemitism and antiZionism to the the Third World. For more on how this was done see:

The Left’s Dirty Little Secret: Tracing the Left’s decades long collaboration with the Far Right

The Postwar Career of Nazi Ideologue Johann von Leers, aka Omar Amin, the “First Ranking German” in Nasser’s Egypt

Abstract

Johann von Leers, aka Omar Amin (1902-1965), was one of the foremost antisemitic propagandists of the Third Reich. He hated Jews and Judaism, as well as Christianity, which he regarded as a Jewish sect. As a young man, he had reached out to Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. In 1928, he joined the NSDAP, and in 1935, the Allgemeine (general) SS where he received the honorary rank of SS-Sturmbannfuehrer (Major). Like many war criminals of his generation, he was a well-bred and cultured intellectual.

In February 1956, the Government of Egypt engaged Leers to write antisemitic and anti-Zionist propaganda. He thus embodies the postwar continuation of absolute, ideologically pure Nazi doctrine as well as the German traditions of global geopolitics. In Egypt, von Leers achieved access to power and considerable influence.

Our sources are incomplete. Nonetheless, one may achieve a reasonable understanding of Leers’ ideas and plans and their intended consequences.

I. The Career of Johann von Leers and the Historical Problem

Johann von Leers, aka Omar Amin(1902-1965), was one of the foremost antisemitic propagandists of the Third Reich. Beyond hating Jews, Judaism, and Christianity, he possessed distinctive geopolitical views. He advocated cooperation between Germany and the Muslim world and, like members of the Junker class and military elite, he viewed Russia as Germany’s natural ally. Accordingly, he considered the Nazi invasion of the USSR a blunder. As a young man, Leers wrote propaganda against Zionist settlement in Mandatory Palestine and, even before the Second World War, had reached out to Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. In 1929, he joined the NSDAP. From 1930-1931, Leers was a member of the SA reserves and, in 1935, he joined the Allgemeine (general) SS where he received the honorary rank of SS-Sturmbannführer (Major).1 In April 1938, he was named full professor at the Friedrich-Schiller University in Jena. His area of expertise was “Legal, Economic, and Political History on a Racial Basis” (Rechts-, Wirtschafts- und politische Geschichte auf rassischer Grundlage). He demonstrated a talent for languages and was proficient in English, French, Spanish, Dutch, Japanese, Hungarian and Arabic.2 In his biographical dictionary, Who’s Who in Nazi Germany, the late Professor Robert Wistrich gave the following information on von Leers’ career:

…. A district speaker and leader of the National Socialist Students’ League, von Leers came to the attention of Goebbels and was assigned to write Party propaganda, producing a stream of twenty-seven books between 1933 and 1945 dealing in popularized form with Nazi ideology. An expert on the Jewish question, on theories of ‘blood and soil’ and the doctrine of the Germanic master race, von Leers achieved early notoriety with his book, Juden Sehen dich an [Jews are looking at you!], published in 1933 and dedicated to the ‘gallant’ Julius Streicher.3

Leers escaped to Argentina in 1950 where he remained until the overthrow of Juan Perón in 1955. During his stay in Buenos Aires, Leers, a prolific writer, edited the National Socialist and fascist journal, Der Weg (The Way), and contributed to an anti-Jewish campaign commissioned by the embassy of Egypt in Argentina. It is noteworthy that even at this early date the Government of Egypt sponsored antisemitic activities abroad. In retrospect, it has become evident that incitement against Israel and the Jews remained a consistent part of Egyptian policy. The CIA reported that General Hassan Fahmy Ismael [the Egyptian military attaché] recruited him for service in Egypt.4 According to Marco Sennholz, Leers’ biographer, Fahmi served as the intermediary for Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem, who offered him a safe refuge in Egypt.5 In February 1956, the Government of Egypt appointed Leers as political and propaganda advisor at the Information Department of the Ministry of National Guidance. He also was known as the “current Arab League representative for Germany in Cairo” and “Arab League advisor on German affairs.”6 In Cairo, he resumed his life’s work and later converted to Islam. Not surprisingly, Leers maintained his friendship with Hajj Amin who conducted his initiation into the Islamic faith.

Leers remained a Nazi. Today, one speaks of “ex-Nazis” or “former Nazis,” a legacy of the politically correct language introduced during the Cold War era. This approach is based on the fallacy that the passage of time changed the world views of such people, particularly if they could be used gainfully within the context of the Cold War. It would be more accurate to speak of “unrepentant Nazis” or Alte-Kameraden. In Egypt, von Leers achieved access to power and considerable influence, although we do not know precisely its extent or its duration. Thus, the attitude of Leers and his colleagues in Cairo that dates from the Third Reich is relevant to our understanding of the contemporary Middle East.

We know that Leers held an esteemed position in the Brotherhood of Nazi veterans. He corresponded with senior members of this group throughout the world and entertained prominent visitors from abroad, such as Wolf Rüdiger Hess, the son of Rudolf Hess. Leers also served as the head of an organization whose purpose was to assist former SS men in their escape from Europe.7 By definition, he had to possess high rank and the discretionary facility to manage large sums of money.

II. Methodology

The purpose of this paper is to identify and describe certain themes of Nazi thought that von Leers propagated as part of his work. These resulted in the spread of hatred and creation of a nearly insurmountable mental barrier that would obstruct the path leading to accommodation and reconciliation for generations.8 We shall begin by explaining the special nature of Nazi criminality of which Leers was a part and reconstruct his world view. Many of his ideas (and those of his colleagues) have persisted to our times with several permutations.

Our basic primary source is the CIA file on Leers in Cairo, which became available through the Freedom of Information Act. The reports in this file contain several types of data: biographical information; a comprehensive description of the subject’s circle of contacts; access to power and estimated degree of influence. In addition, Leers left us with an autobiographical statement, “Warum ich Muslim wurde,” explaining why he became a Muslim. This statement first appeared in Arabic in February 1964 in the Islamic publication Mimbar al Islam (The Pulpit of Islam).9 In addition, there are several informative first-hand accounts. In August 1956, William Stevenson, a reporter from the Toronto Star, held what seems to have been an unauthorized interview with Leers.10 In addition, the Israeli spy, Wolfgang Lotz (the “Champaign Spy”) socialized with von Leers at his home. He described the man, his wife, and the ambience of his social circle.11

There is also a body of published scholarship on von Leers. In recent years, Marco Sennholz and Martin Finkenberger have published fine biographical studies.12 In his pioneering book, Dreamer of the Day, Kevin Coogan described the outlook of several prominent, twentieth-century fascist ideologues and published essential passages from Leers’ letters that he discovered in the archives of the Hoover Institute.13 Historian Ulrike Becker of Berlin has been writing a dissertation about West-German relations with Egypt and the impact of National Socialism. She has also been particularly generous in sharing information with the author. Becker devoted careful research to the presence in Egypt of several senior German military and industrial experts whom the Government of Egypt hired to help it destroy Israel and the permissive policy of the Bonn government.14

Beyond the basic facts, several authors have presented interpretations that enable us to understand this subject in a broader historical context. In his study entitled Blowback, Christopher Simpson identified the unintended negative consequences resulting from the CIA’s employment of “old Nazis,” particularly in the United States and in Europe.15 Although Simpson did not enter into thorough detail about Egypt, his basic interpretation regarding the unintended consequences of employing veterans of the Third Reich applies there as well.

III. The Special Characteristics of Nazi Criminality

One major, but frequently overlooked issue is the special nature of Nazi criminality. The horror of its reality shocked the world at the Nuremburg Trials, particularly with the “RuSHA Case,” or the Einsatzgruppen Trial, “which charged fourteen SS officers with carrying out systematic genocide.” The name “RuSHA” is an acronym for the Race and Settlement Office of the SS Elite Guard (Rasse und Siedlungshauptamt). The shock of the civilized world was compounded by the fact that the perpetrators were men of culture and education, largely from good middle class backgrounds. When Judge Michael Musmano (1897-1968) sent these criminals to the gallows (c. April 1948), he declared:

The defendants are not untutored aborigines incapable of appreciation of the finer values of life and living. Each man at the bar has had the benefit of considerable schooling. Eight are lawyers, one a university professor, another, a dental physician, still another, an expert on art. One, as an opera singer, gave concerts throughout Germany before he began his tour of Russia with the Einsatz commandos. This group of educated and well-bred men does not even lack a former minister, self-unfrocked though he was.16

Johann von Leers belonged to this class, of “educated and well-bred men,” to use the term of Judge Musmano. He was a professor and intellectual who was born to the lesser nobility of Mecklenburg. Members of this generation were young, ambitious and totally lacking scruples. Leers had contributed directly to the process that led to genocide by inciting against the Jewish people, spreading hatred against Jews, targeting them, and bringing about their isolation in society. Under the Third Reich, Leers worked for Goebbels as an active speaker and prolific author of antisemitic literature. (It is noteworthy that, in 1935, Leers and Goebbels had a falling-out. Subsequently, Leers became closer to the circles of Himmler and the SS.)17 One of his favorite themes was: “Unsere Aufgabe ist es, unerbittlichen Hass zu predigen.” (“Our task is to preach merciless hate [against the Jews].)” Scholars of the new field of genocide studies, notably Gregory Stanton, have identified incitement as one of eight stages of the genocide process.18 Under the Third Reich, Leers engaged in the process of dehumanization. After the war, he continued this work in Cairo.

Michael Wildt, a leading scholar and currently a professor at the Humboldt University of Berlin, has analyzed the distinctive nature of Nazi criminality in a comprehensive study of nearly one thousand pages, Generation des Unbedingten; Das Führungskorps des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes (Generation of the Unbound; The Leadership Corps of the Reich Security Main Office).19 Wildt describes a generation that came of age during the First World War but missed the opportunity to contribute to the German nationalist cause and achieve heroism. Members of this group longed to compensate for this by enthusiastically joining the National Socialist Movement. Johann von Leers belonged to this group.

Wildt also documented the process by which Germany ceased to be governed by law but rather by the police who could act arbitrarily without legal or moral constraints, and for which the ends totally justified the means:

….War made it easier to kill and made murder an everyday practice. The entire legal framework of a bourgeois society – insurance, property rights, financial agreements, and all other rules and regulations that could hinder RSHA operations – vanished in the occupied areas. There were no troublesome clerks and bureaucrats insisting on laws and agreements, no civil rights or criminal code; the RSHA could act as it saw fit without restraints or political considerations.20

In this environment, the logical consequence of unconstrained and unlimited hatred of the Jews, – or of any similar group, – was their total loss of rights and physical annihilation. Wildt identifies the correlation between a policy that branded the Jews as the national enemy and the removal of legal and moral boundaries, which the protection of the law had assured. He explained the nature of the total, genocidal antisemitism which Leers and others propagated, particularly in the Arab world.

The precedent of seeking the complete annihilation of one’s enemy possessed far-reaching consequences. For example, in his description of the anti-Israel demonstrations on the streets of Paris at the beginning of the Twenty-First Century, Pierre-André Taguieff uses the terms “absolute antisemitism,” “eliminationist” antisemitism, and “exterminatory” racism.21 This rabid antisemitism that brings fierce hatred to its genocidal conclusion may be traced to Nazi propaganda, the speeches of Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the PLO Covenant, the Hamas Charter, and more recent manifestations of antisemitic and anti-Israel propaganda.

IV. Von Leers’ World View in the Context of Nazi Ideology

Professor Eberhard Jaeckel devised a methodology that is applicable here as well. Arguing that Hitler held a “rigid set of fixed beliefs” that could be pieced together to form a coherent outlook, Jaeckel reconstructed Hitler’s world view, or Weltanschauung. His classic work appeared in English as Hitler’s World View: A Blueprint for Power. 22 Similarly, in the 1950s, H. R. Trevor-Roper defended the view that Hitler was capable of independent thought, even though his character and his ideas were revolting.23 Therefore, before discussing von Leers’ views, let us place them in the context of the wider cultural and political currents of the Nazi era.

The doctrine of the Third Reich reflects a distinctive approach toward geography and history. German and Nazi thinkers did not accept the geographical and political status quo as a given, but endeavored to create new facts in line with their preconceptions. This approach antedated the Nazi era and is significant because long-standing German geopolitical beliefs played an important role in forming the ideas of Nazi thinkers, including von Leers.

In 1919, after World War I, Halford J. Mackinder, the eminent British geographer and recognized pioneer of the field of geopolitics, described the place of geography in the German mind. His critical observations were colored by the recent experience of the Great War but are still timely:

…. It may be questioned, however, whether most people in Britain and America have fully realized the part played by the map in German education during the past three generations. Maps are the essential apparatus of Kultur,24 and every educated German is a geographer in a sense that is true of very few Englishmen or Americans. He has been taught to see in maps not merely the conventional boundaries established by scraps of paper, but permanent physical opportunities – ‘ways and means’ in the literal sense of the words. His Real-Politik lives in his mind upon a mental map….25

The outlook of Leers and of his Alte Kameraden working in Egypt must be viewed in this perspective. His background in geopolitical studies was essential in determining his approach. It was not by chance that, early on, Leers mastered many foreign languages, including Japanese; wrote books on geography and published an atlas of recent German history and a study of geographical flashpoints.26 He took a professional interest in geography and was influenced by the theories of leading German expert in geopolitics, Professor Karl Haushofer. (According to Trevor-Roper, it was probably Rudolf Hess, Haushofer’s student and Hitler’s fellow cell-mate in Munich, who transmitted the lessons of his teacher to Hitler.)27 Leers knew Haushofer personally and, in the 1930s, had invited him to deliver guest lectures at the Deutsche Hochschule für Politik, the German Academy for Politics, where he was a faculty member. The German Academy for Politics was part of the Nazi ideological apparatus. According to Marco Sennholz, “Haushofer represented [advocated] the idea of a transcontinental cooperation between Central Europe, Russia and Japan. The resulting Continental bloc would become the counterbalance to the Western world. Although Haushofer first formulated his thoughts in 1913 under completely different circumstances, he held the same views, despite the new realities. This consciously included partial cooperation with Bolshevik Russia. The idea of a cooperative relationship with Russia did not find approval among the ruling circles of the Third Reich.28 Instead, Hitler chose a war of annihilation. Trevor-Roper’s insights explain what this meant:

Russia’s crime was its existence, so its judgment was extermination. The war in the West was a traditional war, a war of diplomatic aims and limited objectives, in which some residue of international convention was regarded; the war in the East was a crusade, a ‘war of ideologies,’ in which all conventions were ignored. It is essential that we remember the basic anti-Russian significance of Nazism. All the general concepts of that terrible creed conceal a particular anti-Russian significance. Racialism means the supremacy of Germans to Slavs; ‘living space’ and ‘geopolitics’ mean the conquest of their territory; the rule of the ‘master race’ means the enslavement of their surviving population. Crusades require crusaders; and again it is in the anti-Russian character of Nazism that we find the significance of the S.S., the most fanatical, most mystical missionaries of the new gospel….29

Leers shared Haushofer’s outlook and the traditional conservative view that Russia was Germany’s natural ally.30 Many German ultra-conservatives considered that Russia was Germany’s natural ally. Following this tradition, by signing of the Treaty of Rapallo (1922), the leaders of Weimar Germany removed Bolshevik Russia from diplomatic isolation, and General Hans von Seeckt initiated a secret agreement of military cooperation which enabled Germany to evade the terms of Versailles. Trevor-Roper explained that members of the Junker class that formed the elite of the German general staff “were consistently opposed to war with Russia. Russia was the traditional ally of the German Junkers, whose prejudices … still dominated the General Staff. The Bolshevik Revolution did not alter this alliance, for they were practical men, above mere ideological conceptions; and in fact it was through an agreement with Bolshevik Russia that they contrived to keep a shadow army in existence during the dark days after Versailles ….”31

Even during the mid-1930s, Leers opposed the Nazi propaganda campaign against Bolshevik Russia. He wrote that because of his views he was unceremoniously fired from his teaching job (at the Deutsche Hochschule für Politik).32 After the war, Leers again went on record as being favorably-disposed toward Russia and its Communist regime. For thinkers and activists of the German nationalist right, Russia held the keys to the reunification of Germany. For example, a CIA report of March 1959 indicated that “he [Leers] is constantly pressing for the West German nationalist opposition to come to an agreement with the Soviet Union, on the theory that the Soviets should be brought in to clean up the West.” The report added that “after such a clean-up the Soviets should be removed by anti-colonial pressure and the Reich restored (sic!).”33

Leers told William Stevenson of the Toronto Star that after the war he was held in Russian and East German camps. Stevenson reported that “he [Leers] was sent into West Germany with Communist help, and, ironically, moved immediately into the Vatican Line…. His propaganda themes were curious because, on close examination, they promoted ideas that were far more helpful to Communism than anything else: ‘The Germans will unite again. Their natural friends are the Arabs. The Arabs must unite under Nasser….The Egyptian song is a modest song until Father Khrushchev joins in with his Russian balalaika.’”34 The fact that Leers was freed from Russian and East German prison camps also raises a basic question, namely, did he agree to work for his captors? This is a fair question, because he consistently demonstrated his support for the Soviet Union.

Recent scholarship on the practices and activities of radical groups has introduced the term, “crossovers.” Various researchers have noted the Red-Green Alliance and the Brown-Green Alliance. The subject deserves further study, because our understanding of Leers and his colleagues reflects a consistency of views combined with an unprincipled opportunism. Their positions were hostile to the United States and Britain and suited Egyptian policy which strove to hasten the end American influence in the Middle East.

Another fixed geopolitical belief of Hitler – and later, von Leers – is the assertion that it was a tragedy of history that Christianity defeated Islam at the beginning of the Middle Ages. This idea became fashionable in Germany of the Third Reich and in wider circles. In his recent study, Islam and Nazi Germany’s War, David Motadel discusses the development of such ideas extensively.35 He points out that Karl Haushofer devoted attention to the “geopolitics of religion” and published articles on the future role of Islam in world politics in the Zeitschrift für Geopolitik.36 Hitler admired Islam, and Himmler idealized it.37 Hitler’s architect and Minister of Armaments and War Production, Albert Speer has offered the most revealing statement on the subject:

Hitler had been much impressed by a scrap of history he had learned from a delegation of distinguished Arabs. When the Mohammedans attempted to penetrate beyond France into Central Europe during the eighth century… they had been driven back at the Battle of Tours [also known as the Battle of Poitiers which was fought on October 10, 732]. Had the Arabs won this battle, the world would be Mohammedan today. For theirs was a religion that believed in spreading the faith by the sword and subjugating all nations to that faith. The Germanic peoples would have become the heirs to that religion. Such a creed was perfectly suited to the Germanic temperament ….

Hitler usually concluded this historical speculation by remarking: ‘You see, it’s been our misfortune to have the wrong religion. Why didn’t we have the religion of the Japanese, who regard sacrifice for the fatherland as the highest good? The Mohammedan religion too would have been much more compatible to us than Christianity. Why did it have to be Christianity with its meekness and flabbiness?’38

In light of Leers’ ideological outlook, we must view his attitude to religion within the Nazi tradition. Beyond its clear hatred of Judaism, Nazi doctrine singled out and targeted what it called “Jewish Christianity” that had prevented the development of Germany’s pagan traditions. As mentioned above, Nazism rejects the constraints of morality and conscience which are part of Judaism and Christianity. In this very spirit, Hitler declared that he regretted that the Bible had been translated into German.39

Leers converted to Islam in 1957. In February 1964, he gave an autobiographical statement, “Why I became a Muslim,” which was published in Mimbar al Islam [The Pulpit of Islam] in Cairo.40 This article is an important source because it explains the development of his views and how he reached the decision to convert to Islam. “…. In 1932, I withdrew from the Christian Church after I found that it was a Jewish sect and no path to religion.”41 He added that “the Christendom of the West is on the road to decay, and the destiny of its churches is moral disintegration, so that they became the allies of international Zionism and medium of Israeli propaganda.”42

Leers favored Islam as a replacement to “Judeo-Christianity.” What stands out as a completely new idea is Leers’ proposal that there be an initiative which would undo the victory of Christianity over Islam in Europe and unleash a process that would hasten the Islamization of Europe. In 1957, his idea of bringing about the expansion of Islam in Europe would have been unthinkable. Six decades later, this reality is at our doorstep.

Leers viewed his conversion to Islam as a sign-post in his life. After undergoing this personal transition, he seized the opportunity to express his objection to Christianity. From his youth, he developed a hatred of Christianity and endeavored “to free Germany from the ‘imperialism of Jewish-Christianity’.”43

I felt bitterness later as a student during the lectures on history, because Charlemagne imposed the Christian Church on our nation, which became the basis for much misfortune in German history. I really hated him, and I have the feeling that, if destiny had not brought this on us, [it would have been possible] to develop our pre-Christian religion. Likewise, it was indeed a misfortune that the tyrant Charles Martell drove back the Muslims of Spain. They brought a higher culture, which would have [been transferred] to the German tribes….44

Similarly, the CIA report of October 24, 1957 described the effects of Leers’ conversion to Islam..

Part of Leers’ political attitude is apparently due to his conversion to Islam, which was accompanied by a change in his name to Dr. Omar Amin von Leers. He is becoming more and more a religious zealot, even to the extent of advocating an expansion of Islam in Europe in order to bring about stronger unity through a common religion. This expansion he believes can come not only from contact with the Arabs in the Near East and Africa but with Islamic elements in the USSR. The results he envisions as the formation of a political bloc against which neither East nor West could prevail. Leading Egyptian nationalists, however, disapprove of Leers’ conversion.45 [They may have feared that this type of religious zeal would have brought Leers closer to the Muslim Brotherhood.]

It is remarkable that Leers who was capable of rabid hatred, could crave the comfort of religion so desperately. In fact, Marco Sennholz notes that in his later years, Leers increasingly sought the comfort of Islam and refuge in the mosque.46 We may ask how it is possible that these Nazis who rejected “Jewish Christianity” and waged savage wars of annihilation felt more comfortable with Islam, and vice versa. This is a subject in its own right. One need only read Hajj Amin’s wartime sermon describing the natural affinity between Islam and Nazism.47

V. Von Leers and Egypt

Johann Von Leers arrived in Cairo one year after the Bandung Conference of Asian and African states (April 18-25, 1955). In this environment he combined his geopolitical ideas with the emerging Third-Worldism of the time and even wrote a book entitled The World Fight against Imperialism and Colonialism.48 Leers supported the insurgents in the Algerian War, and it is a matter of record that in this uprising the Government of Egypt and the Old Nazis lent them their active support. Leers saw an opportunity in the “wars of liberation” of the time and positioned his antisemitism within the context of Third-Worldism. A CIA document of October 8, 1956 reported: “Von Leers stated that he is working hard to convince two billion non-Europeans of the Jewish danger. He believes that if he succeeds in this effort, Jewish domination of Germany and the United States will no longer be important.”49 It is noteworthy that Leers had arrived in Egypt on June 15, 1956, and from this early date, he (and his employers) called for the destruction of Israel and targeted the so-called Jewish lobby. William Stevenson’s interview of August 1956 supports this view:

….Israel is abnormal. It is not big enough or fertile enough to supply millions of Jews for the homeland. It must go. It causes trouble. You may ask why Nasser spends time and money rallying Arabs outside Egypt against Israel when so much has to be done at home…. [The] Zionists are responsible for 90 percent of the world’s press attack on Nasser and Egypt.”50

Leers saw an opportunity in appealing to non-Europeans, and, – even if the strategy cannot be traced directly to him, – his innovative plan of mobilizing the Third World against Israel ultimately found expression in the deliberations of the United Nations, notably in the “Zionism is Racism” resolution of 1975. Similarly, the 2001 World Conference against Racism in Durban became the scene of an unprecedented mass outburst of political anti-Zionism and antisemitism.[51]

The extent of von Leers’ influence cannot be determined. It is likely, however, that Leers had greater influence than was generally thought. The CIA report of January 3, 1957, stated that “Hatem and the Egyptian General Staff [are] closely advised by ex-Nazis. Particularly close to Hatem is FNU [First Name Unknown] von Leers, former assistant to Goebbels.” Dr. Abdel Kader Hatem (1918-2015) became deputy premier and Egypt’s first information minister. He was also Egypt’s acting prime minister under Nasser’s successor Anwar Sadat during the “Six of October War against Israel in the 1970s.” Although in October 1957, the CIA estimated that Leers’ influence was low,52 eighteen months later, in March 1959, an information report had completely revised this opinion, stating that he had become the “First Ranking German there in terms of influence.”53 According to Sennholz, during his last years he was homesick and impoverished.54 During his good years, however, he seems to have enjoyed considerable respect and influence. This is confirmed by a CIA report based on information provided by “a West-German journalist with well-placed contacts in Cairo” and by the account of Wolfgang Lotz, the famous Israeli “Champaigne Spy.” The following are the relevant passages from the CIA report:

The relations of German-born Johannes (Umar Amin) von Leers with the UAR government, as advisor to the government on anti-Israel propaganda, have improved since 1957. Since moving to Egypt in 1956 he has become widely known and is apparently considered the first-ranking German in terms of confidence. He has never been officially received by UAR president Jamal ‘Abd-al-Nasir, but is persona grata with the following officials:

Ali Sabri, Minister of State for Presidential Affairs, UAR who has granted him several interviews.

Anwar al-Sadat, president of the Afro-Asian solidarity Council.

Muhammad ‘Abd-al-Khaliq Hassuna, secretary general of the Arab League.

Former Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin-al-Husayni, through whom von Leers was initiated into Islam and with whom he wants to make a pilgrimage to Mecca.

Brigadier General ‘Abid –al-Azim Ibrahim Fahmi, Director-General of Investigations Department of UAR Ministry of Interior.

Sayed Hafez ‘Abd-al-Karim, secretary-general of Ministry of Economy and Commerce, UAR (Egyptian Region). 55

These members of Egypt’s political class represent the most powerful leaders of the time. Some of them continued to hold office for many years. Ali Sabri was an ardent loyalist of Nasser and supporter of ties with the Soviet Union. Beyond the CIA’s factual mention of Anwar al-Sadat, it is noteworthy that he had been an ardent sympathizer and spy for the Third Reich. In his autobiography, Sadat wrote he had hoped that a Nazi victory would contribute to the independence of Egypt. Sadat held the following posts: member of the Revolutionary Command Council, Secretary-General of the Islamic Congress, editor-in-chief of Al-Gumhuriya, and Speaker of the National Assembly. He became the President of Egypt. Leers’ personal friend, the former Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin-al-Husseini, was a Nazi collaborator and a war criminal. We have noted above, Dr. Abdel Kader Hatem, Egypt’s first information minister. In light of von Leers’ access to such prominent figures, he must have had influence. The individuals noted above took Leers’ professional advice and possessed the power to act on it.

Separately, we have a first-person account that describes Leers in his social milieu, presumably at the height of his influence. Some historians may prefer official reports from the archives and would not lend credence to the first-person account of the famed Israeli spy, Wolfgang Lotz. Nevertheless, the testimony of Lotz should be regarded as a valuable primary source, which must be given full weight.

Wolfgang Lotz and his wife, Waltraud, attended a soirée at the home of Johann and Gesine von Leers at #52 rue 11 in the Cairo suburb of Ma’adi. They lived in a two-storey dwelling. According to Lotz, Leers ushered the couple into his spacious living room where there were close to thirty guests drinking cocktails and conversing in German, English, and Arabic. Among the guests was the infamous concentration camp doctor, Hans Kurt Eisele (whose escape from Europe was reportedly facilitated by Leers). During a private conversation on the veranda, Leers took Lotz aside and told him that he remembered him as a commander in the SS and asked him to admit to this past. Lotz evaded this request. Trying to win his confidence, Leers argued that “Goebbels trusted me – and also the Führer. I did not betray either.” Lotz recounted that the company passed the evening drinking, complaining about the locals, and singing Nazi songs. They concluded the evening by singing the Horst Wessel Song.56

Furthermore, significantly, in his interview with Stevenson, Leers stated that he was a gradualist and it was critically important for him to work with Nasser, who was the right man. Therefore, we may assume that Leers did indeed have a relationship with the President of Egypt. He continued:

….It is easier to deal through one leader who has a voice for all.

Yes, one leader for all Arabs, Gamal Nasser. I am not [a] prophet, but he has possibilities for a great leader. Hitler would have bursts of rage and wanted to finish everything in his lifetime. Nasser is a moderate man. He is a Moslem and he understands to let time take its course. He knows that the Egyptian horse is a strong horse but a slow one. 57

William Stevenson of the Toronto Star, recalls: “We had penetrated all the barriers to talk with a Nazi war criminal now held in respect and paid a large salary, plus all expenses, plus the cost of bringing his German wife and children from Argentina.”58 Stevenson got his scoop but at the same time may have unwittingly provided a credible conveyance for Leers’ ideas. It is more likely that Leers got the better of Stevenson. One need only read “Goebbels’ Principles of Propaganda” to understand his simple method.59

In conclusion, the extent of Leers’ influence and effectiveness upon the Egyptian government must be seen in context. The real power in the Republic of Egypt was concentrated among a small circle of leaders. Considering Leers’ rank and access to power, we may safely assume that he was the professional counterpart of other senior Nazi German advisors (among them, rocket scientists) commissioned by the Government of Egypt.60 There is no doubt that Leers and the other Nazi specialists were highly capable and dangerous. When he was arrested the first time after trying to interview General Naguib, Stevenson wrote: “A friendly Egyptian army sergeant said wryly, when I asked: ‘The Germans won. Our real boss is one of Rommel’s old staff officers, General Fahrmbacher.’”61 Wilhelm Fahrmbacher (1888-1970) served as the Senior Military Advisor to the Republic of Egypt.62

VI. Historical Context and Conclusion

On July 27, 1956, Nasser seized the Suez Canal. In the context of the era, the possibility that Nasser’s German advisors had encouraged him to take this bold step cannot be dismissed. In fact, it is more than likely, because such actions conformed with Egypt’s basic policy. Former panzer general and military advisor to the Egyptian government, Oskar Munzel (1899-1992) described the Egyptian strategic goals, as follows: “a) to drive the Jews out of Palestine, and, b) to detach England from the Suez Canal.”63 Indeed, after the fact, U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles facilitated Egypt’s seizure of this major strategic asset, abandoning America’s traditional allies without securing any political benefit. In his autobiography, Anwar Sadat gave credit to Dulles for rescuing Egypt in 1956 but added that Nasser had ungratefully thanked the Russians instead.64

The long-term effects of Leers’ efforts could not be known in his time nor could they be traced directly to him. Leers was a professional, and for the sake of self-preservation would not have wished to draw excessive attention to himself. The Government of Egypt and the Arab League probably adopted some of his ideas and also kept the matter secret. In order to succeed, Leers had to persuade only one or a few of the Egyptian leaders named above. With his strong communication skills, he probably was able to give his advice in Arabic. In addition, much of his work may have been tailored to Arabic-speaking audiences, although the CIA reports indicate that he also wrote propaganda in German and Spanish. In addition, Leers also disseminated his ideas among right wing circles abroad, which included antisemites and Holocaust deniers. It is possible to identify his main ideas and, retrospectively, a coherent geopolitical vision, which had its roots in German and Nazi traditions. Some of his major ideas which, at the time, seemed beyond belief include: spreading political antisemitism and anti-Zionism to the Third World and bringing about the Islamization of Europe by encouraging mass migration in order to change its demographics and to undermine its Christian traditions and culture.

Johann von Leers was a capable and formidable strategist. He was highly regarded by his contemporaries. His geopolitical teachings and antisemitic ideas more than likely had influenced the Egyptian government and shaped its propaganda themes over the last half-century. Leers helped spread the stubbornly persistent legacy of Nazism which included the teaching of genocidal hatred that has obstructed processes of reconciliation in the Middle East.

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