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The war against the Jews

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A Retrospective View

The Final Solution had its origins in Hitler's mind. In *Mein Kampf* he tells us that he decided on his war against the Jews in November 1918, when, at the military hospital in Pasewalk, he learned, in rapid succession, of the naval mutiny at Kiel, the revolution that forced the abdication of the Emperor, and finally the armistice. "Everything went black before my eyes," he wrote. In the ensuing "terrible days and even worse nights," while he pondered the meaning of these cataclysmic events, "my own fate became known to me." It was then that he made his decision:

There is no making pacts with Jews; there can be only the hard: either—or.
I, for my part, decided to go into politics.

Did Hitler really decide then, in November 1918, on the destruction of the Jews as his political goal? Or did the idea remain buried in his mind until it took shape in *Mein Kampf*, which he wrote in 1924? *Mein Kampf* was the basic treatise of Hitler's ideas, where he brought together the three essential components that formed the embryonic concept of the Final Solution. Each component originated in a politically commonplace notion that Hitler transformed into an inordinately radical one. First, he turned political anti-Semitism into a racial doctrine whose purpose was the destruction of the Jews. Second, having defined Bolshevism as a Jewish conspiracy for world rule, he transformed anti-Bolshevism into a holy

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crusade to liberate Russia from its allegedly Jewish masters. Third, using race as a rationale, he transformed the imperialist drive for autarky and world power into the concept of Lebensraum. These three notions were consolidated into a unified concept that became the theoretical, ideational foundation of the Final Solution. In *Mein Kampf* that concept appeared in its matured form and remained a central tenet in Hitler's ideology from which he never deviated. It was already then a fixed idea, in both the everyday and psychiatric meaning of the term, awaiting only the political opportunities for its implementation.

If *Mein Kampf* is the *terminus ad quem* for the conception of the Final Solution, does its beginning indeed go back to November 1918, as Hitler himself claimed? It is a hazardous task to construct a chronology of the evolution of this idea in Hitler's mind. The historical evidence is sparse and no doubt would be inadmissible as courtroom evidence. The very idea of the destruction of the Jews as a political goal demanded, when Hitler first began to advocate it, camouflage and concealment. Its later consummation demanded, within limits, secrecy. Consequently there is a paucity of documents, and even those we have handicap the search for definitive evidence because of the problem of esoteric language.

How does one advocate publicly an idea or a program whose novelty lies in its utter radicalism? No matter how anti-Semitic the Munich of 1919 and 1920 was, the explicit transformation of a slogan like "*Juda verrecke*" into a practical political program would have brought on the censorship of the local authorities and discredited the incipient National Socialist movement even among conventional anti-Semites. In this situation Hitler availed himself of a time-honored device—the use of esoteric language. In all periods of history, when government or society has put limits on public discussion, those who wish to circumvent censorship resort to the use of esoteric language. Exoterically understood, the text is unexceptionable, but to the insiders who know how to interpret the words, the message is revolutionary and dangerous to the status quo.

Hitler complained in *Mein Kampf* that in the early days it was hard to get a hearing for the anti-Semitic point of view. "Our first attempts," he wrote, "to show the public the real enemy then seemed almost hopeless." He exaggerated, as usual, but the problem was that the National Socialists did not want to be dismissed "merely" as anti-Semites, single-minded crackpots without political solutions to contemporary problems. In the Reichswehr, where Hitler's oratorical talents and anti-Semitic presentations to the recruits were much admired by his superiors, there was anxiety that these speeches would be characterized as "anti-Jewish agitation." Instructions were consequently given for a cautious treatment and the avoidance of "plain references" to the Jews.¹

The National Socialists in their public meetings seldom exercised such caution, for the word "Jew" occurs with obsessive repetitiveness. Still, according to the earliest reports of Hitler's speeches, the code words he used for Jews outnumbered the plain references: usury (usurers), profiteering (profiteers), exploiters, big capitalism (big capitalists), international big and/or loan capital, international money power, Communists, Social Democrats, November criminals, revolution criminals, aliens, foreigners. References to the press unmistakably were meant and interpreted as "Jewish" press. In one circumlocution, Hitler spoke of the fight "against the races [*sic*] who are the money representatives."²

The code words served to invest the crude anti-Semitic agitation of the National Socialists with the dignity of political argument and economic analysis. Simultaneously they served to depict for the insiders the vast ramifications of the "Jewish conspiracy" and to document the multifarious roles of the mythic Jew. From the use of these code words, the insiders came to learn that all of Germany's enemies were Jews or tools of Jews.

Having defined the enemy exoterically and esoterically, Hitler in his speeches began to indicate how he would deal with that enemy. In those early days his favorite words were "*Entfernung*" and "*Aufräumung*," both meaning "removal," "elimination," "cleaning up." (In *Mein Kampf* he preferred to use "*Beseitigung*," also meaning "removal," "elimination," but less ambiguous about its finality.) According to a Reichswehr report of a meeting of April 27, 1920, Hitler in his closing remarks said: "We will carry on the struggle until the last Jew is removed [*entfernt ist*] from the German Reich." According to the Bavarian police report, Hitler's conclusion that the NSDAP would make a revolution that would "thoroughly clean out [*aufräumen*] the Jew-rabble" received "protracted, stormy applause."³

Whether he used both words interchangeably or whether the several reporters "interpreted" what they heard, Hitler had resorted to language whose meaning he intentionally made ambiguous, to be understood both exoterically and esoterically. "Removal" or "elimination" could be understood to mean "expulsion," and no doubt some of Hitler's listeners thought, if they thought at all about specifics, that he planned to drive the Jews out of Germany.

In this very early period only two documents are extant that are authentically Hitler's, the direct product of his hand and mind. These lend themselves better to a probing of his meaning than the second-hand reports of Reichswehr and police. The first document is his letter to Gemlich, written while he was still working for the Reichswehr. Here, once more, is that key passage:

Rational anti-Semitism, however, must lead to a systematic legal opposition and elimination [*Beseitigung*] of the special privileges that Jews hold, in contrast to the other aliens living among us (aliens' legislation). Its final objective must unswervingly be the removal [*Entfernung*] of the Jews altogether.

What Hitler is saying here is that a systematic program of anti-Semitism consists of two stages: a preliminary stage in which Jews are deprived of all rights, and then the accomplishment of a "final objective"—"removal of the Jews altogether." The phrase is obviously open to two interpretations. It was not that Hitler was unable to express himself clearly and unequivocally. Rather he deliberately used a word that could be interpreted two ways—one, vague and conventional; the other, specific and radical.

Such ambiguous usage persisted in the National Socialist movement until the end, though its function became somewhat different. Himmler, in his speech to the SS-Gruppenführer on October 4, 1943, used the word "*Ausschaltung*," meaning "elimination," as synonymous with "*Ausrottung*," meaning "annihilation." There was no reason to invoke esoteric language to that particular audience on that occasion at that late date, but by then the political need for esoteric language had given way to the psychological need for euphemistic language.

In the second Hitler document, the text of his speech of August 13, 1920, a typescript apparently made from a stenographic record, with editorial emendations in Hitler's own hand, "*Entfernung*" reappears as a solution to the "Jewish question":

Removal of the Jews from our nation, not because we would begrudge them their existence—we congratulate the rest of the whole world on their company [great merriment], but because the existence of our own nation is a thousand times more important to us than that of an alien race.

Here Hitler has introduced the very question of whether the Jews are to live or die. The irony is heavy. But precisely where does it begin? How did the inflections of his voice, his pauses, and emphases communicate his message? Does the irony begin with the phrase "not because we would begrudge them their existence"? Perhaps the party members are already responding to an inside joke, whereas the outsiders get the joke only at the next clause, which itself compounds the original ambiguity of the word "removal." Are the Jews to be expelled from Germany and thus forced upon other countries, or is Hitler referring to the Jews already living in other countries? The ambiguity is calculated. Nevertheless, Hitler posited an incontrovertible dichotomy: "their existence" versus "our existence."

The "either—or" that he had predicated in *Mein Kampf* was already evolving. In a speech on April 12, 1922, he said, referring to the "Jewish question": "Here, too, there can be no compromise—there are only two possibilities: either victory of the Aryan or annihilation of the Aryan and the victory of the Jew." ⁴ Hitler frequently used the rhetorical device of paired antitheses. Strictly, the construction should have read:

either victory of the Aryan [and annihilation of the Jew]

or

annihilation of the Aryan and the victory of the Jew.

The ellipsis of half of one pair was a signal to the cognoscenti of what he meant to say. Today we can appreciate a similar ellipsis in his famous prophecy of January 30, 1939:

Bolshevization of the world and a victory of the Jews

or

[Aryanization of the world and] destruction of the Jewish race.

In 1922 Hitler had to propagate the annihilation of the Jews in esoteric language. In 1939 he used the same technique to express his ambition for world dominion.

In the summer of 1922 a young man named Kurt Ludecke joined the National Socialist party and first met Hitler. Overwhelmed by both, he described his feelings at that time about the goals the movement had set for itself. These were his perceptions:

The hugeness of the task and the absurdity of the hope swept over me. Its execution meant the liquidation of Jewry, of Rome, of liberalism with its tangled capitalistic connections; of Marxism, Bolshevism, Toryism—in short, an abrupt and complete break with the past and an assault on all existing world political forces.⁵

Hitler's goals had unmistakably been communicated, despite the handicaps of esoteric language. Within the movement, the destruction of the Jews seemed to have been accepted as a basic programmatic task, though the average National Socialist probably still thought of pogrom, despite Hitler's frequently expressed opposition to such "emotional" outbursts of anti-Semitism. Still, even in those early days of the movement, when plans were being laid for the Putsch and the takeover of political power, the Jews figured importantly in Nazi strategy. The destruction of the Jews was not just a matter of words, in esoteric language even then, but a deathly reality. Hermann Esser, one of Hitler's earliest party comrades, at an NSDAP meeting held in December 1922, at which plans for a forthcoming Putsch were discussed, mentioned the possibilities of foreign intervention on behalf of the Weimar Republic. That would not work, he

said, for there would be "500,000 Jews as hostages carefully guarded, who will be ruthlessly dispatched, if even a single enemy crosses the German frontier." At the time of the Putsch, one battalion was assigned to keep the Jews from fleeing Munich, presumably to ensure their remaining as hostages.⁶

A draft constitution prepared by one of Hitler's associates in readiness for the NSDAP takeover provided, as a start, for the expropriation of "all movable and immovable property of the members of the Jewish people." ⁷ Any attempt to circumvent expropriation was punishable by death. Concentration camps (*Sammellager*) were to be set up to "cleanse" the "cities, spas, and resort towns," especially "for the removal of all persons dangerous to security and useless eaters." Since these were to be the first steps during the transitional period while the NSDAP would be consolidating its power, it does not appear unlikely that still more Draconian measures were in store for the Jews.

In retrospect, it seems likely that Hitler had settled on his radical "either—or" anti-Semitism, as he formulated it in the Gemlich letter of 1919, already back in November 1918, as he claims in *Mein Kampf*. During the next few years Hitler's thinking remained geographically limited to Germany, albeit a "greater Germany." In his mind, the destruction of the Jews was the way to restore Germany to its virile Germandom. But once he encountered Alfred Rosenberg, Hitler's political horizons expanded; he began to see the Jews primarily as an international group whose destruction demanded an international policy.

This new approach is distinctly evident in his speech of July 28, 1922, delivered a month after Rathenau's assassination and upon Hitler's emergence from prison where he had served one month for breaking up an opposition meeting. The enforced leisure of prison had given him time to think, as later in Landsberg. Hitler now viewed his struggle against "Jewish world domination" in global terms:

Today we all of us feel that two worlds are struggling with one another, and not alone in our country, but everywhere we look, in oppressed Russia, in Italy, in France, and England, etc. An inexorable struggle between the ideals of those who believe in a national people and the ideals of the intangible, supra-national international. . . .⁸

The content of this speech was a mostly familiar attack on the Jews and the "Jewish" conspiracy in which "the stock-exchange Jew and the labor leader" together "pursue a single direction and a single aim." The new factor was Hitler's global perspective: "How long will it be before the whole world falls to ruin . . . ?"

Rosenberg further showed Hitler the possibilities of exploiting Russia as the political locus of international Jewry, thus providing him with the eventual major theater of operations for his war against world Jewry. Under the influence of Rosenberg and the other Russian and Ukrainian émigrés with whom he associated and with whom the National Socialist movement collaborated, Russia became a key element in Hitler's thinking. The émigrés spoke constantly of the imperative need to invade Russia so as to liberate it from the bondage of the "Jew-Bolsheviks." In the very first issue of the *Völkischer Beobachter*, Rosenberg speculated that the Soviet Union would shortly invade Poland and argued that Germany should then intervene in what he called "the eastern marches of Germany." (Hitler was to use this idea in *Mein Kampf*.) Here, in Rosenberg's mind, is the justification for Germany's "liberation" of the Eastern territories from the "Jewish Bolsheviks," which would simultaneously restore the land to its original German owner. It was an idea that Hitler and Himmler were to hold tenaciously for the next twenty years. Thus, fitting piece by piece into a large scheme, Hitler combined the annihilation of the Jews with the destruction of Bolshevism, both of which could be accomplished by an invasion of Russia. The whole was supported in racial terms: the innate racial perniciousness of the Jews and the innate racial superiority of the Aryans whose culture justified their need for Lebensraum.

Hitler probably derived the components for the idea of Lebensraum from the impositions of the Versailles Treaty. His earliest speeches all dwelled, in one way or another, on the treaty, for which, as he saw it, the Jews were responsible. He often referred to Germany's lost colonies, the forfeiture of her merchant and fishing fleets, the obligatory deliveries of coal to France and the Low Countries, and the burdensome monetary payments. According to the Reichswehr report of a speech of December 10, 1919, on the "shame of the Versailles Treaty," Hitler spoke of Germany's need to import raw materials; according to the Bavarian police report, he complained that there was eighteen times more land for every Russian than for every German. (In that speech, he expressed the view that the Russian had a right to his land, a position he did not long hold.) In a speech on September 20, 1920, the racial justification for Lebensraum had already emerged. According to the Reichswehr report, Hitler said that Germany had a right to live, not only on the basis of its population, but also "on the basis of its culture." Thus, with the help of Rosenberg and eventually Haushofer, Hitler shaped his concept of Lebensraum, in which racial ideology became as vital as the imperialist drive.

Hitler wrote the first volume of *Mein Kampf* in Landsberg prison in 1924 and the second volume in 1925, when he was forbidden to engage

in public speaking. The tone of the second is more aggressive and outspoken than that of the first;⁹ Volume 2 is said to have benefited also from professional editorial assistance. The writing of *Mein Kampf* forced Hitler into a process of organizing his ideas in one all-embracing schema, however unsystematic and inchoate the final product. At its center was the war against the Jews that would culminate in their annihilation and the world supremacy of the Germans. The language, especially in the second volume, is no longer esoteric, but plainspoken. Though Hitler's hysteria and chiliastic rhetoric made the prose appear deceptively metaphorical, the words were meant to be taken literally. The destruction of the Jews is advocated time and again (all italics in original):

Only the elimination of the causes of our collapse, as well as the destruction of its beneficiaries, can create the premise for our outward fight for freedom.

... It is the inexorable Jew who struggles for his domination over the nations. No nation can remove this hand from its throat except by the sword. Only the assembled and concentrated might of a national passion rearing up in its strength can defy the international enslavement of peoples. Such a process is and remains a bloody one.

Writing about the failure of the 1923 Putsch, Hitler accused the Weimar government of lacking sufficient nationalism: "And in my opinion, it was then the very first task of a truly national government to seek and find the forces which were resolved to declare a war of annihilation on Marxism and then to give these forces a free road. . . ." Not only was the government derelict in its task, Hitler argued, but so were all the political parties, which "continued to bicker with the Marxists only out of competitors' envy, without any serious desire to annihilate them."

At the same time, Hitler kept projecting on the Jews the very destructive ideas he held about them: "The Jew would really devour the people of the earth, would become their master," "the international world Jew slowly but surely strangles us," "the Jew destroys the racial foundations of our existence and thus destroys our people for all time."

He even argued retroactively for a "preventive" war against the Jew in 1914-1918, which could have saved Germany from defeat:

It would have been the duty of a serious government, now that the German worker had found his way back to his nation [in August 1914], to exterminate mercilessly the agitators who were misleading the nation.

If the best men were dying at the front, the least we could do was to wipe out the vermin.

If at the beginning of the War and during the War twelve or fifteen thousand of these Hebrew corrupters of the people had been held under

poison gas . . . the sacrifice of millions at the front would not have been in vain. On the contrary: twelve thousand scoundrels eliminated in time might have saved the lives of a million real Germans, valuable for the future.

In the years between 1919 and 1925, the political climate had changed and Hitler now openly espoused his program of annihilation, without having to resort to concealment or camouflage. But only his followers took his words literally. Others, when they listened to Hitler or read *Mein Kampf*, dismissed his words as lunatic ravings. Yet these words were to become the blueprint for his policies when he came to power and would become, astonishingly, political and military reality.

Once Hitler adopted an ideological position, even a strategic one, he adhered to it with limpetlike fixity, fearful lest he be accused, if he changed his mind, of incertitude or capriciousness on "essential questions." He had long-range plans to realize his ideological goals, and the destruction of the Jews was at their center.

The grand design was in his head. He did not spell it out in concrete strategy. Nothing was written down. (On April 29, 1937, he advised NSDAP leaders: "Everything that can be discussed should *never* be put in writing, never!")¹⁰ He even elevated his tactics of secrecy into a strategic principle: as few people as possible to know as little as possible as late as possible.¹¹

The implementation of his plans was contingent on the opportunism of the moment or the expediency of delay. As head of both the German state and the National Socialist movement, he had to weigh the urgent passions of the little man in the party against the foreign-policy interests of the state, and to balance his own desire for surprise attack with the state's readiness to mount one. Often he decided suddenly that the opportune occasion had arrived to carry out a specific aspect of his program, and then the practical work had quickly to be improvised.

In Hitler's schema, the removal of the Jews from posts in the state apparatus and from society's cultural and educational institutions represented, along with the remilitarization of Germany, the first phase of his program, the internal cleansing and healing of Germany. Whereas the anti-Jewish legislation of 1933 was for him merely the prerequisite for later stages of his program that would culminate in the Final Solution, this undoing of the emancipation of the German Jews represented for the conventional anti-Semites the attainment of their political ambitions. That was the time when the widest consensus existed in Germany with regard to anti-Semitism, when the values and goals of the conventional anti-Semites were identical and undistinguishable from those of the radical

anti-Semites. That particular convergence made it easier for the conventional anti-Semites subsequently to acquiesce to the radical anti-Semitic program.

At the National Socialist party congress in Nuremberg in September 1935, Hitler introduced new anti-Jewish legislation, describing these laws as a repayment of a debt of gratitude to the National Socialist party, under whose aegis Germany had regained her freedom, and as the fulfillment of an important plank of the movement's program.¹² The Reich Citizenship Law, depriving the German Jews of the rights and protections of citizenship, marked the goal of conventional anti-Semitism—the total disenfranchisement of the Jews.

The Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor, on the other hand, even though it drew heavily upon a half-century's tradition of racist anti-Semitism, was a new departure. With its implementing decrees and with those of the Reich Citizenship Law, it initiated Hitler's program of radical anti-Semitism, with the process of identifying and isolating the Jews from the non-Jews, readying them, as it were, for their later fate.

The Nuremberg Laws were a watershed also in another respect, to which Hitler alluded ominously. In introducing the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor, he said that it was "an attempt to regulate by law a problem which, in the event of repeated failure, would have to be transferred by law to the National Socialist party for final solution."* He was, it now appears, indicating that the state had come to the end of its competency in handling the Jewish question and that thenceforth all anti-Jewish measures would be carried out by the party. In this period, too, he spoke of sweeping plans for the Jews, involving ghettos and possibly a reservation, and on another occasion he talked of carrying out the "euthanasia" murder program once war came.

By the summer of 1936, Hitler believed that the first phase of his program—the internal domestic stage—was virtually completed and in August, having composed a memorandum on the Four Year Plan, he entered into preparations for the second phase—aggression and war. That memorandum, with its ideological justification for a war against "Jewish Bolshevism," transformed *Mein Kampf* into state policy. The doctrine of the party leader now became the plan for the state. The annihilation of the Jews, who are explicitly referred to as the power behind Bol-

* In his speech of April 27, 1920, Hitler was reported to have said, with regard to carrying out his planned anti-Jewish program: "First we try to carry it out kindly, and then, when that does not work, with ruthless violence."

shevism, is implicit in Hitler's familiar rhetorical construction (italicized in the original): "*For a victory of Bolshevism over Germany would not lead to a Versailles Treaty but to the final destruction, indeed to the annihilation, of the German people.*"¹⁸ As further clarification, Hitler specified that the Reichstag would have to pass a law expropriating the Jews. Thus the expropriation of the Jews had become, in Hitler's thinking, correlated with the advancement of his war plans. That decision explains why Hitler rejected the insistent demands of the National Socialist movement between 1935 and 1938 to plunder Jewish property and possessions.

That decision explains also Hitler's apparent indifference to the unregulated pluralism with regard to the Jews that then flourished within state and party—the use of National Socialist law, arbitrary violence, normal bureaucratic procedures for normal migration coexisting with the SD's ideas of forced emigration. Hitler's toleration for such assorted "solutions" extended only until he was ready to put his war plans into operation.

Hitler appointed Göring to be his Plenipotentiary for the Four Year Plan and gave him a copy of that memorandum. They surely discussed aspects of this program, and Hitler must have shared his plans concerning the Jews. At least one other person also shared Hitler's confidences in this respect at this time—Heinrich Himmler. In the early summer of 1936 Himmler had, with Hitler's support, become Reichsführer-SS and Chief of the German Police, directly subordinate to Hitler and only to him. Hitler had by then already decided to hand over to the National Socialist movement the authority to "solve" the Jewish question. Himmler, then one of the most powerful figures in the party, had probably been inducted into the inmost circle and told of Hitler's plans for war and the destruction of the Jews—a task that would fall, at the proper time, within his jurisdiction.

How often and how specifically Hitler discussed his plans with Göring and Himmler no one knows. Yet they spoke, for instance, about ghettos as an interim measure, because Göring, at his post-Kristallnacht inter-ministerial conference of November 12, 1938, proposed ghettos as a possible means of concentrating the Jews. (Heydrich's objections at that time indicate that he had not yet become privy to these plans.)

If the plans for dealing with the Jews were vague and nonspecific, so were the plans for military invasion, as the Hossbach protocol reveals. Hitler's military and diplomatic staffs were appalled to learn in November 1937 of Hitler's intentions to invade Austria and Czechoslovakia in 1938, not so much because of the suddenness with which they had to confront these plans, but because of lack of preparation. Their demurrals,

however, cost them their posts and careers, for Hitler remained inflexible, committed to his timetable. The Austrian invasion advanced smoothly, but Chamberlain's intervention in Czechoslovakia frustrated Hitler's plans. It appears that he had intended, under cover of the seizure of Czechoslovakia, to carry out the expropriation of the Jews, for the first National Socialist legislation in this area was issued early in 1938. Hitler no doubt counted on the general public upheaval over Czechoslovakia to muffle protests about robbing the Jews.

Thwarted by Chamberlain, but impatient to move ahead according to his schedule, Hitler took the first opportunity that would give him apparent justification to expropriate the Jews: the assassination of vom Rath. That opportunism proved doubly useful, for it gave the little Nazi a last chance for a fling. The pogrom and the expropriation were not really part of Hitler's new, radical anti-Semitism, but rather a reversion to medievalism, when Jews were subjected not only to violence, but to all sorts of taxes, fines, levies, exactions, ameracements, and confiscations. In the Middle Ages complete expropriation went hand in hand with expulsion, and for the brief period that National Socialist pressure for Jewish emigration intensified following the Kristallnacht, Hitler seemed to be emulating Edward I and Philip the Fair. But pressure for emigration was, in Hitler's plans, only byplay. After the Kristallnacht the Jews in Germany became little more than hostages, perhaps no different from the way Hitler and Esser had envisaged the situation in 1923. The Reichszentrale, which Göring had instructed Heydrich to set up on January 24, 1939, effectively put the Jews at the mercy of the police and SD. (Probably then, Heydrich was made a party to the plan to destroy the Jews.)

On January 30, 1939, Hitler made his declaration of war against the Jews, promising "the destruction of the Jewish race in Europe." The decision to proceed with this irreversible mission had already been taken. Thenceforth the Final Solution entered the stage of practical planning for implementation. Hitler's first opportunity to put into practice his ideas about killing the crippled and insane presented itself at this time, and shortly thereafter, on April 3, 1939, he instructed Keitel to start planning the invasion of Poland.

Hitler's gamble, then, was on a quick military victory in Poland, to be completed before Russia could gather wits or forces to act. Afterward he would consolidate his position, using Poland as the launching pad for his invasion of Russia. (The rapprochement with Russia, ideologically embarrassing but tactically expedient, did not at all affect his long-range plans, but merely eased his short-range military risks.) While planning the Polish invasion, Hitler, Himmler, and Heydrich worked out the first stage of the Final Solution, concentrating the Jews while consolidating

the Polish gains. Heydrich's instructions to the chiefs of the Einsatzgruppen on September 21, 1939, are clear enough about present program and future intentions. The second, ultimate stage of the Final Solution was to be synchronized with the attack on Russia, when "Jewish Bolshevism" would be destroyed.

While the Jews in Poland were concentrated in ghettos and began to expire slowly of "natural" causes like hunger, disease, cold, exhaustion, the idea of systematically killing the Jews began to appear as an inevitable and even desirable development to a number of Germans not privy to the still-secret plans for the Final Solution. Thus SS-Brigadeführer Friedrich Übelhör, *Regierungspräsident* of Lodz (the top official in the civil administration of the district of Lodz), on December 10, 1939, in planning to establish a ghetto, already thought of its destruction:

The establishment of the ghetto is of course only a provisional measure. I reserve for myself the points in time and the means with which the ghetto and thereby the city of Lodz will be cleansed of Jews. The end goal [*Endziel*] in any case must be that we burn out this pesthole without a remainder.¹⁴

Übelhör's hubris reveals that he knew nothing of the plans for the Final Solution, otherwise he would not likely have arrogated to himself a decision of the highest state and party priority.

A year later, on December 20, 1940, Governor Hans Frank addressed a Wehrmacht battalion stationed in Cracow. Remarking, as he often did, that their families must commiserate with them for having to serve in Poland, where there were so many lice and Jews, Frank said it would indeed be nice if they could write home and say that things with regard to lice and Jews had improved: "To be sure, in one year I can do away with neither all the lice nor all the Jews [merriment]. But in the course of time and, above all, if you help me, that will be made attainable."¹⁵

Still later, in July 1941, an official by the name of Höppner, in the city administration of Posen, sent Eichmann the official minutes of a discussion regarding the "Solution of the Jewish Question" in the Wartheland. One proposal read:

There is an imminent danger that not all the Jews can be supplied with food in the coming winter. We must seriously consider if it would not be more humane to finish off the Jews, insofar as they are not fit for labor mobilization, with some quick-acting means. In any case this would be more agreeable [*angenehmer*] than to let them die of hunger.

In his covering letter asking for Eichmann's comments, Höppner was optimistically categorical: "These things sound to some extent fantastic,

but in my view absolutely practicable."¹⁶ Eichmann, for his part, at precisely that time was working on the practicability of such fantastic ideas.

In December 1940 Operation Barbarossa entered the formal planning stage, and Hitler then no doubt explored with Himmler, and perhaps Heydrich, various practical possibilities for the last stage of the Final Solution. By February 1941 they had decided on a two-pronged attack against the Jews. In the active war zone, the Einsatzgruppen would coordinate their murder attack on the Jews with the military invasion. The rest of the European Jews in countries under German occupation or governed by rulers sympathetic to Germany would be brought to annihilation camps in or near the Generalgouvernement of Poland. (Himmler's visit to Auschwitz on March 1, 1941, was obviously exploratory, for he did not inform Höss then why Auschwitz was to be expanded.) All the decisions had been taken. The rest was a matter of technology, administrative clearance, and efficient operation. Through a maze of time Hitler's decision of November 1918 led to Operation Barbarossa. There never had been any ideological deviation or wavering determination. In the end only the question of opportunity mattered.

The Final Solution grew out of a matrix formed by traditional anti-Semitism, the paranoid delusions that seized Germany after World War I, and the emergence of Hitler and the National Socialist movement. Without Hitler, the charismatic political leader, who believed he had a mission to annihilate the Jews, the Final Solution would not have occurred. Without that assertive and enduring tradition of anti-Semitism by which the Germans sought self-definition, Hitler would not have had the fecund soil in which to grow his organization and spread its propaganda. Without the paranoid delusion of the Dolchstoß that masses of Germans shared in the wake of Germany's military defeat, political upheavals, economic distress, and humiliations of the Versailles Treaty, Hitler could not have transformed the German brand of conventional anti-Semitism into a radical doctrine of mass murder.

Anti-Semitism was the core of Hitler's system of beliefs and the central motivation for his policies. He believed himself to be the savior who would bring redemption to the German people through the annihilation of the Jews, that people who embodied, in his eyes, the Satanic hosts. When he spoke or wrote about his "holy mission," he used words associated with chiliastic prophecy (not only in the millennial concept literally rendered as the "Thousand Year Reich"), like "consecration," "salvation," "redemption," "resurrection," "God's will." The murder of the Jews, in his fantasies, was commanded by divine providence, and he was

the chosen instrument for that task. He referred often to his "mission," but nowhere so explicitly as in *Mein Kampf*: "Hence today I believe that I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator: by defending myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the work of the Lord." From the moment he made his entrance on the historical stage until his death in a Berlin bunker, this sense of messianic mission never departed from him, nor could any appeal to reason deflect him from pursuing his murderous purpose.

Generations of anti-Semitism had prepared the Germans to accept Hitler as their redeemer. Layer upon layer of anti-Semitism of all kinds—Christian church teachings about the Jews, Volkist anti-Semitism, doctrines of racial superiority, economic theories about the role of Jews in capitalism and commerce, and a half-century of political anti-Semitism—were joined with the solder of German nationalism, providing the structural foundation upon which Hitler and the National Socialist movement built. Of the conglomerate social, economic, and political appeals that the NSDAP directed at the German people, its racial doctrine was most attractive. Yet for the average National Socialist, and still more for the party's fellow travelers, out of the whole corpus of racial teachings, the anti-Jewish doctrine had the greatest dynamic potency. The reports of early NSDAP meetings reveal, from the record of audience responses, that violent attacks on the Jews provided orgasmic outbursts and that Hitler was most adept at getting the blood to tingle with his threats against the Jews.¹⁷ For the audience, the convolutions of Hitler's ideology were, in the end, reduced in significance to the timeworn slogan of German anti-Semitism: "*Juda verrecke*."¹⁸

The insecurities of post-World War I Germany and the anxieties they produced provided an emotional milieu in which irrationality and hysteria became routine and illusions became transformed into delusions. The delusional disorder assumed mass proportions. Germans, otherwise individually rational, yielded themselves to pathological fantasies about the Jews.¹⁹ In that climate, where masses of Germans had lost the ability to distinguish between the real Jew and the mythic Jew of anti-Semitic invention, the chiliastic system of National Socialist beliefs could further influence their already distorted sense of reality. Belief in National Socialism was like belief in magic and witchcraft during the Middle Ages, similarly ruling and inflaming the minds of men.²⁰ In the Middle Ages private misfortunes and public calamities were attributed to witches and demons, whereas in modern Germany the Jews were regarded as the source of evil and disaster. A popular children's book of the time made it plain:

*Ohne Lösung der Judenfrage
Kein Erlösung der menschheit.*²¹
(Without solution of the Jewish question
No salvation of mankind.)

In medieval days entire communities were seized with witchcraft hysteria, and in modern Germany the mass psychosis of anti-Semitism deranged a whole people. According to their system of beliefs, elimination of the Jews resembled medieval exorcism of the Devil. The accomplishment of both, it was variously held, would restore grace to the world.

German hysteria was rooted in fear. "That which drives the German to cruelty," wrote Curzio Malaparte, "to deeds most coldly, methodically and scientifically cruel, is fear."²² That fear, which assumed pandemic proportions, operated through projection. What the Germans hated and feared most in themselves they projected onto the Jews, endowing the Jews with those terrible and terrifying attributes they tried to repress in themselves. The farther the image of the Jew receded from reality, taking on the fantastic distortions of primeval hatred, the more abhorrent it became.

There were, fundamentally, two totally disparate and mutually contradictory images of the Jew that collided with each other in the paranoid propaganda of National Socialist anti-Semitism, both inherited from the recent and medieval treasury of anti-Semitism. One was the image of the Jew as vermin, to be rubbed out by the heel of the boot, to be exterminated. The other was the image of the Jew as the mythic omnipotent superadversary, against whom war on the greatest scale had to be conducted. The Jew was, on the one hand, a germ, a bacillus, to be killed without conscience. On the other hand, he was, in the phrase Hitler repeatedly used, from *Mein Kampf* until the end of the war, the "mortal enemy" (*Todfeind*), to be killed in self-defense.

Also the counterimages that the Germans held of themselves were dual and inconsistent. In one scenario, the "Aryan" German was the wholesome, vigorous superman, invulnerable to "Jewish" poison, who was destined by innate racial superiority to rule the world. According to the other scenario, however, the Germans saw themselves as latter-day Laocoöns in the grip of a death struggle. In a paranoid vision, they believed themselves to be innocent and aggrieved victims, outwitted by the machinations of a supercunning and all-powerful antagonist, engaged in a struggle for their very existence. It was a struggle, as Hitler put it, of "either—or."

Once the illusory notions about "Jewish" power had been transformed into delusions about a Jewish conspiracy to rule the world, the Germans

became possessed by the belief that mythic world Jewry was committed to their destruction. Consequently, in the deluded German mind, every Jewish man, woman, and child became a panoplied warrior of a vast Satanic fighting machine. The most concrete illustration of this delusion is the now familiar photograph taken from the collection attached to Stroop's report of the Warsaw ghetto uprising. It shows uniformed German SS men holding guns to a group of women and children; in the foreground is a frightened boy of about six, his hands up. This was the face of the enemy.

Hitler skillfully translated this mythic warfare into a real war in which the Germans engaged the real enemy along with the mythic enemy. On April 15, 1945, when six million Jews were already murdered, Hitler issued his last military order. He exhorted his soldiers to perform their utmost: "For the last time our mortal enemies the Jewish Bolsheviks have launched their massive forces to the attack. Their aim is to reduce Germany to ruins and to exterminate our people."²³

In one sense the German war against the Jews fitted into Clausewitz's classical definition of war as a political act, the continuation of politics by other means. This was National Socialism's innovation, having transformed conventional anti-Semitism with its metaphoric imagery of combat into a literal war of annihilation. "True wars," said Himmler, "wars between races, are merciless and fought to the last man, until one side or the other is eliminated without trace."²⁴ But only the truly mad could have believed that it was war that they were waging against the Jews. For the Jews were a civilian population, dispersed among the European nations, having no country and no political power, and consequently none of the resources that even small nations could muster for war.

PART II

THE HOLOCAUST