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## Scholars Forum

### *Hitler, Antisemitism, and the Final Solution*

CHRISTOPHER R. BROWNING

*This article argues that antisemitism and an understanding of history as race struggle were central to Hitler's ideological outlook and had crystalized into a relatively stable Weltanschauung by the late 1920s. However, the transformation of Hitler's ideas into regime policies was not a simple process, and the Final Solution—while consistent with Hitler's ideology—was not a pre-ordained outcome. The Final Solution emerged out of a complex and incremental decision-making process shaped by the failure of earlier policies of expulsion and decimation, the changing military context, and a polycratic political system centered on “working toward the Führer.”*

A number of historians, but especially Eberhard Jäckel and Thomas Weber, whose major publications were separated by nearly five decades, have argued persuasively that the key components of Hitler's ideology incrementally coalesced as a coherent worldview (*Weltanschauung*) between his entry into politics in 1919 and the writing but withholding from publication of his second book in 1928.<sup>1</sup> In his first political document, the notorious Gemlich letter of September 16, 1919, Hitler insisted that the Jews were an alien race and not a religion. They were a “racial tuberculosis of peoples” (*Rassentuberkulose der Völker*) who dominated their host societies through “the power of money” (*die Macht des Geldes*) and as the

“driving force of revolution” (*treibenden Kräfte der Revolution*)—in short, a trifecta of race, capitalism, and Marxism. This threat to Germany had to be countered not through emotional antisemitism expressed via pogroms but through rational antisemitism resulting first in depriving Jews of their legal rights and then as the “final goal” (*letztes Ziel*) in the “removal of the Jews altogether” (*die Entfernung der Juden überhaupt*)—a goal that was attainable not through political parties and parliamentary majorities but only through the ruthless action of a nationalistic leader.<sup>2</sup>

In his speech of August 13, 1920, entitled “Why We Are Antisemites,” Hitler elaborated on his racial antisemitism, which was both anti-Marxist and anti-capitalist. Aryans were state-building and culture-creating because they had developed a sense of “work” as a moral duty and civic virtue that was necessary to survive the harsh northern climate that also winnowed out the weak and left only the racially pure strong. Jews, in contrast, were a nomadic people who abhorred work and lived as parasites among others by robbery and exploitation. They were incapable of state-building or culture creation and perpetuated their negative racial characteristics through incest. Just as the Jews had infiltrated the Roman Empire and helped destroy it by fostering a state-weakening Christianity that they themselves did not practice, so now they sponsored enervating international Marxist socialism for workers in order to sustain their own domination through international speculative finance capitalism. To avoid the fate of Russia, where Jewish-controlled bolshevism was destroying the state, economy, and race, Germany needed a socialism that was racially Aryan, nationally German, and devoted to “work” for the common good as opposed to the self-serving “Semitic” concept of work. Socialists who opposed “materialism” and “mammonism” had to be antisemites. “Socialism can only be carried out in combination with Nationalism and Antisemitism,” he concluded.<sup>3</sup>

The most important addition to Hitler’s racial antisemitism in the mid-1920s, as reflected in his two books,<sup>4</sup> was a more comprehensive view of history as constant racial struggle tied to the geopolitical concept of *Lebensraum*. Races rose and fell as they

preserved or squandered their racial purity and martial capabilities and won or lost *Lebensraum*, that is territories and resources vital to feeding, arming, and expanding their populations. War, therefore, was the natural state of all races waging the eternal struggle for survival. “Those who do not want to fight in this world of eternal struggle do not deserve to live,” he argued.<sup>5</sup> And for Germany, the destined territorial object of this struggle was *Lebensraum* in the East.

Subhuman Jews stood outside Germany’s wartime opponents and racial rivals for *Lebensraum* and posed a threat to Germany’s survival in a very different way. First, as allegedly rootless and stateless by nature, the Jews were deemed to be an inherently parasitical people who not only lived off their hosts but simultaneously polluted the purity of the hosts’ “blood” by race-mixing. The underlying assumption, of course, was that “pure blood” was the precondition of a people’s strength and vigor, while “mixed blood” spelled doom through degeneration and weakness. Second, the Jews were perceived as the carriers of those subversive ideas that most threatened to undermine the will of Germans to wage the unrelenting, no holds barred, struggle for *Lebensraum* against other racial communities that was essential for their own survival. These subversive ideas constituted a sequence of Jewish conspiracies: Christianity, with its messages of “love thy neighbor” and “turn the other cheek”<sup>6</sup>; liberalism, with its advocacy of equality before the law, personal freedom, divisive parties and weak parliamentarianism, and the egotistical pursuit of economic self-interest; and ultimately the “Jewish doctrine of Marxism” that rejects “the aristocratic principle of nature,” “contests the significance of nationality and race,” and whose triumph would mean “destruction for the inhabitants of this planet.”<sup>7</sup> If the law of nature was racial struggle, then the Jews represented in essence anti-nature, the pernicious attempts to weaken other races through blood-mixing and to persuade them to act feebly, passively, and unnaturally. Thus, both the very physical presence of the Jews in German society as well as subversive Jewish influence or spirit constituted in Hitler’s thought intolerable threats

to a restored and purified Germany that had to conquer the *Lebensraum* in the East necessary to obtain the status of a world power and survive.

Virtually all historians now agree that Hitler combined the roles of ideologue and pragmatic politician, and that his goals remained relatively fixed while issues of timing and methods remained extremely flexible. But such a formulation does not resolve the key question concerning the relationship between Hitler's ideology as it crystallized by 1928 and the subsequent evolution of Nazi Jewish policy. Hitler himself embraced ambiguity in this regard. For instance, in May 1939 he told Grand Admiral Raeder that there were three kinds of secrets about his future plans: those he would tell under four eyes, those he would keep to himself, and "problems of the future, which I don't think through to the end."<sup>8</sup> In addition, I would argue, Hitler practiced four different decision-making and management styles. At times he was the micro-manager, entangling himself in excessive details. Other times he was the delegating and detached leader, making clear that if only the demanded results were obtained, he would not even inquire as to how they had been achieved. Third, he made "prophecies" or expressed "wishes," and then bestowed approval and rewards on those who brought forth corresponding proposals that found his favor. And finally, there was Hitler as uninvolved absentee, with his stated preference that "the best man is for me the one who bothers me least by taking upon himself 95 out of 100 decisions."<sup>9</sup> The historian is thus faced with numerous alternatives in trying to pin down the precise role Hitler played at different junctures.

When the issue at hand is Hitler and the decisions for the Final Solution, historians are also challenged by an asymmetry of surviving documentation—plentiful at some local, regional, and middle-echelon levels but scarce at the upper level—due to both Hitler's non-bureaucratic work habits and the successful destruction of key SS files. Thus, it is important for the historian to be conscious and open about his or her working assumptions about how Hitler and the Nazi state functioned when interpreting incomplete and fragmentary documentary evidence.

First, I think that in the area of Jewish policy, Hitler most often employed the third option mentioned above, namely he exhorted, prophesied, and expressed his wishes, and then empowered those whose responses found his favor to undertake the policymaking and implementation. Hitler was crucially involved as an instigator and decision-maker but not as a micro-manager in this area. Second, I think the functioning of the Nazi state in this area can be seen as a synthesis of competition and cooperation, polycracy and consensus. In vying for Hitler's favor, bitter rivals had to "work toward the Führer" to realize his ideological goals. Third, in Jewish policy, the man who read Hitler's mind and anticipated his wishes most effectively, with the most acute sense of timing, was Heinrich Himmler. If one wants to know what Hitler was thinking, one should look at what Himmler was doing. Fourth, this style of decision-making lent itself to what Hans Mommsen called "cumulative radicalization," as no one could outbid a political rival by suggesting moderation or retreat. Moreover, this style also produced a temporal coincidence between radicalization and euphoria of victory. It was at the peaks of Nazi success that Hitler's paladins were most likely emboldened to produce more radical proposals and Hitler was more likely to approve them.

To get a sense of how Hitler—both ideologue and political pragmatist—and the decision-making process outlined above shaped Nazi Jewish policy prior to the decisions about the Final Solution, let us look at one well-documented example: the Madagascar Plan. In January 1939, Hitler had given his infamous Reichstag speech prophesy that the next world war would result in the "destruction of the Jewish race in Europe." Some historians have interpreted this as a straight-forward revelation of the Final Solution to come. Others have seen it as a crude attempt to blackmail the major powers into accepting more German Jewish emigrants. I see it primarily as an address to his followers, signaling that with the outbreak of the war he intended to wage, Nazi Jewish policy would no longer be limited to achieving a *judenfrei* Germany but rather would aim at creating a *judenfrei* Europe.

In September 1939, Germany experienced its first victory euphoria with a quick conquest of Poland, accompanied by Allied passivity in the west and Soviet cooperation in the east. Himmler's immediate response was to submit to Hitler sweeping plans for the demographic transformation of the "incorporated territories" of western Poland—the expulsion of 7.5 million Poles and 500,000 Jews into the General Government and their replacement by repatriated ethnic Germans. The Jews were to be sent to a "Lublin reservation," a region considered ideal for the purpose because the "extreme marshy nature" of the region "could induce a severe decimation of the Jews" sent there.<sup>10</sup> The initial attempt to implement this vast scheme of ethnic cleansing produced chaos and was brought to a virtual standstill by an alliance of Göring and Frank in the spring 1940. Göring persuasively argued that racial experimentation on such a scale had to await winning the war first.

In late May, when Germany's astonishingly quick victory over France was assured, Himmler immediately exploited the new situation by presenting Hitler with a memorandum on the treatment of alien populations in Eastern Europe. He revived his plans for massive ethnic cleansing as well as the denationalization of Poles in general but with one new twist; instead of deporting the Jews to a Lublin reservation, he now proposed sending them overseas, perhaps to a colony in Africa. Recognizing the radical nature of his collective proposals, Himmler concluded: "However cruel and tragic each individual case may be, this method is still the mildest and best, if one rejects the Bolshevik method of physical extermination of a people out of inner conviction as un-German and impossible." Following the meeting, Himmler recorded that Hitler had read the "six pages through and found them very good and correct." Moreover, Hitler told Himmler he could show the memo to the other Nazi leaders as being congruent with his "line of thinking."<sup>11</sup> In short, Hitler made no official decision and gave no specific order but empowered Himmler to proceed with the knowledge that he could invoke the Führer's backing. This is a rare case in which we know the precise course and result of a private meeting between Hitler and Himmler.

Simultaneously but independently, the newly appointed head of the Foreign Office Jewish desk, Franz Rademacher, in response to the prospect of having the French overseas empire at Germany's disposal, drafted a specific proposal to ship the Jews of Europe to Madagascar. This low-level initiative was quickly passed to the Foreign Minister and then to Hitler, who in a June 18 meeting with Mussolini indicated that Madagascar was to become a Jewish reservation. When Heydrich caught wind of the scheme, he immediately wrote to Ribbentrop to assert his own jurisdiction over any "territorial solution" to the Jewish question. Over the next two months of July and August, Rademacher in the Foreign Office and Eichmann and Dannecker in Heydrich's RSHA (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, Reich Security Main Office) refined their respective versions of the Madagascar Plan, while awareness of Hitler's intention to expel the European Jews to Madagascar spread through the German bureaucracy. However, the plan was predicated on the defeat of Great Britain for open seaways and use of the British merchant marine for transport. Defeat in the Battle of Britain and cancellation of the cross-channel invasion ended further planning, and no definitive version of the plan was ever submitted for approval.

In this example, we see a complex combination of the intoxicating effect of victory euphoria, the dovetailing initiatives of Himmler meeting with Hitler at the top and a low-level official of the Foreign Office working through channels from below, a vague but essential approval by Hitler, a bureaucratic turf battle for jurisdiction, and a close correlation between decision-making on the one hand and rapidly changing military realities on the other. I would argue that, informed by such an understanding of the processes of Nazi decision-making and even without the same richness of surviving documentation, the historian can still reach informed conclusions about Hitler and the fateful decisions for the Final Solution in 1941.

I would also note that this episode provides a cautionary warning against the "teleological temptation." Just because the Final Solution that the Nazis arrived at in 1941–1942 was consistent with Hitler's ideas as they had crystallized by 1928 does not mean



that the former was the premeditated outcome of the latter. Had the Nazis actually been able to implement the Madagascar Plan, what “intentionalist” historian would have suggested that Hitler had failed to fulfill his Reichstag prophesy concerning the “destruction of the Jewish race in Europe” that in turn had been foreshadowed in various ominously murderous sentiments expressed in the 1920s? The Madagascar Plan, if actually implemented, would have been cited as proof that Hitler had long before thought through the ultimate fate of the European Jews.

Following his decision to attack the Soviet Union, Hitler issued a series of exhortations in the early months of 1941 to prepare for a “war of destruction.” The military responded with the Commissar Order, the lifting of martial law protections for the civilian population, mandatory collective reprisals, and the deliberate neglect of preparations to care for Soviet POWs. Economics experts envisaged a “Hunger Plan” that would result in the starvation of “umpteenth million people.” And the SS organized *Einsatzgruppen* to liquidate potential enemies, while Himmler commissioned a *Generalplan Ost* for the demographic engineering of a vast German *Lebensraum*, predicated upon the reduction of local populations by some 30–40 million. Explicit plans for the fate of Soviet Jews were absent in the surviving documentation. However, the thrust of Nazi planning involving mass executions, mass starvation, and mass expulsion clearly implied a genocide of the Soviet Jews, though not yet specific about the timetable and means.

Following the invasion of the Soviet Union, the 3,000 men of the *Einsatzgruppen* implemented a policy of selective mass murder in the communities they quickly passed through, targeting above all adult male Jews of military age and those in leadership positions. They also often tried to instigate local pogroms, with varying success. Both the small number of men in the *Einsatzgruppen* and the vast territories they had to cover precluded a more comprehensive killing program. Other units, such as the Tilsit Kommando on the Lithuanian border and Police Battalion 309 in Bialystok, carried out large massacres on their own that were subsequently sanctioned by Himmler and Heydrich, who then also urged other police units

to emulate such actions. But the turning point from selective mass murder to the onset of the Final Solution for Soviet Jewry, with the goal of killing all Soviet Jews as quickly as possible, in my opinion, occurred in the last half of July 1941.

Flush with spectacular military success and victory euphoria, Hitler met with many of the top Nazi leaders on July 16 and made what he called “fundamental observations.” The newly-occupied territories were lands from which Germany would never retreat, but rather transform into a “Garden of Eden” through “all necessary measures—shootings, resettlements, etc.” He added, “The vast area must be pacified as quickly as possible; this will happen best through shooting anyone who even looks askance at us.”<sup>12</sup> As usual, Hitler did not give explicit orders, but he made clear his expectations.

Himmler’s response was crucial.<sup>13</sup> We can follow it along two tracks. First was a massive reinforcement of manpower for killing operations. Two SS brigades and eleven additional police battalions were reassigned to the HSSPF (*Höherer SS- und Polizeiführer*, Higher SS and Police Leader) on the northern, central, and southern fronts, i.e. nearly 19,000 more men. By the end of the year, there were 26 police battalions on Soviet territory. A further source of manpower reinforcement was the institutionalization of auxiliary local police. Ad hoc bands of native volunteers, such as the Arajs Kommando in Latvia, had already made themselves available to the Germans and been active in killing Jews.<sup>14</sup> Now on July 25, Himmler officially authorized the formation of native auxiliary police units, whose numbers would reach 33,000 by December.<sup>15</sup>

The second track concerned the incitements and instructions these units received, beginning in late July, that led to “re-targeting” and vastly expanded killing. In late July and August, Himmler made repeated trips to the eastern front to meet with his HSSPF and others. The impact of Himmler’s trips was felt in two ways: the shift from targeting primarily adult male Jews to now include significant numbers of Jewish women and children on the one hand, and a substantial increase in the scale of executions (including the first two five-figure *Judenaktionen*) on the other.<sup>16</sup>

In fact, the turn to large-scale executions did not begin with the *Einsatzgruppen* but rather with other units directly subordinate to the HSSPF. After Himmler assigned the SS Cavalry Brigade to Bach-Zelewski, its two regiments were launched on a drive through the Pripet Marsh. On August 1, two days into the *Aktion*, the commander of the Second Regiment received a radio message: “Explicit order of the RF-SS. All Jews must be shot. Drive the female Jews into the swamp.” In the first two weeks of August, the SS Cavalry Brigade—in the estimation of Martin Cüppers—killed some 25,000 Jews.<sup>17</sup> Following a rebuke from Himmler on August 12, the response of HSSPF Jeckeln in the Ukraine was equally lethal. In the last two weeks of August, numerous police battalions under his command intensified their killing of Jews, which culminated on August 26–28 in the mass execution of 23,600 Jews in Kamenets-Podolsk by Jeckeln’s own “staff company” and Police Battalion 322.<sup>18</sup> No single comprehensive order was issued for retargeting, and various *Einsatzgruppen* officers learned at different times in different places as the new policy spread irregularly by word of mouth. For instance, the infamous Jäger Report documents the dramatic turn by *Einsatzkommando 3* to killing large numbers of Jewish women and children in mid-August. Despite local discrepancies in implementation, the new policy was manifest throughout occupied Soviet territory by mid-September.

At the same time that the incremental decision-making process that sealed the fate of Soviet Jewry reached closure, Nazi leaders were aware that this inevitably opened the question about the fate of the remaining European Jews under German occupation. On July 22, Hitler spoke with the visiting Croatian general, Marshal Kvaternik, about his firm intention that not a single Jew could be allowed to remain in Europe, and he was going to approach each state in Europe with that demand.<sup>19</sup> Obviously, Hitler was not being less open with Nazi leaders about his long-term desires in this regard. On July 31, Heydrich obtained Göring’s signature on a document authorizing him to “make all necessary preparations” for a “total solution of the Jewish question” within the German sphere of influence and then submit a draft of this plan for a “Final

Solution.” This authorization to plan did not empower Heydrich to act, as he found out when his initial proposal to Hitler in early August to begin deportations of Jews from Germany was rejected.

On August 19–20, 1941, Goebbels met with Hitler and submitted his own proposals to mark German Jews and begin deportations. Hitler approved the former but not the latter. Goebbels recorded in his diary: “The Führer is convinced that his Reichstag prophecy is coming true . . . In the east the Jews are paying the price, in Germany they have already paid in part and they will have to pay still more in the future.” Concerning that fateful future, Goebbels noted that “the Führer has promised me that I can deport the Jews from Berlin immediately after the end of the eastern campaign.” Then they would be sent to the east “to be worked over in the harsh climate there.”<sup>20</sup>

This episode is crucially instructive in many ways. First, it is perfectly clear that key measures such as marking and deportation required Hitler’s explicit approval. Second, Hitler was well informed about what was happening to the Jews in the Soviet Union. Third, he conceived of the annihilation of the Jews in two phases: for Soviet Jews this was already taking place; for Reich (and ultimately all other European) Jews this would occur “in the future” and “after the end of the eastern campaign.” Fourth, there is no hint that Hitler tied realization of his prophecy to a world war defined by American involvement; fulfillment of the prophecy was already in effect on Soviet territory in the summer of 1941 and was not triggered by American entry into the war in December. And fifth, Hitler was still envisaging the fate of European Jews within the framework of the existing policy of expulsion and decimation.

In the wake of the onset of the Final Solution for Soviet Jewry was the continuation of a policy of expulsion and decimation self-evident for those charged with the actual planning of the total removal of Jews from Europe? A state of frustration and uncertainty can be seen in a September 2 memorandum of Eichmann’s colleague, Rolf-Heinz Höppner. He complained that plans for deportations to “reception territories” in the East had to remain

“patchwork” “because I do not know the intention of the Führer.” “To go into further detail about the organization of this reception area would be fantasy, because first of all the basic decision must be made. It is essential in this regard, by the way, that total clarity prevails about what finally shall happen to those undesirable elements deported . . . Is it the goal to ensure them a certain level of life in the long run, or shall they be totally eradicated.”<sup>21</sup> Höppner’s memo shows that even the most fanatical SS man, eager to work toward the Führer and willing to murder the Jews of Europe, needed a “basic decision” by Hitler and “total clarity” about that goal before he could pursue a policy of total eradication. As of early September, such a decision and such clarity were still lacking, and lower- and middle-echelon Nazis were not simply going to stumble into a program of systematic and comprehensive mass murder on their own.

In the fateful months of September and October, the historian must track four questions. First, what was the military context of this period? Second, why and when did Hitler reverse his position of August 1941 and order the deportation of Reich Jews to begin? Third, when and by whom were the decisions taken to construct the first death camps equipped with gassing facilities? Fourth, were the first death camps only regional improvisations for regional killing, or were they part of a vision for a European-wide Final Solution that could not have emerged without Hitler’s approval?

The German advance stalled at the end of July as it outran its supply lines. In August, the Wehrmacht refit and resupplied while Hitler and the generals argued over the priority targets of a renewed offensive. It was a dispiriting time for Hitler, who simultaneously rejected Heydrich’s and Goebbels’ deportation proposals until the campaign had concluded. Then, in the first week of September, the German army struck northward and encircled Leningrad. On the southern front, breakthrough was achieved on September 12, encirclement of Kiev on the 16th, and capture of the city on the 26th. On October 2, the offensive toward Moscow was launched and achieved the double-encirclement victory of Vyazma and Bryansk by October 7.

Hitler was euphoric. On September 24, he met with Goebbels who reported: “The spell is broken. In the next three to four weeks we must once again expect great victories.” Hitler expected serious fighting would be over and bolshevism would be routed by October 15.<sup>22</sup> Hitler was back in Berlin on October 4 to deliver a speech at the Sportpalast, and Goebbels recorded his mood: “He looks at his best and is in an exuberantly optimistic frame of mind. He literally exudes optimism . . . The offensive has been surprisingly successful so far. . . . The Führer is convinced that if the weather remains halfway favorable, the Soviet army will be essentially demolished in fourteen days.”<sup>23</sup> And on October 7, Goebbels again noted: “It goes well on the front. The Führer continues to be extraordinarily optimistic.”<sup>24</sup>

It was in this renewed euphoria of victory that Hitler reversed his decision on deportations. He met with Himmler and other top leaders on September 16–17, and Himmler announced the results in a letter to Arthur Greiser, Gauleiter of the Warthegau, on the 18th. Hitler had decided to deport Reich Jews to the Lodz ghetto “as the first step” in clearing the Reich of Jews, but this was merely an interim measure being taken “in order to deport them yet further east next spring.”<sup>25</sup> The first deportation train departed on October 15, the exact day Hitler predicted for the end of serious fighting.

In September 1941, experiments in killing by two kinds of readily available poison gas were undertaken: carbon monoxide in the exhaust gas of internal combustion engines (as opposed to the pure carbon monoxide that had been delivered in cylinders to the euthanasia institutes) and the fumigant Zyklon B (already in widespread use in the concentration camps). Two kinds of gas chambers—mobile gas vans and stationary buildings (the morgue/crematorium in Auschwitz I and sealed peasant huts in the forest near the Bug River in the Lublin district)—were also tested. In October, designs for a new crematorium in Auschwitz included two unusual features—recessed ducts and a double ventilation system—particularly suitable for converting the underground morgue into a gas chamber.<sup>26</sup> This building was not immediately constructed, but elsewhere events moved quickly.

Heydrich ordered the construction and testing of a prototype gas van, and in early November contracted for the conversion of 30 trucks into gas vans.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, in late October or early November, the commander of the mobile euthanasia commando in Posen, Herbert Lange, searched the Warthegau for a suitable site, drove to Berlin for consultation, and then returned to the village of Chelmno in the Warthegau to begin construction of a camp that would subsequently be equipped with Heydrich's gas vans.<sup>28</sup> In late September, Eichmann was dispatched by Heydrich to report on the preparations for the Lublin test.<sup>29</sup> The SS and Police Leader in Lublin, Odilo Globocnik, then asked for a meeting with Himmler concerning the "removal" of alien populations in the General Government, which took place on October 13, and construction of the death camp at Belzec began on November 1.<sup>30</sup>

The proliferation of possible death camp sites continued. On October 23, Erhard Wetzel of the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories met with Viktor Brack of the Führer Chancellery, who declared himself ready to help with the construction of "gassing apparatuses" (presumably gas vans) in Riga, since they were not in sufficient supply in the Reich. Wetzel then met with Eichmann, whereupon Wetzel drafted a report for his superiors. The German Jews soon to be deported to Riga would be sent "to the east" later, but there would be no objection "if those Jews who were not fit for work are removed by Brack's helper."<sup>31</sup> And on October 23–25, Himmler visited Mogilev and discussed the construction of gas chambers. By mid-November, the Topf Company had been commissioned to construct huge crematoria, whose ovens were later diverted to Birkenau.<sup>32</sup>

Clearly, not only were several death camps being envisaged in October 1941, but Himmler, Heydrich, and other Berlin figures—including Brack of the Führer Chancellery—were deeply involved. These camps were not just local improvisations. But for whom were they intended? Some historians have argued that the small killing capacity of the first camps at Chelmno and Belzec indicate that they were merely intended for local Jews. I find this argument utterly unpersuasive. No sensible planner would construct in large

numbers on a large scale without first testing small prototypes. After a successful trial, Belzec was quickly enlarged and replicated; Chelmno was not.

More important, fragmentary evidence from late October 1941 indicates a much bigger vision concerning the intended victims of the death camps. On October 13, 1941, the German Foreign Office informed Heydrich of a Spanish request to obtain the release of Jews with Spanish citizenship arrested in reprisal for an attack on a German officer in Paris. If these Spanish Jews were released, the Spanish government offered to evacuate all Spanish Jews—some 2,000—to Spanish Morocco. The Foreign Office endorsed this offer that was fully in line with Germany's prior policy of removing all Jews from Europe by whatever means. On October 17, however, Heydrich rejected the Spanish offer. Not only did the Spanish government lack the will or experience to guard Jews in Morocco, but "in addition these Jews would also be too much out of the direct reach of the measures for a basic solution to the Jewish question to be enacted after the war."<sup>33</sup> This fundamental shift away from a policy of expulsion was confirmed in a Himmler-Heydrich conversation the next day, as cryptically noted in Himmler's telephone log: "No emigration by Jews to overseas."<sup>34</sup> Prohibition of all further Jewish emigration was made official on October 23, and henceforth it was German policy to keep all Jews in Europe, not to get them out. And what, one must ask rhetorically, did the expression "measures for a basic solution to the Jewish question to be enacted after the war" mean when the Nazis were planning four death camps?

At the same time, the German Foreign Office expert and initiator of the Madagascar Plan, Franz Rademacher, along with Eichmann's close associate Friedrich Suhr, were in Belgrade to ensure that the local military authorities, who were beleaguered by a partisan uprising, stopped pressing for the deportation of incarcerated male Jews and shot them instead. On October 25, Rademacher reported that the Jewish women, children, and elderly—whom the German army deemed itself too chivalrous to shoot—would be temporarily interned. "Then as soon as the



technical possibility exists within the framework of a total solution to the Jewish question, the Jews will be deported . . . to reception camps in the east.”<sup>35</sup>

Because Rademacher was in Belgrade, he was not present in Berlin on October 23 when Eichmann met with his deportation experts, including those from the East, to discuss the next wave of deportations.<sup>36</sup> But upon his return to Berlin, Rademacher found waiting a letter of October 23 from an old friend, who had been visiting Berlin and just missed seeing him. “Dear Party Comrade Rademacher! On my return trip from Berlin I met an old party comrade, who works in the east on the settlement of the Jewish question. In the near future many of the Jewish vermin will be exterminated through special measures.”<sup>37</sup>

On October 25, Himmler returned from Mogilev and met with Hitler and Heydrich. In the previous weeks the vehemence of Hitler’s anti-Jewish tirades had already intensified considerably. Now, after referring to his Reichstag prophecy once more, he proclaimed: “It is good when the terror precedes us that we are exterminating the Jews . . . We are writing history anew from the racial standpoint.”<sup>38</sup>

In the fateful months of September-October 1941, the goal of Nazi Jewish policy fundamentally changed from a vision of expulsion and decimation to one of total and systematic extermination. This change of paradigm was not the end of the decision-making process. On the contrary, it raised many new questions still to be answered. Were the death camps to be located primarily on Soviet or Polish territory? What exemptions, if any, were to be made for Jewish labor? Were German Jews, and especially half-Jews, Jews in mixed marriages, and elderly Jews unfit for purported labor, to be treated more cautiously and discretely than foreign Jews? In what order would the different countries of Europe be asked to turn over their Jews? And especially, following the Soviet counter-offensive and American entry into the war in December, when “next spring” and “after the war” were no longer two different expressions for the same timetable but rather two alternative timetables, which was operative? Despite all of these open questions, however,

the “basic decision” and “total clarity” sought by Höppner in early September were now there. Those working on the Jewish question were no longer in doubt about what “working toward the Führer” meant and what was expected of them. This new vision of total eradication—to be carried out in “reception camps in the east” through “special measures” such as Brack’s “gassing apparatuses” and encompassing even Jewish women and children in Belgrade and Spanish Jews in France—was fundamentally different from the old vision. The transition between expulsion and decimation and the Final Solution had been made, and henceforth no leading Nazi doubted whether he was meeting Hitler’s wishes and fulfilling his prophecy. Neither should we.

#### NOTES

1. Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitlers Weltanschauung. Entwurf einer Herrschaft* (Tübingen, 1969) and *Hitler’s Weltanschauung: A Blueprint for Power* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1972); Thomas Weber, *Hitler: The Making of a Nazi* (New York: Basic Books, 2017).

2. *Hitler: Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen 1905–1924*, ed., Eberhard Jäckel (Stuttgart: DVA, 1980), 88–90.

3. *Hitler: Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen*, 184–204. Weber’s assertion that Hitler’s antisemitism was predominately anti-capitalist and only tangentially anti-Bolshevik at this time seems to me overdrawn. Weber, *Hitler*, 110–123.

4. In addition to *Mein Kampf*, see *Hitler’s Second Book*, ed., Gerhard Weinberg (New York: Enigma Books, 2003).

5. Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Boston: Sentry Edition, 1962), 289.

6. Uriel Tal captured this seeming paradox of modern antisemites viewing Christianity as a Jewish conspiracy with the memorable phrase “anti-Christian antisemitism.” Uriel Tal, *Christians and Jews in Germany: Religion, Politics, and Ideology in Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975).

7. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 65.

8. Weber, *Hitler*, 239–240.

9. *Monologe im Führerhauptquartier 1941–1944*, ed., Werner Jochmann (Hamburg: Albrecht Knauss Verlag, 1980), 82 (entry of October 14, 1941).
10. *Trials of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal (hereafter IMT)*, vol. 50, 95 (2278-PS).
11. Helmut Krausnick, ed., “Einige Gedanken über die Behandlung der fremdvölkischen im Osten,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* (hereafter VfZ), V/2 (1957), 194–198.
12. IMT, vol. 38, 86–94 (221-L: conference of July 16, 1941).
13. According to Peter Longerich, Himmler was angered over Rosenberg’s relative success at the July 16 meeting in terms of jurisdictional rewards and thus felt impelled to use his jurisdictions over the police and consolidating Germanism to make the new territories *judenfrei* immediately “in anticipation of what Hitler had in any case planned for the period after the war: the physical extermination of the Jews.” Peter Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 528–530.
14. Richards Plavnieks, *Nazi Collaborators on Trial During the Cold War: Viktors Arajs and the Latvian Auxiliary Security Police* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 39–41.
15. Christopher R. Browning, *The Path to Genocide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 105–106.
16. For Himmler’s role in instigating re-targeting: Cüppers, *Wegbereiter*, 176–188, and Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler*, 530–540. For the uneven manner in which this re-targeting was implemented, see the essays by Wolfgang Scheffler, Christian Gerlach, Dieter Pohl, and Andrej Angrick for *Einsatzgruppen* A, B, C, and D respectively, in *Die Einsatzgruppen in der besetzten Sowjetunion*, 29–110; Christian Gerlach, *Krieg, Ernährung, Völkermord* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1998), 63–81; and Alex J. Kay, “Transition to Genocide, July 1941; Einsatzkommando 9 and the Annihilation of Soviet Jewry,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* (hereafter HGS) 27:3 (Winter 2013), 411–442.
17. Cüppers, *Wegbereiter*, 142–165.
18. Klaus-Michael Mallmann, “Der qualitative Sprung im Vernichtungsprozess. Das Massaker von Kamenez Podolsk,” *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 10 (2002), 239–264.
19. *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik* (hereafter ADAP), Series D, vol. 12/2, appendix 3, 838 (Hewel memo, July 22, 1941).

20. *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, ed., Elke Frölich, Teil II, Bd. I, 266, 269, and 278 (entries of August 19 and 20, 1941).
21. US Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, RG 15.007m, roll 8/file 103/455–62 (Höppner to Eichmann and Ehlich, September 3, with proposal of September 2, 1941).
22. *Tagebücher* II/1, 480–82 (entry of September 24, 1941).
23. *Tagebücher*, II/2, 49–50 (entry of October 4, 1941).
24. *Tagebücher*, II/2, 73 (entry of October 7, 1941).
25. National Archives Microfilm: T175/54/2568695 (Himmler to Greiser, September 18, 1941). See also: Peter Witte, “Two Decisions Concerning the ‘Final Solution to the Jewish Question’: Deportations to Lodz and Mass Murder in Chelmno,” HGS 9:3 (Winter 1995), 318–345.
26. Michael Thad Allen, “The Devil in the Details: The Gas Chambers of Birkenau, October 1941,” HGS 16:2 (Fall 2002), 189–216.
27. Matthais Beer, “Die Entwicklung der Gaswagen beim Mord an den Juden,” VfZ 35/3 (1987), 403–417; Christopher R. Browning, *Fateful Months: Essays on the Emergence of the Final Solution* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985), 57–67.
28. Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen (hereafter ZStL), 203 AR-Z 69/59, IV, 624–643 and VI, 961–989 (testimony of Walter Burmeister) and VII, 1288–1293 (testimony of Konrad S.)
29. For an analysis of the various Eichmann testimonies in this regard, see Christopher R. Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 362–365.
30. Bogdan Musial, *Deutsche Zivilverwaltung und Judenverfolgung im Generalgouvernement: Eine Fallstudie zum Distrikt Lublin 1939–1944* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999), 203–204; *Der Dienstkalender Heinrich Himmlers 1941/42* (hereafter DKHH), ed., Peter Witte et al (Hamburg: Christians, 1999), 233; ZStL, 8 AR-Z 252/9, VII, 1119–1120 (testimony of E. Urainski) and 1129–1130 (testimony of S. Kozak).
31. Nuremberg Document NO-365 (draft letter, Rosenberg to Lohse, initialed by Wetzel, October 25, 1941).
32. Christian Gerlach, “Failure of Plans for an SS Extermination Camp in Mogilev, Belorussia,” HGS 11:1 (Spring 1997), 60–78.
33. Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (hereafter PA), Politische Abteilung III 245, Luther memoranda, October 13 and 17, 1941.

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34. DKHH, 238.
  35. ADAP, D, XIII, 570–572 (Rademacher report, October 25, 1941).
  36. Yad Vashem Archives, O-53/76/110–11 (Abromeit Vermerk, October 24, on meeting in Berlin on October 23, 1941).
  37. PA, Inland II AB 59/3, Wurm to Rademacher, October 23, 1941.
  38. *Monologe im Führer-Hauptquartier 1941–1944: Die Aufzeichnungen Heinrich Heims*, ed., Werner Jochmann (Hamburg: Albrecht Kraus Verlag, 1980), 106.
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