

Capitulation, Racial Science, and the Rise of Modern Islamic Antisemitism

When those who saw themselves as the descendants of Abraham's oldest son Ishmael fled from Egypt during the sixteenth century BCE, they rode their horses to the western coast of the Arabian Peninsula which offered one of the few good pastureland regions in southwestern Asia (Bernal, 1991; *Preserving the Arabian-Horse in its Ancestral Land*, 2008). In marked contrast to the Judaic branch of the Abrahamic religions, the religious tradition that ultimately emerged as Islam did not create a separate written record of its faith until the seventh century following the rise of Muhammad. In addition to the word of Allah given directly to Muhammad, the Quran directly draws upon the Torah, Psalms, and Gospels as holy Islamic texts. The relationship between Islam and Judaism as well as its offspring Christianity gained increased cogency with the dramatic conquests achieved by the Arabian armies of Muhammad and the subsequent caliphs. In many of the lands conquered by the Arabs, Christians and Jews constituted a substantial portion of the population. Toward those other members of the broader Abrahamic faith, the Islamic conquerors generally extended a form of qualified religious tolerance, referred to as the millet system. With regards to non-Abrahamic religions such as the then still robust faith of Zoroastrianism, these faiths were typically more aggressively suppressed.

The crucial aspect of the Islamic millet system is the *dhimmi*s (the Protected People). These religious/ethnic groups represented elements of the society which the Islamic rulers regarded to be crucial to the society that should be preserved in a comparatively secure but stylized inferior social/political status. Reflecting the fact that the Arab millet system was initially designed with respect to newly conquered Christian and Jewish populations of the Near East, the three crucial protections provided were security of one's person, one's property, and a circumscribed freedom of religious observance (Cohen, 1994, p. 55). While specific forms of legal and institutional discrimination contributed to solidifying the second class status of the *dhimmi*s, it was the systematic regime of humiliating social restrictions *ṣaghār* ("to make little") that primarily instilled the 'proper' sense of one's place within millet society (Cohen, 1994, p. 56). By securing a political economic system in which the *dhimmi*s could function productively, the Islamic rulers obtained their own direct benefit by imposing an individual poll tax (*jizya*) on each adult male. This source of predictable future income helped encourage the Islamic rulers to maintain their end of this 'protection' scheme. The significance of that approach to securing one's own intrinsically problematic position is well illustrated by the contrasting approach in medieval Northern Europe where the wealthier segment of the Jewish population was for many centuries often taxed according to an unpredictable 'tribute' collection system. On occasion across the centuries, regions of the widely extended Arabian Empire became dominated by intolerant tribal sects who rejected the principles of the millet system and aggressively suppressed both Jews and Christians through mass expulsions and/or pogroms. However, that blanket intolerance was more the historical exception than the rule (Cohen, 1994). Most significantly, during the long period of dominance by the Ottoman Empire from the fourteenth century to its collapse at the end of World War I, the Islamic world of the Middle East and North Africa generally embraced the millet system.

The concept of 'capitulation' evolved during the medieval era. By political necessity, most foreign trade within the Western Europe required the active sponsorship of the kings or leading nobles. As it was, foreigners were typically treated as 'outlaws', that is to say, lacking the legal protections provided to the native inhabitants. To deal with this challenge, the rulers of the two interacting lands could formulate a treaty agreement in which both rulers recognized that the resident foreign merchants within their land would be assured the legal protections of their home country. In an extraordinary political innovation, Western European rulers began to assert their claim to being the political protectors of specific 'Protected People' within the lands of the Ottoman Empire. Starting in 1535, the Ottoman Empire was induced by France to accept a long set of capitulations and treaties regarding the rights of Christians within their borders. Initially directed toward foreign Christian businessmen conducting trade within Ottoman lands, these capitulations came to cover all Christians who lived as subjects to the sultan (Akçam, 2006, pp. 25-26). Such capitulations stipulated legal protections that were secured by the consular courts established by sponsoring government for 'their' Christians. In addition, these Christians were often released from various forms of accountability to their Ottoman rulers. The increasing political asymmetry of these capitulations provided a potent measure of the decaying political standing of the Ottoman Empire. As a practical demonstration of that empire's conventional nineteenth century moniker as the "Sick Man of Europe", in 1856 the British Consular Court judge proclaimed that the number of "so-called British protected subjects" under Ottoman rule was "little short of a million" (Akçam, 2006, p. 26). Needless to say, the capitulation system induced both an intense resentment among those who supported the Ottoman political system as well as providing an encouragement for resistance or rebellion among the local Christian populations.

The capitulation policy came to be seen as providing a promising avenue for imposing colonial rule. Up to the later years of the nineteenth century, the European colonial powers had relied upon three basic approaches

to imposing their colonial authority on conquered lands. As illustrated by the British colonization of the North American coast, shipping large numbers of British citizens to a distant land not only depleted the domestic population but could also give rise to rebellious colonists who desired more rather than fewer freedoms. Direct military command of a populous foreign colony such as India not only weakened the colonial power's defense on the home front, a simple direct command structure of political economic control is rarely efficient. The third approach of co-opting the local political class to serve as the foreman for extracting economic profits from the colony brings with it the challenge of stopping those local political leaders from excessively exploiting the system for themselves. As Western European governments considered the slowly collapsing Ottoman Empire and jockeyed among themselves over the colonial opportunities that were soon to emerge, they began to look upon their 'Protected People' within the lands of the Ottoman Empire as the future local managers of their anticipated new colonies. Through the capitulation programs, these targeted local minorities had already begun to see themselves as being tied to their sponsoring European government. By arranging their promotion to the role of local ruling class within the future colony, the sponsored minority could be well suited for the role of domestic colonial management. On one hand, they would be more familiar with the political lay of the land than any colonial officer sent from the home country. On the other hand, since the domestic political support for that local minority would be strongly circumscribed, they would remain dependent on direct support from the home country and would have little chance to chart their own independent course.

The French long took the lead in applying the principles of capitulation to the Arab lands of the Middle East and North Africa. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the French government increasingly focused upon targeting the Jewish populations in those countries. In 1870, France issued its Crémieux Decree to grant French citizenship to Algerian Jews while pointedly excluding Algerian Muslims from that opportunity. Various capitulation policies were similarly applied throughout the Middle East as both England and France attempted to create the basis for sham democratic imperial rule. To facilitate both increased political dependence and enhanced cultural isolation arising from this systematic promotion of antisemitic animosities, the local Jewish minorities were granted various forms of imperial 'protection'. By this means, the Jewish populations were drawn into the role of becoming the public face for the suppression of Arab nationalist aspirations. As the resultant resentment blew back upon the Jewish population, the Jews would feel a yet greater need for 'protection'. "[Historian] Landshut may well be right in arguing that the Capitulation system was the most important reason for the severance of the ties between Jews and their social surroundings" (Shiblak, 2005, pp. 133-134).

Ten years before his famous decree while serving as the French Minister of Justice, Adolphe Crémieux launched what was arguably the most successful capitulation effort against the Ottoman Empire. His Paris-based Alliance Israelite Universelle established a vast network of French language schools for Jews living throughout the Arab world. In sharp distinction to the opportunities available to the rest of the local Arab populace, these schools provided modern Western European training to their Jewish pupils to enable them to serve in running the anticipated future 'liberated' colonies. The motto of Alliance Israelite Universelle, "all Jews are responsible for one another", was given political meaning by this organization's concurrent program of lobbying European governments to establish or enhance their capitulation agreements with the Ottoman Empire for the 'protection' of Jews ("Alliance Israelite Universelle," 1905). These approaches served to sever the political and cultural ties between the Sephardic/Mizrahi Jews and their Arab societies while increasing their political dependence upon the West. While all such Western European capitulation agreements functioned to endanger the minority population that they were pretending to protect, the Alliance Israelite Universelle capitulation program was exceptional in having Jews help carry out the targeting of other Jews. Without subtlety, a central motivation of this program was to suppress and supplant the 'primitive' Sephardic/Mizrahi cultural and religious tradition with the more 'civilized' Ashkenazi Jewish perspective. Such efforts included the colonial 'rescue' of the centuries-long Arab-Jewish textual corpus (*Geniza*) which embodied the religious cultural Mizrahi traditions spanning from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic. This 'rescue' program reached its pinnacle of success in 1896 with Dr. Solomon Schechter confiscating 300,000 religious manuscripts and medieval Jewish texts from the Erza Cairo synagogue in British-occupied Egypt which were then taken to Cambridge University for scholarly examination as a cultural artifact (Shohat, 2017, p. 3). For many years, the teaching at the Alliance Israelite Universelle schools was conducted exclusively in French with the intended goal of establishing a 'lingua franca' to be shared among the Sephardic/Mizrahi Jews across the Arab world. Ultimately, the Alliance Israelite Universelle effort to establish French as the common language among Mizrahi Jews failed when in 1913 Zionist advocates finally succeeded in having Hebrew taught in their schools.

The Christian nations of Austria and Russia took a more direct approach to recapturing lands in southeastern Europe from the Ottoman Turks. In addition to a series of outright wars between those adversaries, Austria and Russia both encouraged and supported rebellions of the Christian populations under

Ottoman rule. The early nineteenth century rebellions in Serbia led to its independence in 1835. In parallel, Britain, France, and Russia dispatched their navies to assist in Greece gaining its independence from the Ottomans in 1832. In response, the Ottoman government carried out the period of reform between 1839 and 1876 in which the sultans attempted to take some of the political edge off of the Islam-based millet political system while at the same time rolling back the capitulations that had been made to the European powers. This incentive was to bring the Christian and Muslim populations together into a position of at least nominal legal equality based upon identification with a higher 'Ottoman unity' (Akçam, 2006, pp. 28-29). On one hand, this "Reorganization" attempted to reflect the political language of post-French Revolution Europe. On the other hand, the sultan government was quite unsure of how to blend such ideas with their own. Resistance rapidly emerged from both Muslims and Christians. The claim to equality before the law flew directly in the face of longstanding Islamic tradition which held that conquest had sanctified the claim to superior legal status for Muslims (Akçam, 2006, pp. 30-32). At the same time, the Christian's traditional obligation to pay special taxes in compensation for their being barred from military service had come to be viewed by many as a significant benefit while the foreign-sponsored consular courts had taken much of the sting out of the discrimination that they would otherwise likely face in the Ottoman courts (Akçam, 2006, pp. 32-33).

This period of Reorganization was brought to an abrupt halt with the overthrow of the sultan and the subsequent ascension of Abdul Hamid II who promptly set about reversing the policies of the Reorganization. The beginning of his reign was interrupted by the outbreak of the Russo-Turkish War which soon turned sharply against the Turks. The intervention of the British navy helped persuade the Russians not to conquer Constantinople (Ihrig, 2016, pp. 19-20). Desperate for support, the sultan turned to Germany which under Chancellor Bismarck had not long before formed itself into a modern nation-state. At the peace conference ending the Russo-Turkish War, Germany chose not to join with the other Great Powers in staking claim to particular regions of the Ottoman Empire (Ihrig, 2016, p. 21). The sultan sent a high-ranking delegation which met with both the Kaiser and Bismarck to request German military advisors and attempt to initiate an alliance. Bismarck aggressively pursued this political opportunity by sending senior rank military officers to the Ottoman Army whose responsibilities quickly extended well beyond mere offering of military advice. Not only did senior German officers assume control of the Ottoman military academy, as ultimately a formalized junior alliance partner with Germany, the Ottoman government agreed to having German generals command the major military operations that occurred within the Ottoman Empire during the First World War.

While Western European colonial imperialism had embraced the self-aggrandizing doctrines of triumphant nationalism for years, the emergence of Darwinian racial science during the late nineteenth century put a sharper political edge on those nationalist doctrines. By the 'Blood and Soil' doctrine, a 'nation' and its 'people' draw their strength from the soil of their homeland. As only the fittest of nations can survive the struggles between nations, every such would-be nation-state must secure a suitable level of racial/ethnic homogeneity. As a result, every distinct racial/ethnic grouping was pressed to claim and secure its own homeland. To lack such a homeland was to lack an evolutionary justification for survival. It hardly mattered whether those other racial/ethnic groupings actually accepted the tenets of scientific racial nationalism. They faced a political reality that was determined by those who did. Darwinist doctrine reached Germany just as Chancellor Bismarck and his allies were imposing the creation of the modern German state, and Darwinian racial science captured the halls of German academia in similarly dramatic fashion. It was largely through Darwin's personal familiarity with Ernst Haeckel, leader of the German Darwinist academics, that he could confidently prophesize Germany would be the "chief ground for hoping that our views will ultimately prevail" (Desmond & Moore, 1992, p. 539). Witnessing the political/military strengthening occurring in both Germany and Russia during the last decades of the nineteenth century, the populations of Eastern Europe were caught in a scramble over how to secure their own survival by quickly reinventing themselves as modern racial nation-states. Through the German commanders of their military academy, Darwinian racial science quickly spread across the Ottoman officer corps and into the state bureaucratic class more broadly.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Christian population of Armenians in central and eastern Turkey had become the primary focal point of this political retrenchment. In large part, this reflected the British government's efforts to proclaim themselves as the protectors of the Christian Armenians in their increasingly brazen program of laying claims to the lands of the soon to be absorbed Ottoman Empire. To move his political retrenchment efforts forward, Sultan Abdul Hamid II unleashed the governmentally-orchestrated massacres of 1894-1896. Estimates of Armenian death tolls range from 80,000 to over 200,000 (Ihrig, 2016, p. 34). Despite the magnitude of these pogroms, it soon became clear that the sultan intended to intimidate the Armenian populace back into their earlier less visible status of political submission rather than achieving their complete annihilation (Akçam, 2006, pp. 43-47). As viewed through the lens of Darwinian racial science, that political naivety was completely unacceptable to a group of well-educated Western-oriented military officers, state bureaucrats, and teachers who had been fashioned in the political cauldron of the Ottoman-controlled regions

of southeastern Europe (Mann, 2005, p. 120). These rebels declared themselves to be the 'Young Turks'. While the title of 'Young Turks' might offer little shock value for the present day Western world, this explicit invocation of an ethnic/racial identity to define an opposition to the ruling government that was explicitly based upon this same politically dominant ethnic/racial grouping caused a shock within the Ottoman Empire not unlike the present day calls for white supremacist militias to overthrow the U.S. government. Shortly before the beginning of the First World War, the Young Turks would seize control of the government, force an otherwise unwilling Turkish population into the war as Germany's ally, and then exploit the 'fog of war' to carry out the systematic extermination of between 1.2 and 1.4 million Armenians (Mann, 2005, p. 140).

At the end of the war, the leadership of the Young Turks fled to Germany. However, Britain's plans for partitioning the Turkish homeland would collapse, and the nationalist forces under Mustafa Kemal (later to be given the honorific of Atatürk) would drive out the Allied occupation forces and establish the Republic of Turkey. Throughout the rest of the former Ottoman Empire, Arabs rather than Turks were the dominant ethnic group. From before the First World War there had already been building nationalist resistance to the Turks among a number of these Arab populations. With the end of that war, it was now the European victors, principally Britain and France, who declared colonial authority over these lands. In the process of setting up those colonies, the political authority of traditional Arab leaders was largely neutralized. With that came a discrediting of the traditional millet system of social control for which the French and British colonial rulers had little political sympathy. This created the obvious dilemma of what form of anti-colonial Arab nationalism would emerge. One obvious alternative was an Arab nationalism built upon a re-embrace of the still familiar rejection of all non-Muslim faiths in establishing a stridently intolerant theocracy. The other obvious alternative was to embrace the 'cutting-edge' Darwinist racial nationalism. Despite the notable differences in philosophical justification, it was lost on no one that, in operational terms, these two approaches were closely similar.

For various reasons, Palestine would serve as the focal point for playing out this political dynamic. In contrast to other regions of the former Ottoman Empire where local minorities, most often Jews, had been groomed for assuming the role of the colonial foreman, the British policy for Palestine was to be the importation of European Jews, taking advantage of the growing Zionist movement. In that instance, how were the anti-colonial nationalist aspirations of the Arabs to be addressed? Immediately following the end of the war, two years after his famed Declaration pledging a Jewish homeland in Palestine, Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour provided the answer (*Origins and Evolution of the Palestine Problem: 1917-1947 (Part I)*, 2021):

"so far as Palestine is concerned, the Powers have made no statement of fact which is not admittedly wrong, and no declaration of policy which, at least in the letter, they have not always intended to violate"

"zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long traditions, in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder import than the desires and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land."

While there's little reason to believe that the officials of the Jewish Agency (the Israeli government-in-waiting) ever accepted their designated role as colonists for Britain, they clearly did understand that officials throughout the British government saw their role in those terms. Across the decade of the 1920s, the British government aggressively supported the Jewish Agency and the overarching Zionist Organization in their efforts to orchestrate an Israeli government-in-waiting. In parallel, the British government systematically suppressed any potential progress toward the organization of an analogous Palestinian Arab government-in-waiting. Those efforts were not limited to hamstringing the political efforts of the influential nationalistic but politically moderate Nashashibi clan which possessed the political and economic networks needed for constructing such an infrastructure. The British government had the temerity to negate the vote of the Arab Muslim Council to appoint its own selection for the senior Muslim cleric position within Palestine (Morris, 2011, p. 111ff). The British choice was the violent young racial nationalist Amin al-Husayni for whom they first had to pardon his recently awarded ten year prison sentence for his role in a deadly anti-Jewish riot (Elpeleg, 2007, pp. 2-3,6-7). With a prolonged level of political support from the British government, Amin al-Husayni would remain the recognized leader of Palestinian nationalism from 1921 until the Israeli War of Independence in 1948. While no clear justification for this seemingly bizarre policy has been offered, two related rationalizations would appear to be quite plausible. In spirit and ability, Amin al-Husayni was a radical terrorist, he was not a military leader. He could help frustrate any efforts by the Nashashibi clan to organize a politically relevant infrastructure while never posing an existential threat to either British or Zionist ambitions. Furthermore, Amin al-Husayni's violent racial nationalist rhetoric would underwrite the necessity for a strong Jewish-led colonial government that would help drive both British and international policy along in that direction. With the emergence of the German Nazi government and its renewed ambitions to destabilize

Western European control in the Middle East, for a number of years the blatantly racist Amin al-Husayni would become elevated to a role as the public face of Arab nationalism across the world (Lewis, 1999, p. 152).

While Arab support for Amin al-Husayni would eventually collapse, the political challenge still remains as to the form of Arab nationalism that should be embraced. International political discourse had become dominated with the language of 'democracy', whether in the legitimate defense of that concept or as façade for either colonialism or fascism. The capitulation programs of Western Europe had demonstrated the crucial weaknesses of the traditional Islamic millet system of social control. Are Islamic societies to instead look back upon the theological intolerance of the medieval Almohad Caliphate in suppressing the expression of all non-Islamic beliefs? Quite similar end results could be obtained by instead embracing the still 'cutting edge' doctrines of Darwinian racial nationalism. As to the other seemingly obvious alternative, one cannot ignore the disastrous ramifications of the West's long-running efforts to market 'democracy' to the rest of the world as a political cover for colonial exploitation. In addition to the real world tragedies that have played out during the Palestinian conflicts, this continued uncertainty as to the future face of Arab identity has surely contributed to focus upon Zionism as the root cause of their strife. As both this and the previous essay attempt to demonstrate, an important step in disentangling these political tensions is to recognize that present day Islamic antisemitism is fundamentally distinct from the European-derived antisemitism. In the context of the ongoing Palestinian conflict, the claim that those two forms of antisemitism are equivalent has become an article of faith among extremists on both sides. As examined in the following essay, the well-rehearsed pretense from the Revisionist Zionists that the ongoing Middle East conflict is simply a continuation of the Holocaust is a transparent historical fraud whose political function is to create a moral blank check for a racial nationalist solution.

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