

Netanyahu Said What About Muslims and the Holocaust?

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu provoked controversy on Wednesday, hours before a visit to Germany, by saying the former Muslim elder in Jerusalem convinced Adolf Hitler to exterminate the Jews.

In a speech to the Zionist Congress late on Tuesday, Netanyahu referred to a series of attacks by Muslims against Jews in Palestine during the 1920s that he said were instigated by the then Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini.

Husseini famously flew to visit Hitler in Berlin in 1941, and Netanyahu said that meeting was instrumental in the Nazi leader's decision to launch a campaign to annihilate the Jews.

"Hitler didn't want to exterminate the Jews at the time, he wanted to expel the Jews," Netanyahu said in the speech. "And Haj Amin al-Husseini went to Hitler and said, 'If you expel them, they'll all come here.'"

"'So what should I do with them?'" Netanyahu said Hitler asked the mufti, who responded: "Burn them."

Netanyahu, whose father was an eminent historian, was quickly harangued by opposition politicians and experts on the Holocaust who said he was distorting the historical record.

Palestinian officials said Netanyahu appeared to be absolving Hitler of the murder of six million Jews in order to lay the blame on Muslims. Twitter was awash with criticism.

"It is a sad day in history when the leader of the Israeli government hates his neighbor so much that he is willing to absolve the most notorious war criminal in history, Adolf

Hitler, of the murder of six million Jews,” Saeb Erekat, the Palestine Liberation Organisation’s secretary general, said.

“Mr Netanyahu should stop using this human tragedy to score points for his political end,” said Erekat, the chief Palestinian negotiator with the Israelis.

Even Netanyahu’s defense minister, close ally Moshe Yaalon, said the prime minister had got it wrong.

“It certainly wasn’t (Husseini) who invented the Final Solution,” Yaalon told Israel’s Army Radio. “That was the evil brainchild of Hitler himself.”

It is not clear what sources Netanyahu was relying on for his comments. A 1947 book “The Mufti of Jerusalem” and a newspaper report at the time said a former Hitler deputy had testified at the Nuremberg war crimes trials that Husseini had plotted with the Nazi leader to rid Europe of its Jews.

Husseini was sought for war crimes but never appeared at the Nuremberg proceedings and later died in Cairo.

Historical Record

But the point several historians made was that Netanyahu was distorting timelines and drawing false conclusions.

The meeting between Husseini and Hitler in Berlin took place on November 28, 1941. More than two years earlier, in January 1939, Hitler had addressed the Reichstag and talked clearly about his determination to exterminate the Jewish race.

“To say that the mufti was the first to mention to Hitler the idea to kill or burn the Jews is not correct,” Dina Porat, a professor at Tel Aviv University and the chief historian of Yad Vashem, Israel’s Holocaust museum, told Israel Radio.

“The idea to rid the world of the Jews was a central theme in Hitler’s ideology a long, long time before he met the mufti.”

Porat and others pointed out that the murder of the Jews began in June 1941. Even if the mufti wanted the Final Solution to be expanded, he wasn't the one who came up with the idea.

"For somebody who knows something about history and grew up in the house of historian Professor Benzion Netanyahu, he should know well," Porat said of the prime minister. "But in my humble opinion, to say that the mufti gave Hitler the idea is wrong." {eoa}

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