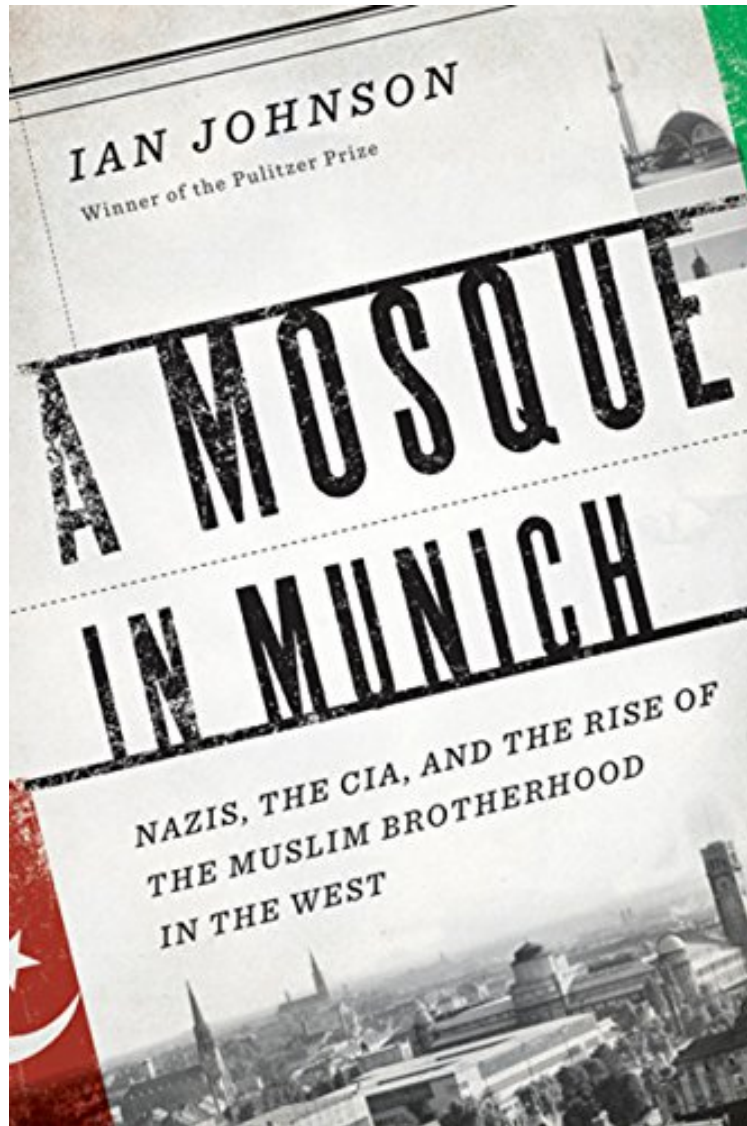


A Mosque in Munich: Nazis, the CIA, and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in the West

Ian Johnson

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Ian Johnson : A Mosque in Munich: Nazis, the CIA, and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in the West before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Mosque in Munich: Nazis, the CIA, and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in the West:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Informative, entertaining, and witty readBy Catherine A. BillingtonI just finished this book and really enjoyed it. It is based on just three characters, so I don't get why some reviewers say

it has a confusing number of characters. Yes, minor characters come and go but I never found it to be an issue. It's also fast-paced and has some very bizarre characters, such as the nudist camp CIA agent and the California author who becomes a supporter of terrorism. These are people you can't make up. It's not a thriller--it's reality--so this might explain why some of the reviewers (especially those who write a lot of reviews of that genre) might not have gotten what they expected. But for me it helped explain some things going on now. It gave enough background information without bogging down the book. It moved along and took you along - Johnson is a gifted story-teller who brings life to an important piece of history. Personally, I found out about the book from the review I'm posting below. The New Republic "The Book" Review by Eliza Griswold Ian Johnson abhors pack journalism. Instead, he prefers to investigate the margins of major news stories. In *A Mosque in Munich*, this predilection serves him well. Based in Berlin and Beijing, he speaks fluent German and Mandarin, and holds an advanced degree in Chinese Studies. With equal tenacity and lack of bluster, however, he also pursues the development of radical Islam in Europe. Mostly by accident, the veteran journalist stumbled upon one of the largest untold stories of the last fifty years: how, with help from Nazis and the CIA, radical Islam first established its foothold in the West, and planted its roots firmly in Germany. Johnson begins decades before the now-familiar Cold War narrative of the 1980s. In that decade the United States began to back the Muslim holy warriors, mujahideen, in their fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan. But as Johnson's investigative work definitively shows, America's efforts to use the religious and political fervor of Islam to its own ends followed a Nazi program intended to do much the same thing during World War II. This was a program, Johnson writes, which Hitler "explicitly blessed," saying, "I consider only the Mohammedans to be safe. All the others, I consider unsafe." In the eastern regions of the Soviet empire, where the Nazis were more interested in oil than ethnic cleansing, the Third Reich mobilized Muslims and other ethnic minorities to fight for the liberation of their homelands. The Nazis plucked Muslims from German prisoner-of-war camps: some Muslims became German soldiers; some, members of the SS; some, professional propagandists. Although rumors and half-truths about this historic collusion have long existed, Johnson does the painstaking archival work of retracing the lives of these largely unknown Muslim Nazis, and pieces together their lives compellingly. Once World War II ended, many of these men, stuck in Germany and having lost their homelands, found a new employer: the United States. Radio Liberty, the lesser-known stepsister to Radio Free Europe, was the CIA's effort to broadcast anti-Soviet propaganda into Eastern Europe. In order to reach the thirty million Muslims living within the Soviet Union, the Americans turned to many of these former Nazi sympathizers. The idea, from the 1940s onwards, was to use Islam to undermine the Soviet system. Islam, American officials mistakenly believed, was the ideal antidote to godless communism. Although many of Johnson's readers will know this story in broad strokes, no book before this one so deftly traces the history of this ideological misstep. And no one, until Johnson, has traced how far back this error in judgment went. It is not just Johnson's investigative reporting that makes this book important. He also has a gift for historical narrative. He structures his cloak-and-dagger tale around a series of absurdly colorful characters, from the famous Said Ramadan to the little-known figure of Ahmad Kamal, whom Johnson calls an "one of the most charismatic figures in America's effort to harness Islam." Between writing thrillers and working as a spy, Kamal moved from California to Indonesia organizing disaffected Muslims. His eyebrow-raising antics make more familiar Cold War cowboys, such as Charlie Wilson, look like all hat and no cattle. (To give these antics away here would be unfair to Johnson's meticulous biographical research; read the book.) A vein of dark humor runs throughout the book, as Johnson points out America's early and later missteps vis--vis Islam with a kind of fatalistic legerdemain. Since this story unfolds so much at the margins of American foreign policy, it might seem rather mundane. (My biggest criticism of the book is its rather flat-footed title.) But just when this reader's eyes would start to glaze over at all the exotica, Johnson usefully steps back to locate his particular story within the context of today's unavoidable confrontation between the West and certain strains of Islamic thinking. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Johnson takes the time to define the terms that he uses. Most notable is his discussion of Islamism, a word we often encounter but rarely hear properly explained. Who are all these "Islamists," really? This is one of the helpful moments at which Johnson breaks his narrative to tell us clearly: "Islamists differ from traditional Muslims because they use their religion in pursuit of a political agenda, via either democracy, or violence." In his strong but unassuming way, Johnson tells us something that is true and significant: "Implicit in Islamism is a rejection of Western society and its values." This is one of the most essential--and uncomfortable--truths in the book. Yes, the West has unwittingly fed the rise of political Islam. And still worse, America continues to misunderstand something even more fundamental about the politics of Islamism: much of its ideology is born out of opposing the West. The question follows, Can the West coexist with Islamists? Johnson reveals that the current ideological fault lines are more insurmountable than we know. Appeasing Islamists is ill-advised policy. But America continues to support groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood anyway. There are two Muslim Brotherhoods, he argues, one in the West and another in the rest of the world. The former is much more perilous to American interests. Still, out of ignorance and laziness in part, many American bureaucrats and foreign policy-makers turn to the best-looking business-suited Islamist leaders as allies. Many are tied to the Muslim Brotherhood, which, in the West, is a deliberate proponent of radical Islam. The United States does this, in part, because it's easier to turn to self-appointed spokesmen for the world's Muslims than to reach out to far less media-savvy members of civil society--

Muslim groups that aren't so slick and organized by ordinary people. "Ordinary people are messy," Johnson puts it. The book is funny and tragic and peaks toward the end when Johnson takes us along on his interviews with contemporary members of the European branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. One day in Cologne, Johnson rides along in the BMW's passenger seat of Ibrahim El Zayat, a young Islamist who leads many of Germany's Muslims. Zayat is hugely controversial, and it is hard to know whether or not he condones the use of violence based on some of his murky associations. When Johnson points this out, Zayat points right back at Johnson. "A lot of people say that Ian Johnson is a CIA agent because you write so little." "My boss says that too," I say. "You should write more. Sloth is a sin." At the end of the ride, Zayat answers one of the most important riddles as to why the West gets it wrong when choosing Islamic allies. We ask the wrong questions about who they are and where their ideas come from. It is really a matter of research: of taking the time to get our facts right, as Johnson clearly has. When he asks Zayat about his alphabet soup of radical affiliations, Zayat replies: "I don't deny that I'm in these groups.... When I'm asked clearly, then I answer." The challenge for us, then, is to get our questions right--and this Ian Johnson has done masterfully. Source URL: [...]3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. An evil combination: Islam Used by Western Powers By Guenter Langer

Accidentally, Ian Johnson, a journalist of the Wall Street Journal, stumbled across an odd building in Munich, a rather unimpressive mosque that was referred to him by Muslim Brothers as one of the most important mosques in the world. Johnson was curious, he wanted to know why. So he started his research, luckily being able to look through archives not accessible to the public before. First he describes the Western inner-imperialistic usage of Islam by the German Empire's alliance with Turkey during WWI: A German diplomat convinced the Ottoman caliph to declare holy war against the allied powers, the first modern use of jihad. One of the main architects of this strategy was Professor Oskar Niedermayer, who later, in Nazi times, headed the Berlin Humboldt-University's Institute of Military Geography and Politics. Surprisingly, not Niedermayer, but his political rival in the field of Orientalism/Turkology, Gerhard von Mende, picked up this strategy against the Soviet Union in the time of the Weimar Republic and continued it during WWII on behalf of the Nazis, when he joined the Ostministerium's Department for the East (Orient). He assembled Soviet exiles around him who had formerly formed an Anti-Soviet group called Prometheus. These men included Mikhail Kedia of Georgia, Ali Kantemir of Turkestan, and Veli Kayum also from Central Asia. Von Mende's group directed Islamic anti-Soviet propaganda towards the Muslim areas of the Soviet Union and towards the captured Soviet soldiers from the predominantly muslim Soviet republics. The Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin al-Hussaini, endorsed Gerd von Mende's work... After WWII, von Mende dropped his virulent anti-Semitic rhetoric, but kept up his Anti-Soviet stance. He formed a private organization that closely worked together with German intelligence, trying to save and control the Muslim exiles from the Soviet Union. The CIA, the newly formed spy agency, founded Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe. The former institution was directed directly towards the Soviet Union, the latter towards the East European countries. The von Mende group and the CIA tried to achieve the same objectives: The use of Moslems against the communist enemy. Though allies against the common foe, both groups struggled to dominate the Muslim exile community coming mostly from the Soviet Union now residing in Western Germany. What Oskar Niedermayer and Gerd von Mende designed for the Germans was done by President Eisenhower's chief psychological warfare strategist, Edward P. Lilly. Lilly drew up a memorandum called "The Religious Factor". President Eisenhower was in favour of doing just that, he wanted to stress the "holy war" aspect against communism. However, not Lilly put the "religious factor" into practice, this task remained to be done by a rather dubious organization called American Committee for Liberation (Amcomlib), which ran Radio Liberty in Munich and was secretly financed by the CIA. The CIA agent Robert H. Dreher was the main protagonist to add the religious factor, in this case Islam, into the daily broadcasting of Radio Liberty. In order to keep the Muslim anticommunist community happy Gerd von Mende developed the idea of providing his Muslim friends with a place for worship, a mosque. Dreher and von Mende practically relied on the same people for their anti-Soviet and pro-Muslim activities. In order to outsmart von Mende Dreher aligned himself with Said Ramadan, son of Hassan al Banna (founder of the Muslim Brotherhood), a leading ideologist of the Muslim Brotherhood, who then practically took over the mosque project, using the financing by the CIA. The building of the mosque took years due to internal and external intrigues. Even the Soviets tried to influence the project. When it finally was completed neither the CIA nor the German intelligence community controlled it anymore, The Muslim Brotherhood did. This revolutionary Islamist group used this mosque as basis for the infiltration of Western Europe, a form of a quiet and smooth jihad. Out of Munich the Muslim Brothers, outlawed in their place of origin, Egypt, managed to establish dependencies in most western European states. Johnson states that Ramadan worked to achieve an Islamic world revolution. The Muslim Brotherhood, with new funding by Saudi money, is still busy promoting this revolution. Today, the mosque in Munich lost its central role, the leadership for Europe has its headquarter now in Great Britain. The major participants in the struggle around the mosque in Munich, Gerd von Mende, Robert H. Dreher, and Said Ramadan are all dead by now, but their creation, the European section of the Muslim Brotherhood, thrives, and Ramadan's sons, Hani (Imam and director of the Islamic Centre of Geneva) and Tariq (President of the Euro-Muslim Network), are busy to continue their father's and their grandfather's work. Hani plays the radical part, he is for example in favour of stoning the unfortunate Iranian woman Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani, whereas Tariq plays the more intellectual part trying to

convince the European and US audience that Islam is the religion of peace and tolerance. Johnson believes that the Brotherhood only supports terrorism in certain cases, against Israel for example, but he is convinced that this group creates a mental precondition for terrorism. Paradoxically Western governments don't fight the Brothers, instead they believe they can use this anti-democratic, anti-Western faction of Islam now to fight terrorism and combat extremism. Obviously Johnson does not share this view. For more details how the quiet jihad works I definitely recommend reading this book. Furthermore it shows that the religious factor might work temporarily but it will backfire eventually, as the case of the mosque in Munich, and, better known to the world, the case of Afghanistan has shown without a doubt. Western democracies should be warned, but obviously they didn't learn: Obama appointed Mazen Asbahi as his Muslim outreach coordinator, although this man has had intensive contacts with the Brotherhood and he was even head of the Muslim Student Association, which was founded by people related to the Munich mosque. As an example for Germany Johnson refers to the prominent anthropologist Werner Schiffauer, who has close ties to the Brotherhood and its Turkish version, Mili Grs. Schiffauer is a darling of German media and is frequently taken as a reference source for everything related to Islam. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. "The Great Game. "By "Strange Affair" This book is an eye opener. The Muslim Brotherhood is so tied in with the intelligence community one has to wonder what is going on today in Iraq and Syria. The MB was in bed with former Nazis as well as the CIA. Another important book to add to this is "The Devil's Game," by Dreyfuss. Armed with these two books and perhaps the "Meccan Rebellion," one is able to well understand how deep the rabbit's hole goes. We are in a riddle wrapped in an enigma sealed in a code and buried in a mystery. We may never get to the bottom of it, but this book goes a long way to understanding the players in the game and the madness of the modern version of what they called in the Nineteenth Century, "The Great Game."

In the wake of the news that the 9/11 hijackers had lived in Europe, journalist Ian Johnson wondered how such a radical group could sink roots into Western soil. Most accounts reached back twenty years, to U.S. support of Islamist fighters in Afghanistan. But Johnson dug deeper, to the start of the Cold War, uncovering the untold story of a group of ex-Soviet Muslims who had defected to Germany during World War II. There, they had been fashioned into a well-oiled anti-Soviet propaganda machine. As that war ended and the Cold War began, West German and U.S. intelligence agents vied for control of this influential group, and at the center of the covert tug of war was a quiet mosque in Munich radical Islam's first beachhead in the West. Culled from an array of sources, including newly declassified documents, *A Mosque in Munich* interweaves the stories of several key players: a Nazi scholar turned postwar spymaster; key Muslim leaders across the globe, including members of the Muslim Brotherhood; and naive CIA men eager to fight communism with a new weapon, Islam. A rare ground-level look at Cold War spying and a revelatory account of the West's first, disastrous encounter with radical Islam, *A Mosque in Munich* is as captivating as it is crucial to our understanding the mistakes we are still making in our relationship with Islamists today

.com Product Description In the wake of the news that the 9/11 hijackers had lived in Europe, journalist Ian Johnson wondered how such a radical group could sink roots into Western soil. Most accounts reached back twenty years, to U.S. support of Islamist fighters in Afghanistan. But Johnson dug deeper, to the start of the Cold War, uncovering the untold story of a group of ex-Soviet Muslims who had defected to Germany during World War II. There, they had been fashioned into a well-oiled anti-Soviet propaganda machine. As that war ended and the Cold War began, West German and U.S. intelligence agents vied for control of this influential group, and at the center of the covert tug of war was a quiet mosque in Munich radical Islam's first beachhead in the West. Culled from an array of sources, including newly declassified documents, *A Mosque in Munich* interweaves the stories of several key players: a Nazi scholar turned postwar spymaster; key Muslim leaders across the globe, including members of the Muslim Brotherhood; and naive CIA men eager to fight communism with a new weapon, Islam. A rare ground-level look at Cold War spying and a revelatory account of the West's first, disastrous encounter with radical Islam, *A Mosque in Munich* is as captivating as it is crucial to our understanding the mistakes we are still making in our relationship with Islamists today. Photographs from Ian Johnson, Author of *A Mosque in Munich* (Click on images to enlarge) Gerhard von Mende was a Turkic studies expert who pioneered use of Muslims against Soviets in the Nazi era A dynamic leader and fervent cleric, Youssef Nada co-founded the Islamic Center of Munich in the 1970s Robert H. Dreher, CIA agent and Amcomlib officer, spearheaded American interactions with the Muslim Brotherhood The usually charismatic Muslim cleric Ibrahim Gacaoglu faltered at an important Hajj press conference The Ostministerium, home to Hitler's Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories An architectural sketch of the mosque in Munich A QA with Ian Johnson: Q: We're inundated with books on Islam and Europe and so on. Why another? A: Two reasons. The simplest is because this story is important and hasn't been told before. It starts during World War II with the Nazis deciding they could use Muslims to fight the Soviet Union. Then, after the war, the very same group of Muslims are recruited by the CIA to do the same thing--fight the Soviets by using Islam. This group is then taken over by the Muslim Brotherhood, which uses Munich as a beachhead to spread into the West. This is twenty years before Afghanistan and the mujahidin; it's the prequel to a lot of what's gone on since. Plus, this continues right up to the present. The Muslim

Brotherhood still plays a key role in setting a radical agenda for Islam in Europe. It's no coincidence that the mosque in Munich is associated with many major terrorist attacks in the West, including the two attacks on the World Trade Center. As our governments try to figure out how to deal with Islam, we need to know our own history first. Q: So, once again, history serves as the backstory. A: To be honest, my roots are in journalism and I like colorful stories. This is a really strange one with memorable characters. The people involved are so bizarre that they sound like the start of a joke: you have a brilliant Nazi linguist, a CIA man who's a nudist, and a radical Muslim on the lam... Q: I'm afraid to hear the punch line. You combed many archives to write this book. Was there an ah-ha moment that made the drudgery worthwhile? A: I especially remember the archives in the Eisenhower Presidential Library in Abilene, Kansas. I got Eisenhower's appointment book for 1953. It was this big, thick, leather-bound book--what you'd expect a presidential appointment book to look like. And in it, on September 23, was the name Said Ramadan, "Delegate of the Muslim Brothers." It wasn't a big, important meeting, but it was the culmination of early efforts by the Eisenhower administration to use Islam to fight communism. The more time I spent in those archives, the more fascinated I became. The president was a practicing Christian and saw Muslims as fellow believers. He thought faith could help immunize them against communism if they could be made aware of communism's atheistic message. So he endorsed all sorts of plans to use religion--his advisers called it the "religious factor." Embracing the Muslim Brotherhood was part of this strategy. Q: You have a scene in which people are singing a farewell song at a party for a CIA man who is leaving Germany after having set up the connection with the Brotherhood. How can you describe this event in such detail? A: Thanks to the other main sources for this book: interviews and the personal archives of people from that era. One of the CIA man's friends is still alive in Munich, and she had a tape recording of the farewell party. We spent an afternoon listening to it and chatting. She also showed me sketches that he made of her at nudist colonies, and talked about that era in such detail it sprang alive. As much as I liked the archives, it was these people who volunteered their personal papers and stories that made it worthwhile. People knew they were involved in history and were waiting to give it to someone. Q: What about the Nazi angle? Are you saying radical Islam has Nazi roots? A: No, I'm not equating Islamists with Nazis. Some people do, but I'm trying to stay away from polemics. I'm also not dissecting problems within Islam or immigration in Europe. Instead, the big-picture idea I'm trying to show is the early--and decisive--effort by the West to use Islam. Three groups made overtures to these Muslims: the Nazis, the Cold Warriors, and the Islamists. So the story carries us from the past to the present, a microcosm of all our mistakes with Islam since the 1940s. Q: What's wrong with engaging with religion? You think it should be kept separate from politics? A: No. Religion is a big part of every society, and politicians should engage with it--for example, by talking to religious leaders and listening to believers' concerns. But it should be done with respect. It shouldn't be used as a tool for short-term gains, like "Let's get the Muslims to declare jihad on our enemies," or "Let's create Muslim champions who will speak for us around the world." Religion isn't a puppet that you can control like that. It isn't a cudgel. These things are a bad idea and always backfire. But we're still doing it. Q: You say in the endnotes that there's still a lot left unexplored. A: Right now, the CIA roadblocks anyone trying to get information on our dealings with radical Islam, claiming that releasing documents, even half a century old, would harm the national interest. It was like this with the Nazis. The CIA released information only when Congress passed a law mandating it. I think something similar will have to happen here too. For now, however, this book is a first step toward understanding this past. (Photo Otto Pohl) From Publishers Weekly Pulitzer-winning journalist Johnson (Wild Grass: Three Portraits of Change in Modern China) tells a probing saga of militant Islamism rooted in a Munich mosque in a cold war strategy gone wrong. The mosque eventually became the epicenter of Islamist organizing in Europe and America. Johnson's story goes back to Nazi Germany's recruitment of Soviet Muslim POWs into anti-Soviet propaganda organizations; during the cold war, the CIA vied with West Germany to control these Munich-based exiles for anti-Soviet propaganda. The CIA brought in Said Ramadan, an Egyptian anticommunist and member of the Muslim Brotherhood, who stealthily wrested control of a mosque-building project from the CIA- and German-controlled Muslim factions, redirecting it to Islamism. Johnson pens a lucid, closely observed account of the fraught intersection of intelligence bureaucracies with migr political factions. It's not quite a tale of blowback: the mosque was funded largely by Saudi and Libyan money, and the Muslim Brotherhood seems to have been only marginally abetted by the CIA. But it is a troubling example of America's perennial cluelessness about the Muslim world and its religious politics. (May 4) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist Browsing an Islamic map adorned with great mosques, journalist Johnson was intrigued to see the Islamic Center of Munich included with the Dome of the Rock. Inspired to investigate, he discovered a complicated cold war tale in which American and West German intelligence sought to exploit Islam as a propaganda weapon against the Soviet Union. The idea was not original; during WWII, a midlevel Nazi bureaucrat named Gerhard von Mende had organized Soviet Muslim POWs into pro-German military and political units. Come the early 1950s, Johnson found, von Mende was back in business, ostensibly as a consultant on Muslim refugees from the USSR. Enter the CIA: intruding onto turf von Mende regarded with proprietary jealousy, its rivalry prompted von Mendes masterstroke to win the loyalty of Munich Muslims: build them a mosque. However, the provon Mende Muslims lost control to Muslim Brotherhood fundamentalists (bankrolled by the CIA, Johnson suggests), and the mosque has subsequently been a locus of Islamic radicalism.

Persistently pursuing leads, Johnson tracks a strange history with ramifications in the present. --Gilbert Taylor