

FOREWORD

The last two decades have seen yet another noticeable upsurge in the academic study of—and public interest in—the Hitler dictatorship and German society under National Socialism. The old question of how the Germans got into the Third Reich has received renewed attention in works on the Weimar Republic, attention that has been further expanded by research on the continuities and discontinuities in modern German history from Bismarck to Hitler.

As far as the Nazi period in the strict sense is concerned, research has focused both on how the country “ticked” in the 1930s at the grass-roots level and, above all, on the sociopolitical history of World War II with its 70 million dead and its mass murder of Europe’s Jews and other minorities. To some extent, the topics of military violence and genocide received a considerable boost after the 1995 publication of Daniel Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, which identified the murderous depths of German anti-Semitism as being a root cause of the Holocaust.¹ This bestseller asserted that when the Nazi regime provided the ideological justifications and administrative structures that permitted genocide, a preexisting “eliminationist” hatred of the Jews in Germany flipped over into an “exterminationist” racism. It was these prewar forces and wartime conditions that, according to Goldhagen, mobilized not only a relatively small number of fanatics through the SS, but also “ordinary” German men through the Wehrmacht and police units sent into the occupied Eastern territories to kill.

Following Christopher Browning and others, Goldhagen rightly drew attention once again not just to the cold-blooded industrial mass murder at Auschwitz and other extermination camps, but also to the Holocaust in the villages of the East, where soldiers and policemen, often under the

¹Daniel J. Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners. Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, New York 1996.

guise of antipartisan warfare, took Jewish women, children, and elderly people into the woods and ravines adjacent to their village, forced them to dig their own mass graves, and shot them under circumstances that defy sober historical description.² Apart from some praise, Goldhagen received very vigorous and often well-founded criticism that we can reference only selectively in a footnote here.³ No less significant than the Goldhagen Debate is the wave of fresh, meticulous research now available on the subject of the murder of Europe's Jews, Sinti and Roma, Slavs, and others.

Much of this work—which, again, can be mentioned only selectively here—is concentrated on retrieving the fate and the responses of the victims from the records.⁴ However, historians and sociopsychologists have also turned to the study of the perpetrators. There are now a number of major books on the developments and decision-making processes within Hitler's wartime headquarters and in Berlin's Reich Security Main Office down to the level of the higher SS, police leaders, and administrators who organized the ghettoization, deportation and "resettlement" of millions of victims.⁵ Finally, recent work has also been concerned with the grassroots level and the men in the rear areas who not only gave the orders to kill, but who also actively participated in the killing.⁶

This research has in turn revived an interest in the role of the Wehrmacht, although without focusing on the alleged "Lost Victories" or the strategic and tactical blunders that the German generals and fieldmarshals laid at Hitler's door after 1945.⁷ This kind of purely military history that began in the early postwar period shifted in the 1970s to an expanded notion of the history of World War II, one that was interested in how actual German warfare was linked to the evolution of the campaign in the rear areas, the badly underestimated logistical problems, and the brutal treatment of the population in the occupied territories. Due to this research, we now have a much more comprehensive and less compartmentalized

²Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men. Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, New York 1992.

³See e.g. Robert R. Shandley, *Unwilling Germans? The Goldhagen Debate*, Minneapolis 1998.

⁴See e.g. Saul Friedlaender, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, Chapel Hill 1995.

⁵Michael Wildt, *Generation des Unbedingten. Das Führungskorps des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes*, Hamburg 2002.

⁶Edward B. Westermann, *Hitler's Police Battalions. Enforcing Racial War in the East*, Lawrence 2005.

⁷Erich von Manstein, *Lost Victories*, London 1958. See also Barry Leach, *German Strategy against Russia, 1939- 1941*, Oxford 1973.

picture of the SS and the Wehrmacht's *Weltanschauungskrieg*, which the regime began first in Poland, then later conducted in the Balkans and the Soviet Union, as well as in occupied Western Europe.

However valuable all this work has been for understanding the larger dynamics of the Third Reich and the causes of its ultimate defeat by the Allies—as well as its self-defeat through its inner contradictions and irrationalities, even in the face of impending collapse—one key question is not addressed in much of this recent literature, whether the literature provides sweeping analyses of *Hitler's Empire* or the *Nazi Empire*⁸ or whether it is narrowly monographic. This is the question of the ideas and policies the Nazis conceived of for the world after Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941.

Of course, it could be argued that the study of post-Barbarossa planning is counterfactual and hence irrelevant. After all, Hitler never defeated the Soviet Union, and he himself was soon defeated, first in the East by the Red Army and later in Western Europe. But there is something special about this particular counterfactual, in that the Wehrmacht came very close to defeating Stalin in the summer and early autumn of 1941. Indeed, the regime was at that time so confident that the war in the East would be won as quickly as the earlier campaigns in Western and Northern Europe that Hitler's headquarters began preparations to reduce the mass mobilization that it had accomplished in the spring 1941. At the same time, the planning for the world post-Barbarossa that had begun as far back as 1937–38 continued, accompanied by expert discussions about how to establish a New Order in the vast spaces of a defeated Soviet Union and the rest of conquered Europe,⁹ as well as by the continuing construction work on the buildings that architect Albert Speer had designed with Hitler's approval. All this was not just a utopian “dream of empire”; the foundations had been laid before Barbarossa, and concrete measures had been taken.¹⁰

As Jochen Thies mentions in his book, there have been earlier studies of whether Hitler was merely a conqueror of “living space” in the East and of a Continental European empire, or whether he was preparing for a struggle against Britain and the United States for world domination. Hugh Trevor-Roper had been among the first to raise this question in a short article in 1961, where he discussed evidence that Hitler's ambi-

⁸ Shelley Baranowski, *Nazi Empire*, Cambridge 2011; Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, New York 2008.

⁹ Arno Sölter, *Grossraumkartell*, Dresden 1941.

¹⁰ Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, London 1970; W.W. Schmokel, *Dream of Empire*, New Haven.

tions were indeed, he believed, global ambitions.¹¹ Andreas Hillgruber and Klaus Hildebrand subsequently wrote big books in which they put forward the argument, backed up by plenty of empirical evidence, of a Nazi *Stufenplan*, or the notion of a calculated expansion in two stages: first on the European Continent, and then, once this position had been secured, in a war against the two major “sea powers,” Britain and the United States.¹² Milan Hauner and Robert Hertzstein also wrote a few much shorter studies of this question.¹³ Students of Hillgruber and Hildebrand have also published monographs on the subject, such as Jost Dülffer’s study of Hitler’s naval rearmament program and the so-called Z Plan, as well as the buildup, well before the invasion of Poland in 1939, of planes—developed by Messerschmitt and others—that were capable of transcontinental warfare.¹⁴

However, the most comprehensive and compelling treatment of the long-range aims of Nazi imperialism was written by Jochen Thies, another student of Andreas Hillgruber. A long overdue translation of this important book, first published in German, has now finally been undertaken. It is a good example of the fact that even in the age of instant information and sound bites, there are still studies that, although published some time ago, have lost none of their importance over the years.

Against the background of the enormous destructiveness of the Nazi dictatorship—which should never be forgotten or minimized—the fact that a New Order had begun to be built on the ruins of the “Old Europe” has been largely overlooked. But, as Jochen Thies demonstrates, the Nazi ambitions went well beyond the murderous conquest of *Lebensraum* (“living space”) in the East. His book shows the concrete preparations the Nazis made for military operations after Barbarossa, preparations that included trans-Atlantic naval and air warfare with ships and planes capable of attacking the United States. Colonial administrators were learning Swahili in preparation for service in African colonies. Ultimately, Thies draws a connection between these ambitions and Hitler’s architectural rebuilding plans. In many ways, this is the most fascinating, but also the

¹¹ Hugh Trevor-Roper, “Hitlers Kriegsziele,” in: *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, vol. 8 (April 1960), pp. 121–133.

¹² Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitler’s Strategie. Politik und Kriegführung, 1940 – 1941*, Frankfurt 1965; Klaus Hildebrand, *The Foreign Policy of the Third Reich*, New York 1973; Gerhard L. Weinberg, *The World at War*, New York 2005..

¹³ Milan Hauner, “Did Hitler want a World Dominion?,” in *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 13 (1978), pp. 15–32; Robert Hertzstein, *When Nazi Dreams Com True*, London 1982.

¹⁴ Jost Dülffer, *Hitler und die Marine*, Düsseldorf 1973.

most terrifying aspect of this book, not least because Speer not only prepared scale models of gigantic buildings and rally grounds for Hitler, but actual work on constructing such projects continued as late as 1943, one example being the huge area just outside Nuremberg where the annual Nazi Party conventions would take place, with granite constituting one of the key building materials. The Nazi utopia had begun to turn into a grim reality not merely in the way the regime destroyed millions of human beings and their homes, but also in the blueprints for the buildings that would be constructed—or that were already being constructed—upon those homes, as well as in the post-Barbarossa military plans for world domination.

This book is the best digest of Hitler's imperial New Order, and it should be read alongside the many volumes available on the Holocaust and other racist programs in order to gain a comprehensive impression of what the world would have been like had Hitler won the war against Stalin in 1941. Had this happened, the minimum effect would have been a much longer struggle to defeat not only the brutal imperial conquests of the Nazis, but also those of Japan in the Far East and Mussolini in Africa. This is why the year 1941 is a more crucial divide in the history of human kind in the twentieth century than 1939 or 1945; it was the year when Hitler expected to defeat Stalin and initiated the Holocaust, as well as the year when the United States entered the war after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

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