



Youssef Aboul-Enein, Basil Aboul-Enein. *The Secret War for the Middle East: The Influence of Axis and Allied Intelligence Operations during World War II.* Annapolis: Naval Institute Press. 256 pp. \$49.95 (e-book), ISBN 978-1-61251-336-2; \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-61251-309-6.

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The Region That Would Have Made a Difference

Nations in the Near East, such as Egypt, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Israel, are in the news daily. Brothers Youssef and Basil Aboul-Enein visit these countries in *The Secret War for the Middle East: The Influence of Axis and Allied Intelligence Operations during World War II*. The ten-chapter text examines the impact the battleground [Middle East] had on the evolution of Arab national movements in the 20th century and Islamic groups in the 21st (p. xi).

The authors believe that Nazi Germany is to blame along with the Allies for the establishment of modern political culture of the Arab East (p. xxi). Furthermore, they conclude that it was not the Balfour Declaration or the Sykes-Picot Agreement that shaped the Arab East, but such men as German archeologist Max von Oppenheim. An interesting point, unfortunately not adequately developed, that they raise is that Nazis were so obsessed and blinded by their hatred toward Joseph Stalin and the Jews that they did not realize the region offered a chance in crippling the British economically (p. 9). The authors show how mistakes were made by both the Allies and the Axis powers to win over the region. By 1938, the Axis powers missed the last possible chance on the eve of World War II to exploit Afghan tribes against the Allies.

In the two-page introduction, the authors note that the book focuses heavily on covert operations and propaganda by the Allies. Further, they trace the beginning of

the Zionist movement in the Middle East, but also present interesting facts about how the radio became an important key to providing Arab masses a new and more destructive vocabulary (p. 3). The book is divided into chapters on the different entities that make up the Near East and Middle East: Palestine, Iraq, Syria, Iran, Turkey, the Arabian Peninsula, Afghanistan, and Egypt. For each country, the Aboul-Eneins try to uncover intelligence efforts and levels of British, French, German, Italian, and Russian involvement in the 1930s and 40s. Some chapters, however, such as the one on Turkey, contain barely any intelligence history and offer only a rather general history. Several chapters make the reader long for more information, such as what happened to the roughly 1,500 Arab inmates of concentration camps after 1945. More information on the radio wars between Italian Bari, the British BBC Arab Service, and Radio Berlin would also have been beneficial.

The authors try to find parallels between Nazi Germany's attempt to bring ethnic Germans back to the Reich and the efforts of pan-Arabism in the Near East. They conclude that Arab nationalists were attracted to Germany's NSDAP (the Nazi Party) movement since both groups felt victimized by France and Great Britain after the Great War. Arabs and Germans, according to the Aboul-Eneins, shared common enemies. This is a thesis that they could have discussed further.

The authors assert that by 1939 Afghanistan and Iran were the only suppliers of cotton and wool to the Reich. The authors overlook the US South and Texas or the efforts of New Zealand to export wool in large quantities to Germany. Yet the brothers uncover interesting tidbits, such as the actions of the faqir of Ipi who, although he was anti-British, requested payment from the Axis powers in pounds.

The Aboul-Enein brothers are not historians; they have medical and health science backgrounds and serve in the military. They offer no historiography discussion; at the end of the first chapters, they throw in a short paragraph or a book title to look up. Less space should have been devoted to the biography of the authors, listing every award that they have ever received.

The authors did not visit any archives; they conducted their research from the convenience of an office, with extensive use of Internet sources and secondary literature. The book is not earth-shattering new research or a groundbreaking new thesis; it is rather a summary

of numerous published texts. Unfortunately, as a result, mistakes were transferred into the text. The book is riddled with errors and misspelled words. For example, the city of Flensburg turns into Flansberg, Abteilung became an ableitung, Obergruppe an Obengruppe, and Adolf Hitler's often quoted "Lebensraum" became his "Liebesraum." Some references and footnotes are unclear, confusing, and incomplete, making sources difficult to find. The text has a heavy focus on Nazi Germany, suggested already by the *Punch* cartoon from 1938 depicting Hitler dressed as an Arab nomad looking at Wilhelm II's monogram in a palm tree as if somebody else had "been down this path before him." In other words, it is German-centric.

Another missed opportunity is the conclusion of the book. The authors present a narrative of the history of Germany's involvement in the Middle East and a few mishandled operations, followed by the history of Arab nationalism after 1945. Unfortunately, these topics have nothing to do with the intelligence operations during World War II in the Middle East.

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