

**THE
HOLOCAUST
AND
HISTORY** The Known,
the Unknown, the Disputed, and
the Reexamined

EDITED BY

Michael Berenbaum and Abraham J. Peck

Published in association with the
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
Washington, D.C.

1998

Indiana University Press
Bloomington and Indianapolis

12.

CHARLES W. SYDNOR, JR.

Executive Instinct

REINHARD HEYDRICH AND THE
PLANNING FOR THE FINAL SOLUTION

Adolf Hitler's racial and ideological antisemitism was the foundation of his political life and career. His obsession with destroying international Jewry was fundamentally important to the development of Germany's internal policies and to the Third Reich's diplomatic and military strategy. The specific anti-Jewish measures that were the harvest of this hatred were of paramount interest to Hitler from the boycott of April 1933 to the dictation of his political testament in April 1945. The destructive anti-Jewish policies of Nazi Germany, whether publicly announced, unofficially implied, or secretly implemented, resulted from decisions that were strategically driven and were the products of planning. For Hitler, diplomacy, war, and the conquest of living space for the Nazi millennium were inseparably linked to what he called "the merciless struggle against the Jews."¹

By focusing upon the activities of the subordinates Hitler called upon to carry out Germany's anti-Jewish policies, especially during periods when the Führer exercised critical strategic options, we may learn more about how the regime undertook the preparations and approached the decisions that led to the destruction of the European Jews. This is particularly true in the case of the man charged with the administrative planning and operational direction of the Final Solution to the Jewish Question, Reinhard Heydrich.

We have long known a great deal about Heydrich's career in the SS and the police. The essential features of his working relationships with Heinrich Himmler, Hermann Göring, and with Hitler are fairly well documented. In many respects, he was the ablest and most energetic Nazi operative of radical ethnographic policy. He could be relied upon absolutely to carry out the most brutal orders and inhuman measures required to achieve Hitler's racial and ideological objectives.²

An earlier and accurate appraisal depicts Heydrich as a figure of conventional intellect, an unoriginal and lackluster personality who possessed social abilities and communications skills barely adequate to the stature of a major persona exercising vast authority in one of the world's great powers.³ While this is true, it is well to remember that in the Nazi cosmos even a dwarf star—if determined—could shine brightly. Other traits were to make him a major figure in modern history.

Where Heydrich excelled and stood apart from, if not above, every other major

figure of the Nazi era was in the exercise of certain qualities that both Hitler and Himmler valued as indispensable and irreplaceable. Heydrich possessed a unique combination of administrative acumen, organizational insight, pragmatic tenacity, and unparalleled ruthlessness. His phenomenal drive and stupendous capacity for work were propelled by an unbounded physical and psychological energy. No one else in the Nazi hierarchy could keep up with him. His relief from the pressures of office, apart from his passion for the cello and chamber music, was in the pursuit of even more strenuous activity; an accomplished equestrian, a world-class fencer, an enthusiastic sports flyer, and a decorated wartime fighter pilot, Reinhard Heydrich looked and acted the role of the versatile, athletic, prototypical leader of the Nordic New Order. He was Hitler's ideal Nazi.⁴

More important were the even rarer capacities Heydrich possessed, abilities that enabled him to interpret, anticipate, plan, and administer Hitler's anti-Jewish policies in the overlapping sequences that culminated in the Final Solution. Taken together, these qualities can be called *executive instinct*. Both Hitler and Himmler, each in their own vernacular, referred to them in reflecting upon Heydrich's abilities.⁵

Executive Instinct

In Reinhard Heydrich, the talent for executive instinct depended upon a number of exceptional traits. First and foremost was acute sensitivity. Heydrich was always and everywhere alert to the wishes and temperament of his superiors. He could anticipate how to respond reflexively to their most important obsessions or objectives and the moods and circumstances that conditioned them. Knowing what mattered most to Hitler and Himmler, Heydrich engaged his own natural appetite for making decisions and applied his energetic and ruthless determination to the tasks of planning and developing options that could enable them to succeed.

Heydrich could trust his own instincts because he was never unprepared. He understood that in the Hitlerian world, failure most often occurred from lack of choice. In any issue of importance to the growing portfolio of critical charges he carried after 1938, and most especially in matters related to anti-Jewish measures, Heydrich was never caught off guard by his superiors by merely having a plan or an idea. He constantly carried the ammunition of thorough preparation, and he was always well-armed with plans—short term, intermediate, and long-range.⁶

In plain language, Heydrich relied on his instincts to figure out what he thought the bosses wanted, and then took the initiative to present them with the possibilities for achieving their goals. He never had to be told anything twice; he never needed justification or explanation for any assignment he received; he never required supervisory follow-up or had to be reminded of deadlines; and there is no recorded instance in which he ever took a problem to Himmler or to Hitler without corresponding recommendations or options for resolving the dilemma. In the daily pressures of administering the Führer state, a subordinate with these qualities was both a rare find and an irreplaceable asset.

Thus, when Hitler talked of getting rid of the Jews "one way or another," Heydrich understood what he meant. He saw clearly how each of the steps in Germany's

escalating anti-Jewish
thermore, he grasped
policy, military strate

With Heydrich,
sensing, it also includ
could make rope fro
considerable powers
Service. To these pow
of the state, the agen
Reich to his authorit
of Hitler).⁷ In these o
larly successful tenu
enabled him to act
Germany's military s
European Jews.

In each instance
unauthorized. In eve
Nisko and Lublin Pla
of German-occupied
preparation.⁸

Evolution of th

Heydrich's activ
the evolution of plan
tied to Heydrich stro
no later than mid-J
option—for the exte

The three perio
(the winter and early
and shortly after the
elapsed between the
decision to attack Sc

The Reichskrist
cies. The national p
were driven by two
1938, to launch an
implement it), and
diplomat in Paris, E
intend or plan to lo
tion from random
Himmler and Heyc
streets as mob viole
SS and police as ad
Heydrich's authority

escalating anti-Jewish policies would define and condition the stages to follow. Furthermore, he grasped without difficulty the evolving relationships among foreign policy, military strategy, and the war against the Jews.

With Heydrich, the capacity for executive instinct meant not only acting by sensing, it also included an uncanny ability to produce bureaucratic enlargement. He could make rope from shoestring. Beginning in January 1939, he expanded the considerable powers he then held as Chief of the Security Police and the Security Service. To these powers he added further responsibilities that tied the key ministries of the state, the agencies of the Nazi Party, and ultimately the armed forces of the Reich to his authority as the Judenkommissar (commissioned by Göring on behalf of Hitler).⁷ In these offices, which finally (and fatally) included a brief but spectacularly successful tenure as Hitler's satrap in Prague, Heydrich's executive instincts enabled him to act upon the opportunities presented by the pace and scope of Germany's military successes to initiate unprecedented "final" measures against the European Jews.

In each instance, the anti-Jewish measures he initiated or undertook were not unauthorized. In every case, with the exception of the Jewish deportations under the Nisko and Lublin Plan to resettle all the Jews of the Third Reich in the eastern portion of German-occupied Poland, they were the result of extensive prior planning and preparation.⁸

Evolution of the Final Solution

Heydrich's activities during three critical periods offer interesting insights into the evolution of planning for the Final Solution. Newly discovered documentation tied to Heydrich strongly suggests that he had prepared and had placed before Hitler, no later than mid-January 1941, a draft proposal—as a plan and therefore as an option—for the extermination of the European Jews.

The three periods in question include the time during the Reichskristallnacht (the winter and early spring of 1938–1939) and shortly thereafter; the weeks during and shortly after the German conquest of Poland in 1939; and the seven months that elapsed between the French surrender in June 1940 and the weeks following Hitler's decision to attack Soviet Russia, which was formally signed on December 18, 1940.

The Reichskristallnacht brought radical changes in Germany's anti-Jewish policies. The national pogrom of November 9–10, 1938, and the events that followed it were driven by two factors: the first was Hitler's decision, taken in the summer of 1938, to launch and wage a European war (a decision that preceded the plans to implement it), and the second was Herschel Grynzspan's killing of a German diplomat in Paris, Ernst vom Rath.⁹ Since Hitler was determined to start (and did not intend or plan to lose) the war, the decision altered the methods of Jewish persecution from random tactics to concrete strategy. With the concurrence of Göring, Himmler and Heydrich seized the initiative to get anti-Jewish measures off the streets as mob violence. These measures would be transferred into the hands of the SS and police as administrative measures and policy decisions, coordinated under Heydrich's authority as Chief of the Security Police and the SD.¹⁰

Himmler himself had been a major barometer of the climate for the pogrom. In a secret speech to SS generals the night before the violence, he had predicted a merciless racial struggle to the death—a long war of annihilation between Germany and the Jews.¹¹ Though he and Heydrich apparently were surprised by the outbreak and extent of the violence, they intervened to keep the destruction at least under police supervision. At the height of the pogrom, in an order as emblematic of his own views as it was of subsequent anti-Jewish policy, Heydrich telegraphed instructions to his police commanders that “Jewish homes and businesses may only be destroyed; they may not be looted.”¹²

At the ministerial conference Göring convened in the Air Ministry on November 12, 1938, in order to deal with the economic and financial aftermath of the pogrom, Heydrich was the key participant.¹³ He proposed new, sweeping laws to seal Germany's Jews in an inescapable pressure chamber of discrimination and deprivation. He insisted on radical additional measures to accelerate the emigration of Jews from Germany. Additionally, he urged the creation of a new Central Office for Jewish Emigration in Berlin, modeled on the successful prototype his subordinate Adolf Eichmann had established in Vienna. Within ten weeks of the meeting, virtually all of the anti-Jewish measures proposed by the participants had become law by decree or administrative regulation, and the new Central Office in Berlin was operating under Eichmann's direction and Heydrich's authority.¹⁴

With the precedent established to enlarge his power in Jewish matters, Heydrich took his first cues from the rhetoric of his superiors. Himmler was already on record predicting the destruction of Germany's Jews in the event of war.¹⁵ Göring had come close to saying the same thing in different words during the Air Ministry Conference on November 12.¹⁶

On January 30, 1939, six days after Heydrich's new Central Office was authorized by Göring, Hitler prophesied to the world from the rostrum of the Reichstag that the event of war would result in the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.¹⁷ Since the prophet was already determined to start the war himself, the unconditional importance of the statement as a self-fulfilling prophecy was not lost on one of his most astute followers.

Five days before Hitler's Reichstag speech, Heydrich himself addressed a gathering of senior SS officers on the nature of the Jewish question. An attentive Himmler jotted down notes. According to the cryptic entries, Heydrich developed the theme of the Jews as the eternal subhumanity whom societies in the past had made “the mistake” of driving out. This error, the reconstructed notes indicate, had led only to the eventual return of Jews into society and to new jealousy (problems). Though inconclusive, the document is extremely suggestive, especially in view of the planning activities involving Heydrich or initiated by him during these same months.¹⁸

The Conference of December 16, 1938

On December 16, 1938, Heydrich had participated in an important gathering at the Ministry of the Interior involving most of the top-level principals whose agencies or ministries would be involved in coordinating anti-Jewish measures under

Heydrich's direction. (Interior), Walther Fu Hans Heinrich Lamm Wolf von Helldorf; a number of mayors from several municipalities. “Further possibilities” were expanded, accelerated

And the meaning of the agency meeting held in Berlin by Bernhard Lösener from the High Commission, a surrogate for Kurt I Eicke, the inspector of the Reich. Develop options for discussion was kept by the deputy chief of the Security

Since it was entirely a general agreement that the productive wartime discussion focused on the ages of eighteen and twenty. Special police registers were asked to collaborate

The participant was labor columns or groups of German workers, the quarries. Since they were German wartime headquarters at these points there was a study concerned with whether the measurement of construction of additional camps. How many camps would they be? How would they be once built, would they be? Eicke was requested to answer questions and settle

The conferees of the Security Police that all the Jews when they were. Since wartime circumstances measures to be applied. Possibility of a compulsory police

All of the major

Heydrich's direction. The participants included Reich ministers Wilhelm Frick (Interior), Walther Funk (Economics), Lutz Graf Schwerin von Krosigk (Finance), Hans Heinrich Lammers (the Reichs Chancellery); the police president of Berlin, Wolf von Helldorf; a number of Gauleiters, senior regional government officials, and mayors from several major cities, including Hamburg. The subject of the meeting was "further possibilities with the Jewish question"; the results were reflected in the expanded, accelerated planning activities in and among the offices involved.¹⁹

And the meaning of *further possibilities* emerged clearly during a follow-up interagency meeting held in the Ministry of the Interior on February 28, 1939. Convened by Bernhard Lösener (Frick's Jewish affairs expert) and attended by representatives from the High Command of the Armed Forces, the Main Office of the Security Police, a surrogate for Kurt Daluge from the Main Office of the Order Police, and Theodor Eicke, the inspector-general of concentration camps, the conferees gathered to develop options for dealing with the Jews in the event of war. The record of the discussion was kept by Dr. Werner Best, then Heydrich's closest subordinate as deputy chief of the Security Police and the SD.²⁰

Since it was entirely clear that no Jew could perform military service, there was general agreement that forced labor would be the appropriate alternative. As no productive wartime labor could be expected from Jewish women and children, the discussion focused on how to deal with the estimated 200,000 male Jews between the ages of eighteen and fifty-five who would be available. They would be subject to a special police registration. The participants from the army and the Order Police were asked to collaborate on proposals and report back.²¹

The participants also agreed that these Jews would be employed in segregated labor columns or gangs. Closely guarded by the police and kept well away from any German workers, the Jews would toil at heavy tasks in road construction and in stone quarries. Since they could not be kept in quarters even remotely comparable to German wartime housing, they would be sealed off in special labor camps. On all these points there was general consensus. The major questions requiring further study concerned whether the Jews could be housed in concentration camps or whether the measures would require the construction of additional camps. If the construction of additional camps was indeed required, the questions then became, How many camps would be needed? Where should they be built? Who would guard them? How would the costs be handled among the various institutions affected? And, once built, would the new camps become part of Eicke's concentration camp system? Eicke was requested to have a designee prepare a memorandum analyzing these questions and setting forth specific recommendations.

The conferees also discussed and assented to a recommendation from the Security Police that in wartime it would be both practical and desirable to round up all the Jews when special developments or circumstances made such a step possible. Since wartime circumstances would from time to time require certain Security Police measures to be applied to all Jews in any event, this measure also opened the possibility of a peacetime round-up and internment of the Jews through a special, compulsory police registration.²²

All of the major points discussed in this interagency meeting, held four months

after the Reichskristallnacht and six months before the German invasion of Poland, were refined and developed in the further planning of anti-Jewish measures, and eventually incorporated into the procedures for the Final Solution.

The Outbreak of War

The German assault on Poland and the European war it unleashed created the conditions necessary to fulfill Hitler's prophecy and opened up further possibilities for measures to avoid the mistake Heydrich noted among societies that had permitted Jews to return after expulsion. In the months before the attack, Heydrich's time and energies were absorbed in his work. He was involved in the planning and preparations for the "ethnographic" measures (killing operations) Hitler wanted the SS and police units to carry out in Poland.²³ In addition, he concerned himself with the reorganization of the SS and police agencies into the larger and more centralized Reich Security Main Office (announced officially at the end of September 1939). Finally, Heydrich was busy with providing the steps necessary to fake a Polish attack on the German radio station at Gleiwitz—an "attack" that Hitler used publicly as the pretext for invading Poland.²⁴

With thousands of heavily armed SS and police units operating as Einsatzgruppen behind the advancing armies and under his control, Heydrich carried out and observed the results and new possibilities of large-scale killings and the anticipated removal of whole population groups in the newly conquered eastern territories. Records of these assessments, with an indication of the direction in which Heydrich planned to develop further options for harsher steps against the Jews, are contained in the well-known summaries of his weekly RSHA conferences in September 1939.²⁵

On September 14, Heydrich gave the new office chiefs in the RSHA important news. He claimed that the Jewish problem the Einsatzgruppen had encountered was of such magnitude that Himmler was preparing recommendations that Hitler himself would have to decide upon, since they could have such far-reaching implications for foreign policy.²⁶

On September 21, meeting with the Einsatzgruppen commanders, the RSHA office chiefs, and with Adolf Eichmann present, Heydrich revealed at least some of what he had learned of Hitler and Himmler's thinking about the intended future of the Jews and Poland. The old German provinces would be incorporated into the Reich as Gaue, while further east a dependent state, a kind of no-man's land, would be created with its capital at Kraków. Heydrich also added that in order to achieve "all the necessary ethnographic measures," Hitler would appoint Himmler resettlement commissar.²⁷ Himmler's first assignment was already set; Hitler had agreed to deport all Jews from the new German provinces and from the old Reich and dump them into ghettos in the new dependent state, from which subsequent deportation possibilities would also exist.²⁸

Shortly after the meeting on September 21, Heydrich dictated a top-secret express letter with copies for all the conference participants, for all office chiefs of the Security Police and the SD, for the High Command of the Army, and for the state secretaries in the Reich ministries working directly with the RSHA in Jewish matters—Erich Neumann (Four Year Plan), Wilhelm Stuckart (Interior), Friedrich

Walter Landfried (for the
and the civilian govern

Heydrich's subject
total measures to be ta
Heydrich did not defin
made first about "the f
and, second, the steps
would have to be carr

The first step tow
of all Jews from the co
It also required the sel
Jews in the occupied t
chosen, Heydrich dir
main railroad lines.

In distinguishing
goal, and in stressing
preparation in both t
ients that the immine
office.³⁰ In summary
decisions that had to
cation of past experie
the absolute requirer
decision had been ma
Jews in the East. He
involved to the pla
Poland—the prelude
to Hitler.

The Conferen

The importance
recently discovered
1939, for Dr. Franz
"Final Solution of t
problems). The doc
reservation should h
future (sic) General
soll oder ob die Juc
sollen).³¹

In the event of
it would be necessa
of Germans or Jew
authorities. In any c
Einsatzgruppen for
of all Jews from the

The second of

Walter Landfried (for both the ministries of Food and Agriculture, and Economics), and the civilian government chiefs in the occupied eastern territories.

Heydrich's subject was the Jewish Question in the occupied areas. For both the total measures to be taken against the Jews and the final goal (*das Endziel*)—which Heydrich did not define further—Heydrich wrote that the decision would have to be made first about “the final goal,” which would be realized over a long period of time and, second, the steps or stages required in the interim to achieve this goal, which would have to be carried through quickly.²⁹

The first step toward the final goal, Heydrich continued, was the concentration of all Jews from the countryside into large cities. This had to be carried out rapidly. It also required the selection of the fewest possible cities and concentration points for Jews in the occupied territories, so later measures would be simpler. The only cities chosen, Heydrich directed, should be those at major rail junctions or those astride main railroad lines.

In distinguishing between the planned measures necessary to achieve the final goal, and in stressing that the planned measures would demand the most thorough preparation in both technical and economic respects, Heydrich advised his recipients that the imminent tasks could not then be outlined in complete detail from his office.³⁰ In summary, the clear implications pointed to further preparations and decisions that had to be made, to the rapid, radical alteration and expanded application of past experience in anti-Jewish policy in wholly new circumstances, and to the absolute requirement for secrecy throughout. Heydrich was not suggesting any decision had been made by Hitler, or by Himmler acting for Hitler, to exterminate the Jews in the East. He was, however, committing the RSHA and the other agencies involved to the planning and preparation for the mass deportation of Jews to Poland—the prelude to extermination as an eventual option for Himmler to present to Hitler.

The Conference of December 16, 1939

The importance of this conference is clearly confirmed in an RSHA document recently discovered by Richard Breitman. Talking points drafted on December 19, 1939, for Dr. Franz Six to use in a scheduled office chiefs' conference were titled “Final Solution of the German Jewish Problem” (*Endlösung des deutschen Judenproblems*). The document addressed the fundamental question of whether a Jewish reservation should be created in Poland, or whether the Jews should be housed in the future (*sic*) General Government (*ob ein Judenreservat in Polen geschaffen werden soll oder ob die Juden im zukünftigen Gouvernement Polen untergebracht werden sollen*).³¹

In the event of a decision to establish the reservation, the document continued, it would be necessary to resolve whether the administration should be in the hands of Germans or Jews, though preferably it would be Jews responsible to German authorities. In any event, the administration would have to remain in the hands of the *Einsatzgruppen* for as long as it took the Security Police to complete the resettlement of all Jews from the old Reich and Austria, and from Bohemia and Moravia.³²

The second option, which is not titled, and which could mean “disposal,”³³

points out that "a final decision" (eine endgültige Entscheidung) in this connection would have to deal with the issue of whether Jewish emigration should proceed in the same manner as would be the case in the creation of the reservation. In foreign policy, the document concludes, the reservation would provide good leverage with the Western powers, perhaps facilitating the question of a worldwide solution at the end of the war.³⁴

With the fate of the German, Austrian, and Czech Jews clearly tied to the plight of the millions of Polish Jews in RSHA planning, Heydrich moved the disposal option a significant step further two days later. He named Adolf Eichmann head of the new special section for Jewish affairs in the RSHA (Amt IVb4), and deputized Eichmann with full authority to coordinate all Security Police activities for all deportation and resettlement measures in Poland.³⁵ Three weeks later, on January 8, 1940, Eichmann presided over his first conference with the designated representatives sent by the Reich ministries to discuss the possibilities for Jewish and Polish deportations in the immediate future.³⁶

In the preceding months, parallel developments on a higher plain drew Himmler and Heydrich into a series of difficulties that would delay, but not cancel, their planning, preparation, and determination to present the eventual option of mass extermination as the preferred solution to the Jewish question in all territory under German control.

On October 7, 1939, Hitler signed a secret decree that made Himmler head of the RKFDV, the Reich Commissioner for the Strengthening of Germandom, with broad powers to develop and carry out all population and resettlement policies in the conquered eastern territories.³⁷ Five days later, the Führer executed the documents creating the General Government of Poland, appointed Hans Frank as governor-general, and then summoned the key figures involved in the occupation of Poland to the Reich Chancellery on October 17 to hear his views on the future course of German policy in the East.³⁸

Opposition to the Einsatzgruppen

As these developments unfolded, both Heydrich and Himmler came face-to-face with double trouble: serious opposition to what they were doing and planning in the eastern territories. The first problem exploded in a chorus of protests from army commanders in Poland. These officers vigorously objected to the murderous activities of the Einsatzgruppen and the behavior of senior SS and police officials toward Polish civilians—activities that had created widespread unrest in the upper ranks of the army. The furor evoked both indignation and alarm from Heydrich and Himmler. Though supported by Hitler, they nonetheless cautiously sought to repair the damage as the episode lingered, festering into the spring of 1940.³⁹

Far more serious were the difficulties the new governor-general of Poland created for Heydrich and Himmler. Hans Frank had a different and much grander view of his domain and its future than either Hitler or Himmler and Heydrich. He did not want millions of Poles and Jews dumped into his territory to compound the already chaotic economic conditions, especially the acute housing, food, and fuel shortages in the midst of the coldest European winter on record. Though careful to

avoid even the appearance of an astute strategy of appeasement, including no further negotiations with the Government to control the situation, Heydrich, Frank managed to get the Poles, Gypsies, and Jews out of the Government as part of the final cleansing. It was a major step.

The bureaucratic machinery that Heydrich and Frank had run out of control before mass deportations began.

Even before Jaromir was the subject of a special prosecution of the law, the cumulative practical experience of the German government was a solution to the Jewish question.

Technology a

Heydrich was a brilliant administrator. Hitler secretly authorized Heydrich, SS Doctor Kaas, and other officials in his territory. Heydrich vested administrative key officials in his territory. The victims were to be in the camps and disabled facilities and attention.

By late December, the killing of the growing number of victims throughout Germany. Leonardo Conti (1898-1978) was a victim in a sealed chamber.

Technology a major factor in the murder. Improvements in technology made it possible to kill an infinite number of victims selected for the purpose. In June 1940, special measures for selecting core groups of SS camp doctors. The action were German. Heydrich simply wanted to see it done. times.⁴⁶

Both Himmler and Heydrich, in the RSHA, were consulted by Heydrich consult

avoid even the appearance of opposing Hitler's wishes, the wily Frank pursued the astute strategy of appealing to Göring with the argument that orderly conditions, including no further deportations, would enable the resources of the General Government to contribute to the war economy of the Reich.⁴⁰ With Göring's support, in a series of back-and-forth, mate-checkmate moves with Himmler and Heydrich, Frank managed to suspend, then delay, and then reduce the numbers of Jews, Poles, Gypsies, and other undesirables Himmler wanted thrown into the General Government as part of his grandiose vision for a vast resettlement and ethnographic cleansing. It was a racial reordering of the populations in the occupied East.

The bureaucratic shoving match persisted until after January 1941. By that point, Frank had run out of options. Though he would win a last reprieve of several months before mass deportations began, Frank had no choice but to accept the inevitable.⁴¹

Even before January 1941, strategic planning for both the military and ideological prosecution of the war had changed everything—everything except the consistent, cumulative planning and experimentation Heydrich pursued in the search for practical experience and useful technique to strengthen the option for mass killing as a solution to the Jewish question.

Technology and Methodology for Mass Murder

Heydrich was especially interested in developments in the euthanasia program Hitler secretly authorized in the autumn of 1939.⁴² Deputizing his personal physician, SS Doctor Karl Brandt, to help organize the program by recruiting physicians, Hitler vested administrative authority for the medically directed killings in the two key officials in his own Führer Chancellery, Philipp Bouhler and Viktor Brack. The victims were to include the terminally ill and the mentally and physically handicapped and disabled, the "useless eaters" who tied up precious resources and medical facilities and attention urgently needed for wartime purposes.⁴³

By late December 1939, euthanasia officials had developed a method for quietly killing the growing numbers of victims being selected from hospitals and asylums throughout Germany. Brandt, Bouhler, Brack, and Reich Health Commissioner Dr. Leonardo Conti observed the first successful carbon monoxide gassing of four victims in a sealed chamber at the Brandenburg euthanasia facility.⁴⁴

Technology and methodology were harnessed in tandem to the task of mass murder. Improvements and refinements followed rapidly; the possibilities seemed infinite. Within a year, six euthanasia gassing facilities were liquidating German victims selected for death from hospitals and asylums from all over Germany.⁴⁵ By June 1940, special teams of physicians from the euthanasia program began systematically selecting concentration camp inmates for gassing based on lists prepared by the SS camp doctors. Among those hauled off to be killed under the cover of euthanasia action were German and non-German Jews, inmates unfit for work, and others the SS simply wanted to eliminate. All the camps were combed, some of them several times.⁴⁶

Both Himmler and Heydrich, as well as senior officials and technical specialists in the RSHA, were intensely interested in learning from and assisting in the murders. Heydrich consulted regularly on legal issues and other matters with the growing

number of SS doctors involved in the selections and gassings.⁴⁷ The RSHA offered technical assistance as the process spread to the occupied eastern territories. In July 1940, Himmler personally authorized the use of a new, mobile gas van developed by the RSHA to kill nearly two thousand mental patients from facilities in East Prussia and the Wartheland. Their transfer and liquidation were handled by a Sonderkommando of the SD.⁴⁸

If the mentally and physically *useless eaters* could be eliminated so efficiently, why not the racially unfit as well? For the RSHA the question was merely rhetorical. By November 1940, euthanasia became a cover for the murder of forced laborers, Polish Jews, half-Jewish children, political prisoners, and adult Gypsies.⁴⁹ Despite the secrecy, the success of the euthanasia program and the rapid expansion and pace of the killings attracted growing unofficial and official attention. In mid-December, Himmler advised Viktor Brack to shut down the Grafeneck gassing facility and move its operations elsewhere because of public unrest in the region about what was taking place there.⁵⁰ Moreover, there is growing evidence that since mid-1940 Heydrich had been the source of expanding contacts and information exchanges among the RSHA, euthanasia personnel, and officials in both the Four Year Plan and the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, who were busy with their own plans for winning the war and feeding the Reich by starving millions of Germany's enemies to death.⁵¹

For Heydrich, the enormous importance of the euthanasia program to racial planning, and to further possibilities for the Jewish Question, were obvious long before Brack's personnel were transferred to the extermination camps in the General Government.⁵² The surviving records suggest that, early on, he also grasped the possibilities the existing concentration camps offered in wartime for the secret, convenient elimination of political and racial enemies. The measures he directed for the camps became essential operating procedures for the Final Solution.⁵³

On September 3, 1939, Heydrich dispatched a circular order stipulating the principles for internal state security to be followed in wartime. The directive was addressed to all the regional offices and all the senior, central office principals in the Security Police, the SD, the Gestapo and the border police, with information copies to all the Higher SS and Police leaders and all the regional civilian governing authorities. It specified the most draconian measures against anyone even suspected of hostility to the Reich and the war effort. The key paragraph ordered the referral of all information on arrested suspects to Heydrich's office for decision, "*because on the basis of higher authority the brutal liquidation of such elements will follow*" (emphasis in the original).⁵⁴

The crucial implementing procedure was ready three weeks later. Gestapo Chief Heinrich Müller, acting for Heydrich, issued detailed guidelines for the "special treatment" (murder) of religious and political enemies, hoarders and profiteers, and those suspected of malicious or subversive acts.⁵⁵ The option for "special treatment" applied to those to be arrested under protective custody and to those already in concentration camps. To close the possibility of any remaining loopholes, Müller—again acting for Heydrich—sent out an express letter on October 24, 1939, addressed to all regional offices of the Security Police and the SD, the Gestapo, the Inspectorate of Concentration Camps, and the individual camp commandants, prohibiting the release of any protective custody prisoners for the duration of the war. Given the

regimen of suffering, sentence of slow de

The key omiss later. On March 9, release of Jews held Jews who already h formalities necessa April (a handful of, concentration camp chambers for any Je

The order, how as the preferred sol moves with Hans F sequent emigration foreign country tha officially sanctione culties involved in the pressure for son was closing rapidly In the aftermath of C the trap shut.

The conquest c altered the strategic Jewish problem. Ea duced or simplified planners and specia reversed overwhel tion in peacetime. I thousands of Jews Additionally, the str victory, or in the lik man control until it bear on a problem g

The Madagas

One option tha and taken more sen Much has been writ The original propos in part from Joachir policy as an issue in more extensive, tho common basic feat would turn the isla packed off by ship t

regimen of suffering inflicted on camp inmates at the time, this was tantamount to a sentence of slow death for many.⁵⁶

The key omission in the procedures was recognized and rectified four months later. On March 9, 1940, Himmler issued a blanket order forbidding the wartime release of Jews held in concentration camps. The only exceptions were to be those Jews who already held release papers by virtue of their completion of all the required formalities necessary to emigrate from German-controlled territory no later than April (a handful of Jews at most). In view of the treatment then accorded all Jews in concentration camps, Himmler's decision by itself made the facilities sealed death chambers for any Jews who were or would be sent to concentration camps.⁵⁷

The order, however, did not stand alone in pointing toward physical destruction as the preferred solution to the Jewish Question. On March 27, in one of his chess moves with Hans Frank, Himmler issued an unpublished order banning any subsequent emigration of Jews from the General Government to Germany, or to any foreign country that might accept them.⁵⁸ The practical experience already gained in officially sanctioned mass killing, and the nearly insurmountable international difficulties involved in shipping Jews out of Europe in wartime, combined to increase the pressure for some solution to the Jewish problem other than emigration. The trap was closing rapidly on all Jews who were, or soon would be, under German control. In the aftermath of Germany's victory in the West, Himmler and Heydrich would slam the trap shut.

The conquest of France and the Low Countries, like the destruction of Poland, altered the strategic direction of the war, and with it the dimensions of Germany's Jewish problem. Each military victory enlarged and compounded, rather than reduced or simplified, the Jewish problem that Heydrich and the growing legion of planners and specialists in the RSHA grappled with. Every conquest expanded and reversed overwhelmingly everything previously achieved through forced emigration in peacetime. By July 1940, the earlier successes in pushing out hundreds of thousands of Jews had been dwarfed by the staggering addition of millions more. Additionally, the strategic and territorial extension of the war was not complete in victory, or in the likely addition of millions more Jews who would come under German control until it was. What further planning possibilities could Heydrich bring to bear on a problem getting bigger instead of smaller?

The Madagascar Plan

One option that emerged that summer, a possibility considered more important and taken more seriously by others than by Heydrich, was the Madagascar Plan. Much has been written in the extensive scholarly debate on the Madagascar Plan.⁵⁹ The original proposals came out of the German Foreign Ministry, resulting at least in part from Joachim von Ribbentrop's attempts to assert authority over anti-Jewish policy as an issue in German foreign affairs.⁶⁰ The RSHA quickly countered with a more extensive, thorough, and carefully prepared draft.⁶¹ The two versions contained common basic features. Presuming the war to be won, and assuming the French would turn the island over to Germany, the millions of European Jews would be packed off by ship to Madagascar, which would become a super ghetto under Hey-

drich's authority as head of the RSHA. Heydrich's people were to do all the logistical planning, and would handle all transport and shipping arrangements, which would require the use of the postwar merchant fleets of Germany, France, and possibly Great Britain. The staggering financial costs required to move more than three million Jews from all over Europe to Madagascar would be paid through special assessments placed on Jews living in the West. The RSHA version calculated, optimistically, that it would take at least four years to deport more than three million Jews to Madagascar.⁶²

The critical issue at that juncture was the question of Heydrich's assessment of the Madagascar Project. No written evaluation from him survives in the record. The corollary evidence, however, suggests the following: First, the Madagascar Project was never *the* plan; it was an option, a contingency, a possibility. It was one planning development among many. Second, it presumed conditions and circumstances Heydrich would have considered totally impractical. He had naval experience; he would have recognized the shipping projections as hopelessly inadequate.⁶³ Had the RSHA version been taken seriously, he would have insisted on specifics about the European ports to be used for embarkation, railroad routes, arrangements and timetables to get Europe's Jews to the ports, temporary housing or holding provisions for the deportees, police and security arrangements and assigned responsibilities from point to point, and recommendations for assistance from specific ministries and agencies of the Reich. Furthermore, where were the cost estimates for the European and oceanic phases of the project? None of these points were mentioned in either draft of the Madagascar Plan.

Given his years of extensive experience in the economic and financial aspects of forced Jewish emigration from Germany, Heydrich could only have smiled at the notion that American Jews and the Western powers could, or would, pay the travel costs in the Madagascar Plan. Moreover, he had been schooled by his bitter, frustrating experiences in Poland over the previous nine months—with the Army, with Hans Frank, with Göring's officials, and with local civilian authorities. Heydrich was the last man to assume any fewer difficulties with the British navy and the Western powers in shipping millions of Jews across thousands of miles of uncontrolled ocean to Madagascar, than the problems he had in attempting to deport thousands of Jews over hundreds of miles by rail in a region completely under the control of the Reich and his own police and security agencies.

If he needed further convincing, or support for his skepticism, Heydrich received unwitting assistance from an unanticipated source early in August 1940. The hapless promoters of the project in the Foreign Ministry sought to strengthen their case by enlisting outside expert opinion. They hired two consultants to evaluate the Madagascar Project and submit written feasibility studies.⁶⁴ Copies of both reports, which were completed by early August, were distributed to officials in the Four Year Plan and to Heydrich's office in the RSHA. The two studies concluded that Madagascar was economically unsuited to support massive resettlement and that the proposal to ship millions of Jews to the island would be impossible to carry out.⁶⁵

The practical residue left from the exercise of Madagascar planning cemented the working relationships in Jewish matters among the officials in the agencies involved: the RSHA, the euthanasia program, the Foreign Ministry, the Four Year Plan, and the

Propaganda Minis
Heydrich had alrea
possible until (and
the East still were
facilitate the optio
and permanent wa
drich was already

A Territorial

Some six wee
Minister that Jewi
for the record why
foreign policy issu
direct Jewish emig
emigration had pr
wartime conditior
through emigratio
areas *currently* un
Final Solution wo
notified by advanc
the Jewish Questi
himself.⁶⁸

In this contex
follow, what did
Solution to the Jev
fact, the Final So
Madagascar-like e
tone of the docum
of 1940 effectivel
continent of Euro

In addition, s
was privy, pointec
führer SS secured
ment of the alien
the document amc
text refers to Jews
had a broader purp
authority as head
Germandom, as F

Himmler had
the colossal victor
rhetoric about the
continuing challe
and resettlement
Higher SS and Pol