

Chapter 11

The Kasztner Affair: Unveiling the Complexities

*The point of establishing the state of Israel is perhaps its ability to secure Jews and prevent another Holocaust of destruction.*³⁸⁸ – Yoel Palgi

The insights from the previous chapter indicate that fear for their lives was a crucial factor influencing the actions of Jewish Council members, a dynamic that was equally prominent in the Hungarian context. Fear appeared to be the primary driver behind their decisions. Out of this fear, the Jewish Council in Hungary published a directive in the Jewish newspaper urging compliance with Nazi orders. This appears to be true in the case of Rudolf Kasztner, who had direct dealings with Eichmann. As the liaison between the *Vaad* (Aid and Rescue Committee) and Eichmann,³⁸⁹ Kasztner found himself in a position where he could not oppose German demands. Eichmann made it clear that Kasztner's fate was entirely in his hands, even giving him the grim option of staying in a transit camp or being sent to Auschwitz. In such a situation of total dependence on Eichmann, Kasztner faced immense difficulty in trying to resist.³⁹⁰ Anna Porter recounted a conversation between Kasztner and another community leader, Samu Stern, where Kasztner argued for cooperation with the Nazis, citing their death as the alternative. Kasztner further illustrated his point by referencing Dr. Adam Czerniakow, who led the Warsaw ghetto and ultimately chose to end his life rather than provide the Nazis with a list of thousands to be sent to their deaths.³⁹¹ Kasztner mentioned that the Nazis preferred to negotiate with Zionist leaders, and he viewed cooperation as a strategy for them and Jewish community to survive the few remaining months of turmoil.³⁹²

³⁸⁸ Yoel Palgi, *Into the inferno*, p. 262. Palgi was one of three parachutists sent by the British and Jewish Agency to help save Jews in Hungary.

³⁸⁹ The *Vaad*, short for *Va'adat Ha-Ezrah ve-ha-Hatzalah be-Budapest* (Hebrew: הוועד הצעיר העזרה), was a small committee of Zionists in Budapest established to assist the Jews, as described at the beginning of Chapter 2. The main figures of the *Vaad* were Ottó Komoly, its president, and Rudolf Kasztner, its executive.

³⁹⁰ Based on Hebrew Site Daat, available at: <https://www.daat.ac.il/daat/hungary/tohen.htm> and <https://www.daat.ac.il/daat/hungary/pirkey/13.htm>.

³⁹¹ Porter, *Kasztner's Train*, pp. 98–99. Ann Porter's support for Kasztner in the debate is emphasized in this study, particularly her argument that he should be credited for his efforts in saving numerous Jews. However, Porter also recognized that fear played a significant role in motivating his actions.

³⁹² Ibid, p. 98.

Despite this, Kasztner is credited by some with aiding in the rescue of additional Jews beyond those transported on the train, as discussed in Chapter 2. This includes approximately 200,000 who remained in Hungary after the train transport stopped and around 15,000 who were redirected to Strasshof, near Vienna, to work.³⁹³ Yet some contend that the mayor of Vienna initiated that shipment of Jews to do labor work, and Kaltenbrunner, a higher authority than Eichmann, approved it.³⁹⁴ This situation underscores Eichmann's power, indicating that someone higher in authority was required to facilitate saving lives. As we saw in the case of Kurt Becher, who took control and enabled the train with 1,684 survivors to depart, circumventing Eichmann was necessary to save lives. This illustrates the need to navigate around Eichmann's authority to ensure life-saving actions.

Kasztner's approach, motivated by fear for his own life, sheds light on several perplexing aspects of his actions. For instance, his continued negotiations with Eichmann, despite Eichmann not honoring a previous agreement, especially considering that major Jewish transports occurred before Kasztner's train departed. Additionally, it can clarify his actions concerning the Jewish parachutists who arrived in Hungary aiming to assist in saving Jews (while also on a mission for the British) but were instructed by Kasztner to surrender to the authorities. This study aims to provide another explanation for that specific decision.

The Joel Brand mission, previously discussed in this study, raised numerous questions and remained secret until it was exposed during the Kasztner trial. This revelation brought criticism upon the Jewish Agency and some of its leaders, who later became leaders of the new state. In this case, Eichmann tasked Brand with brokering a deal with the U.S. or Britain, offering to release up to one million Jews in exchange for 10,000 trucks and supplies. The plan ultimately failed due to mis-handling by the Jewish Agency and a suspicious British government, leading to Brand's arrest in Syria. As mentioned, among other outcomes discussed in Chapter 7, this maneuver may have also been intended to deceive Kasztner, leading him to believe that his negotiations were part of a broader plan to save Jews.³⁹⁵

³⁹³ See Yablonka, *The State of Israel vs. Adolf Eichmann*, p. 27, and Porter, *Kasztner's Train*, pp. 339–340. Yablonka notes that Kasztner managed to send 15,000 Jews to Strasshof, thereby saving their lives. Anna Porter attributes even greater credit to Kasztner, claiming he saved around 200,000 Jews who remained in Hungary after the train transports ceased and helped, through negotiations, to prevent further deportations. However, others interpret this outcome differently, as discussed in Chapter 2 and Footnote 45.

³⁹⁴ Yablonka, *The State of Israel vs. Adolf Eichmann*, p. 27.

³⁹⁵ See Hecht, *Perfidy* p. 229, and the archives of Kasztner trial, protocol C.C. 124/53 in the District Court Jerusalem.

Chapter 2 explores the debate surrounding Kasztner, focusing on whether he should be viewed as a traitor or as a savior of Jews. The study delves into various arguments and perspectives, from Yehudah Bauer's support of Kasztner to Randolph Braham's critical stance. Eli Reichenthal's research brings an intriguing analysis to this debate, highlighting two ambivalent characteristics of Kasztner's actions. On one hand, he exhibited savior-like qualities, willing to bend laws to rescue Jews. On the other hand, his obedience inadvertently aided the Nazis, serving their agenda.³⁹⁶

One incident that highlights Kasztner's actions during that time is his handling of the case involving three parachutists who entered Hungary in June 1944 to help their Jewish brethren and support the fight against the Nazis. In his memoir, Yoel Palgi (né Emil Nussbacher) recounts his mission to Europe as part of the parachutists' operation. Born in Cluj (Klausenburg), Transylvania, Palgi provides a vivid account of his experiences. He immigrated to Palestine in 1939 and was one of the founders of Kibbutz *Ma'agan* on the shore of Lake Kinneret [See of Galilee].³⁹⁷ In the early 1940s he enlisted in the Palmach and was among the first of the young people to be chosen to participate in the operation of parachuting into Europe under the auspices of the British army.³⁹⁸ The British mission included operating a wireless communications system and helping British pilots who parachuted into the enemy territory. Their mission for the *Yishuv* (The Jewish Settlement in Palestine) was to help Jews in Europe and to reconstruct the crumbling Zionist youth movements there after the war. Palgi, Hannah Senesh (born Anna Szenes in Budapest), and a third parachutist, Peretz Goldstein, also a native of Cluj and a member of *Ma'agan*, were assigned to go to Hungary for these purposes. Figures 15–16 (page 122) depict Yoel Palgi and Hannah Senesh, whose courageous efforts –together with Peretz Goldstein's –embodied the core aims of the mission. Hannah was parachuted into Yugoslavia on March 15, 1944, along with three other *Yishuv* paratroopers – Abba Berdichev, Reuven Dafni, and Yona Rosen. However, their plan went awry when the

³⁹⁶ See details in Chapter 2, and Eli Reichenthal, *Haomnam Nirtzach Pamayim?* (Was he really Murdered Twice?), Ben Gurion University Publishing, 2010, p. 135. This theory may be analogous to the belief that Kasztner should be viewed neither as a hero nor as a traitor. Yoel Palgi appears to adopt a similar approach, choosing not to categorize Kasztner as either. Palgi, one of the three parachutists who arrived in Hungary from Palestine, was later persuaded by Kasztner to turn himself in to the German Gestapo. For further details, see Palgi, *Into The Inferno*, pp. 258–260.

³⁹⁷ *Ma'agan* is a kibbutz located in the southeastern part of Lake Kinneret, within the Jordan Valley Regional Council. Established in 1949 in the Ein Gev enclave, it lies across the armistice line with Syria. The kibbutz was founded by immigrants from Transylvania, some of whom, like Yoel Palgi and Peretz Goldstein, immigrated before World War II and became part of the original core group. This kibbutz is distinct from Kibbutz *Ma'agan Michael*, which is located near the Mediterranean coast in northern Israel.

³⁹⁸ Palgi, *Into The Inferno*, pp. 267–269 and the introduction.

Nazis occupied Hungary just four days later. Goldstein and Palgi joined them, and the parachutists stayed in Yugoslavia with Tito's partisans. Hannah lived with Tito's partisans for about three months, relentlessly trying to reach Hungary with their assistance. She firmly believed that the paratroopers needed to act without regard for their own safety, as their personal sacrifice, even if they failed to save Jews, would serve as a symbol of strength and faith for the Jews of Europe.³⁹⁹ In early June 1944, Hannah crossed the border into Hungary but was captured several hours later while in possession of a transmitter. Palgi and Goldstein crossed the border later and were supposed to meet her in Budapest. However, after Senesh was arrested, the two remaining parachutists found themselves alone in Budapest, unaware of her fate. Their liaison man had disappeared, and they decided to turn to one of the few Jews they knew in Budapest, who was one of the leaders of the Committee for Help and Rescue, and who also came from Cluj. His name was Israel Rudolf Kasztner.

Kasztner was in shock when the two of them came into his office and told him about their mission. He was at that time planning last-minute arrangements for the train with its over 1,600 passengers, that had not yet left. How would he hide them? What would he do with them? The situation was particularly precarious as Senesh had already been arrested. As it was apparent to him that the Gestapo already knew about their intention to come to the city, he made a plan for them. A few days prior, his committee partner, Joel Brand, had traveled to Turkey to present the British and, consequently, the Americans with an offer known as "Blood for Goods". Under this plan, the Allies would supply the Germans with ten thousand trucks of food and medicine in exchange for Adolf Eichmann halting the persecution of Hungarian Jews. Kasztner also negotiated for a group of Jews to leave Budapest by train, later referred to as "the Kasztner train".⁴⁰⁰ Kasztner suggested to the two parachutists that they pretend that they had been sent by the British to check the reliability of the Eichmann-Brand proposal. Palgi went with him to the Gestapo headquarters and introduced himself as a British officer who had been sent on that mission. Even though it appeared that he had convinced the Germans, the parachutist was arrested in the end by the Hungarian secret police. His young partner, Goldstein, who knew of his friend's arrest, turned to Kasztner, who first proposed that he join the passengers on the train and even brought him to the camp where

³⁹⁹ Yad Vashem Archives 0.3/6988. See <https://www.yadvashem.org/from-our-collections/hannah-szenes.html>, Palgi, *Into the Inferno*, pp. 21–75, and <https://www.edut.org.il/laor/>, מאמרם/ישראל-קסטנר-וחנה-סנש-מי-באמת-היה-הגבור-ומ-הבודג—כאות-ד-לאור, and <https://allthatsinteresting.com/jewish-parachutists>.

⁴⁰⁰ The Jews, who were uncertain at the time that they would be taken to a safe place and not to Auschwitz, were chosen from all over Hungary by a committee and were at the time confined in Budapest, awaiting their rescue.

the Jews were waiting, among them Goldstein's parents. However, here things fell apart. Within a short time, Kasztner went back to the camp and after a conversation with Goldstein, the latter agreed to turn himself in to the Gestapo. Eventually, both the parachutists ended up in the same prison where Hannah Senesh was being held.⁴⁰¹

Palgi describes in his memoir what happened during the months prior to the end of the war – the prison conditions, the transfers from one prison to another, the trial and execution of Hannah Senesh, with whom the two young men managed to make contact during the months before her death, his transfer together with Goldstein by train to Germany, his daring escape from the train and his return to Budapest, where he met up with members of the pioneering Zionist underground that had been working feverishly to get Jews out of Hungary.⁴⁰²

Was Kasztner's persuasion of Goldstein based on the premise that remaining in Budapest could endanger all passengers on the train, including Goldstein's parents, or did he resort to threats of surrendering Goldstein to the Germans if he refused? Did Kasztner also threaten to remove Goldstein's parents from the train, or did he assure Goldstein of securing their release after a short time in Hungarian prison? Palgi addresses these questions in his book, with some variations between editions. The latest edition of Palgi's work, along with David Engel's assessment in the introduction, appears to be more reliable.⁴⁰³ In 1946 as he was writing the first edition, he was told by the Jewish Agency that they cannot tell the British the whole truth

401 Palgi, *Into the Inferno*, pp. 76–107.

402 After Budapest was liberated, Palgi went to the city of his birth, Cluj, to see whether anything was left of his family, and helped Senesh's mother get to Palestine after she had escaped from the death march that set out from Budapest in November, 1944, and had found her way back to the Hungarian capital. After the war Palgi had been involved in illegal immigration. He returned to his kibbutz and had been appointed after the establishment of the Israeli state to a senior position in El Al. In 1954, Palgi was summoned to testify in the Kasztner trial and struggled to respond to Shmuel Tamir, who represented the opposing side.

403 Palgi, *Into the Inferno*, pp. 258–260, and Introduction by David Engel. Menachem Dorman and the heads of the Kibbutz Hameuchad publishing house, who at that time were discussing a proposal to publish a new edition of his book, demanded clarifications from him about the different versions. His explanations – that at the time he was writing the original edition he was afraid of the British censorship and therefore did not give the precise version of the details concerning the military part of his mission – were not accepted and it was decided not to publish a new edition. Only more than 20 years later did Am Oved publish the second and revised edition of the book. In the last edition Palgi corrected what he had claimed he had censored in the original book, especially concerning the handing over of Peretz Goldstein. He also added an epilogue in which he told about an internal trial of Kastner by associates in 1946 at the Zionist Congress in Basel and about his appearance at the second trial in 1954.

behind Peretz Goldstein's arrest.⁴⁰⁴ There was also a question of how to present the survivors and the victims to the new Israelis. Palgi wrote that the victims were viewed as the dregs of the people, and were even called "Soap".⁴⁰⁵ There was also a question how to view Kasztner, who at the time, was a member of the leading Labor party. However, in the later edition, the situation had changed, and that should be accepted as the real version of the events.

Initially, Palgi was angry at Kasztner for failing to save his family and Hannah Senesh, and for handing over him and Goldstein to the Nazis.⁴⁰⁶ He expressed his view to Moshe Sharett, that the Haganah should investigate the events in Budapest and that Kasztner should face a Haganah trial.⁴⁰⁷ The suggestion was accepted. During the Haganah trial, the judges were persuaded that Kasztner had one aim – to rescue Jews, and that he acted to the best of his understanding and out of loyalty to his purpose. They refrained from judging any of his actions and asserted that those who were not put to that test could not put themselves in a position to judge. Palgi eventually accepted that. He does not see Kasztner as a traitor.⁴⁰⁸ Kasztner had his reasons, and as Palgi himself pointed out, he shouldn't be labeled a traitor. Yet, neither should he be hailed as a hero.⁴⁰⁹ The question of whether we can assert that he actively aided the Nazis remains a subject of debate, and the study finds no proof of that from the parachutists' case. As mentioned, they arrived when Kasztner believed their presence jeopardized the final stages of his agreement with the Nazis to secure the departure of 1,684 Jews on the train. Their arrival seemed poorly timed. After landing in Yugoslavia, the Nazi occupation of Hungary necessitated new plans. Crossing into Hungary became challenging, and the mission proceeded without adequate preparation. Reuven Dafni, Senesh's fellow paratrooper and comrade, describes her determination to take the risk and cross the border into Hungary. However, she was captured with a transmitter shortly after crossing, highlighting the lack of proper planning.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 258. Besides of Goldstein's mission to help the Jews he was a British intelligent agent, and from their perspective he was not allowed to give himself up to the enemy.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 259.

⁴⁰⁶ See also Hecht, *Perfidy*, pp. 118–130. Hecht blames Kastner for not assisting (saving) Channah Senesh.

⁴⁰⁷ The Haganah was a Jewish paramilitary group formed in 1920 to defend Jewish communities in Palestine against Arab attacks during the British Mandate. It evolved into a more organized military force and played a crucial role in the 1948 Israeli War of Independence, eventually merging with other groups to form the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). See <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-haganah>.

⁴⁰⁸ Palgi, *Into the Inferno*, pp. 258–260.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁴¹⁰ In the Yad Vashem Archives (O.3/6988), Dafni, recalled: "I was not happy with Hannah's papers [her forged identity]. Not at all. I saw that the work the partisans did replacing the photographs.

Thus, there appears to be no definitive proof that Kasztner directly assisted the Nazis or acted in their interest in this saga. The study does not justify his actions, which seemed disloyal to the parachutists, but suggests that guilt requires conclusive evidence, while his aim appears to have been to safeguard the rescue of 1,684 Jews, as the arrival of the parachutists complicated matters. Even Palgi did not call him a traitor. Senesh, however, emerged as a powerful symbol of Jewish heroism and sacrifice.

Additionally, Anna Porter argues that Kasztner saved many Jews, although others disagree, as discussed in Chapter 2.⁴¹¹ Yehudah Bauer also regards him as a hero, citing additional reasons such as his willingness to risk his life and his dedication to working with a good purpose. However, this study argues that his primary motive stemmed initially from fear for his life, as was the case with other council members. Even Anna Porter, who perceives him as a hero, acknowledges this factor. Apparently, it will remain questionable whether to view him as a hero or not. Palgi said that the point of establishing the state of Israel is perhaps its ability to secure Jews and prevent another Holocaust of destruction. He added that the rule for the time of the Holocaust is: “If you go and do not return – you will be a hero, if you go and do return- you will be judged, if you do nothing – you will sit in judgment of others”.⁴¹²

In October 1944, Admiral Miklos Horthy negotiated a ceasefire with the Soviets, leading to the order for Hungarian troops to lay down their arms and the announcement of Hungary’s armistice with the Allies on October 15. In response, Nazi Germany took Horthy into “protective custody” and forced his abdication on October 16. That same day, Ferenc Szálasi assumed the title of “Leader of the Nation” and prime minister, forming a “Government of National Unity”. Ferenc Szálasi had previously founded The Arrow Cross Party in 1935 as the Party of National Will, characterized by its anti-Semitic and Nazi sympathizing ideology. By this time, Soviet and Romanian forces had already penetrated Hungarian borders. Then, on October 17, Eichmann returned to Budapest and began concentrating thousands of Jews in ghettos with the intent of extermination. These events were part of the second phase of the annihilation of Hungarian Jews. In this context, this study high-

was not bad, considering the forest conditions. But it was clear to me that anyone even a little experienced in these matters would immediately recognize that the photo had been tampered with. I wanted to convince Hannah not to go with those papers. I was scared. We had a very heated argument. She was altogether extremely obstinate. Until she suddenly said, ‘Even if they catch me, the Jews will be notified. They will know that at least one person tried to reach them.’” See <https://www.yadvashem.org/from-our-collections/hannah-szenes.html>.

⁴¹¹ See Yablonka, *The State of Israel vs. Adolf Eichmann*, p. 27; Porter, *Kasztner’s Train*, pp. 339–340; on the other hand, Lichtenstein, *Witness to History*, p. 314; and Hecht, *Perfidy*, p. 151.

⁴¹² Palgi, *Into the Inferno*, p. 262.

lights two distinct phases: the first ended on July 7 with the cessation of deportations to Auschwitz, followed by the second phase, where Jews faced persecution by Hungarians under Sztojay, a Nazi sympathizer. The situation deteriorated further in October, when the Nazis installed Szálasi and brought back Eichmann, leading to intensified persecution of Jews in Budapest by the Arrow Cross.

At that time, Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg played a pivotal role in saving countless Jews by establishing safe houses under Swedish protection, using Sweden's neutral status to provide refuge. It is important to note that Wallenberg did not act alone. He was recruited after the War Refugee Board (WRB), established by the United States in 1944 to assist Jews, acknowledged Sweden's ongoing efforts for Hungary's Jewish population. Their representative in Stockholm convened a group of prominent Swedish Jews to discuss further actions and select a representative to lead a diplomatic mission to save Jews in Hungary. Wallenberg was recommended and chosen for the role.⁴¹³ The Swedish delegation's efforts to aid persecuted Jews in Budapest had begun earlier, shortly after the German occupation of Hungary on March 19, 1944, when Adolf Eichmann and his special commando unit, working with Hungarian authorities, organized the mass deportation of Jews to extermination camps. The Swedish envoy, Ivar Danielsson, initiated the issuance of temporary Swedish passports to Hungarian Jews with family or business ties to Swedish nationals. Even before Wallenberg's arrival, several hundred of these "protection passports" had been issued.⁴¹⁴

When Wallenberg arrived in Budapest on July 9, 1944, the Hungarian government, under international pressure, including the intervention of King Gustav V of Sweden, decided to halt the deportations. Despite the temporary cessation, the Swedish delegation's protective efforts, alongside those of other diplomatic missions, continued. Wallenberg was appointed to head a newly established department dedicated to this cause. He had been granted special powers even before his departure, including arrangements to transfer funds through the American "Committee for Refugees," which received contributions from Jewish organizations in the United States. Despite the halt in deportations, the situation worsened when, on October 15, 1944, a coup in Hungary brought the anti-Semitic Arrow Cross, led by Ferenc Szálasi, to power. From that point on, Jews in Budapest faced immediate

⁴¹³ Robert Rosen, *Saving the Jews: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Holocaust*, New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2006, pp. 464–465. Rosen mentions that the WRB's Swedish representative, Ivar Olsen, played a crucial role in selecting Wallenberg, noting his prior work in Palestine, which had familiarized him with the Jewish community. This will be discussed further in the following pages.

⁴¹⁴ Based on the Yad Vashem website: <https://www.yadvashem.org/he/righteous/stories/wallen-berg.html>.

threats from both the Arrow Cross and Eichmann's deportation operations.⁴¹⁵ This was when Wallenberg played a crucial role. Over the next three months, he issued thousands of "protection passports". The Hungarian and German authorities generally respected the signatures of Swedish diplomats, allowing many Jews to gain temporary protection. However, Wallenberg did not restrict his efforts to issuing documents from his office. When Eichmann organized death marches, sending thousands of Hungarian Jews to the Austrian border, Wallenberg followed the convoys in his car, managing to rescue hundreds of passport holders and others, bringing them back to Budapest. His assertiveness and resourcefulness enabled him to save people from the train stations designated for transport to Auschwitz, as well as from labor service units to which Jews had been conscripted.⁴¹⁶ Figures 17–18 illustrate this effort, showing a photograph of Wallenberg himself and an example of one of the protective documents he issued. Figure 19 (page 146) further demonstrates this, depicting him providing Jews with protective passes.

Despite the imminent threat from the Arrow Cross, Wallenberg took further action to safeguard the Jews of Budapest. He set up special dormitories to house around 15,000 people. In this effort, diplomats from other missions collaborated with him. In 31 buildings under Swedish protection, Wallenberg established an "International Ghetto," separate from the central ghetto in Budapest. Managing these properties presented a multitude of challenges, including securing adequate food, sanitation, and medical care. Organizing this effort required substantial funding, and approximately 600 Jews were employed to manage the organization and upkeep of the facilities. Both ghettos were located in the Pest district of Budapest, which was among the first areas to be occupied by the Soviet forces. The Soviets regarded the Swedish mission with suspicion, accusing its staff of espionage on behalf of the Germans. They were also displeased with the large volume of Swedish documents in the possession of Jews. Wallenberg, confident in his diplomatic immunity, believed he was protected, especially given that the Swedish mission represented the Soviet Union in its dealings with the Germans. As a result, he agreed to visit Soviet headquarters. On January 17, 1945, Wallenberg returned to Budapest under Soviet escort, uncertain whether he was a guest or a prisoner. From that moment, he, along with his driver Wilmoth Langfelder, disappeared without a trace.⁴¹⁷

Robert Rosen notes that while Wallenberg is revered as a Swedish diplomat, rather than an agent of the War Refugee Board (WRB) or the Roosevelt administra-

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

tion, he would never have gone to Hungary without the support of the WRB and the Joint Distribution Committee. The WRB's Swedish representative, Ivar Olsen, played an instrumental role in selecting Wallenberg, recognizing his previous work in Palestine, which had familiarized him with the Jewish community. The WRB also provided Wallenberg with detailed plans of action and funding.⁴¹⁸ This study, however, emphasizes Wallenberg's crucial role in demonstrating that saving Jews was possible and how much one person could achieve by seizing opportunities, whether acting independently or as part of a larger effort. From this perspective, considering the unique role an individual can play within a system by seizing an opportunity, Wallenberg stands in stark contrast to Eichmann. Both influenced events in significant ways; however, while Eichmann exploited his position to perpetuate evil, Wallenberg used his opportunity for moral purposes, ultimately saving countless lives.

Wallenberg employed various methods, including negotiations with the Arrow Cross, offering food in exchange for saving Jews. The Arrow Cross rule proved brutal, with their death squads responsible for the killing of up to 38,000 Hungarian Jews in under three months. Arrow Cross officers collaborated with Adolf Eichmann to resume deportations, sending around 80,000 Jews out of the city for slave labor or directly to death camps. As the Russians advanced and Eichmann prepared to leave Budapest, he and SS personnel went to the Jewish council's house to execute them, but it was empty. Wallenberg, aware of the plan, had sent a message to the council members, enabling their escape. This episode underscores Eichmann's relentless pursuit of the mission to eliminate Jews and the strategic planning involved, including the intended killing of the Jewish council after exploiting them.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁸ Rosen, *Saving the Jews*, pp. 464–465. Kálmán Lauer, Wallenberg's business partner, also recommended him as the ideal candidate. Here are additional details about the individuals and elements involved in raising awareness and taking action to save Jews, culminating in Wallenberg's appointment to lead the mission. At the end of May 1944, George Mantello, a Jewish businessman working for the Salvadoran consulate in Geneva, publicized two key reports he received from a Romanian diplomat who had obtained the material from Moshe Krausz in Budapest. Krausz worked with Swiss Vice-Consul Carl Lutz in Budapest to rescue Jews. One report was likely Rabbi Weissmandl's version of the Auschwitz Protocols, detailing Auschwitz-Birkenau operations. The other was a Hungarian report documenting the ghettoization and deportation of 435,000 Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz as of June 19, 1944. Mantello's findings sparked protests in Switzerland, prompting threats against Hungary's Horthy from Roosevelt and Churchill. The Roosevelt administration tasked the War Refugee Board (WRB) with addressing the genocide. Treasury official Iver Olsen was sent to Stockholm to develop a rescue plan and consulted Sweden's Jewish relief committee, where Kálmán Lauer was among those consulted.

⁴¹⁹ For further details, see Chapter 2, and Palgi, *Into the Inferno*, "Introduction," and pp. 229–241. Additional information is available on the Daat site at <https://www.daat.ac.il/DAAT/hungary/pir>

In summarizing this section, it becomes apparent that Kasztner and the Jewish Council in Hungary were primarily motivated by fear, a sentiment Eichmann adeptly exploited. While their collaboration with the Nazis is criticized, the study also seeks to understand the complex challenges they faced, avoiding outright condemnation. It is essential to recognize their efforts to save Jewish lives, guided by what they believed to be the most effective strategy. However, some of their decisions involved profound moral dilemmas, as they determined who would leave or stay, live or die—a burden that should not have rested solely on their shoulders. Additionally, the consideration of preserving their own lives, along with the slim possibility of collective rebellion due to various factors, should also be taken into account. This circumstance might have prompted them to seek alternative strategies, prioritizing the preservation of their own lives, given the small chance of creating and making a successful collective action. The crucial inquiry for this study delves into how these actions impacted Eichmann. The subsequent section will offer another perspective, considering risk factors and triggers for genocide, alongside insights from the Milgram experiments. Thus, it's essential not to overlook their inadvertent assistance to Eichmann. An illuminating excerpt from *Life* magazine in November 1960 provides insight into Eichmann's perspective, highlighting a "gentleman's agreement" between Kasztner and himself, where Kasztner maintained order in the camps in exchange for facilitating the emigration of a few thousand Jews. This sheds light on the complexities of their collaboration from Eichmann's viewpoint.⁴²⁰ He positioned himself as an expert, showcasing his sense of uniqueness and power, demonstrating his awareness of his capability to accomplish extraordinary feats. Eichmann expressed that due to Kasztner's efforts in maintaining order in the deportation camps, he allowed his group to escape. He clarified that these small groups, consisting of around a thousand Jews, held no interest for him.⁴²¹ This quote from Eichmann is mentioned at the beginning of the introduction of our study: "Kasztner agreed to help keep the Jews from resisting deportation- and even keep order in the collection camps- if I would close my eyes

key/13.htm and Yad Vashem site at https://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-206864.pdf

420 Chapter 15 of the study, along with other sections, addresses the complexities of relying on perpetrators' testimonies, exploring when such accounts can be considered reliable. The study does not rely solely on Eichmann's statements to counter Arendt's argument, fully acknowledging the limitations of perpetrators' testimonies. Instead, it presents evidence supporting the credibility of Eichmann's statements in the interview.

421 This study explored Arendt's perspective and various other viewpoints on this matter. Eichmann's confession is documented in *Life* magazine, both on November 28, 1960, and December 5, 1960, and is also referenced by Ben Hecht in his book "Perfidy." The Hebrew version can be found at <https://www.daat.ac.il/daat/hungary/document/28.htm>.

and let a few hundred or a few thousand young Jews immigrate to Palestine it was a good bargain". The question then arises regarding the veracity of Eichmann's statements, and the analysis conducted in this study reveals that he was indeed truthful in certain respects—particularly in illustrating how he strategically utilized Kasztner and other members of the Jewish Council. The following chapter will examine the broader implications of this and explore additional factors that influenced Eichmann's decisions, applying a novel analytical approach. It is important to note that analyzing a person's inner thoughts is inherently difficult, as we cannot access their mind directly. From that perspective, the interviews offer a more vivid and tangible picture of Eichmann, which is why they are valuable. However, while this study shows strong support for certain insights that align with Eichmann's own words in his interviews, it does not rely on those statements to refute other interpretations, such as those of Hannah Arendt. Rather, any divergence from existing views is based on the study's independent analysis and contextual findings.



Figure 17: Passport photograph of Raoul Wallenberg. Sweden, June 1944. Credit: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.



Figure 18: Swedish protective pass issued to Joseph Katona, the Chief Rabbi of Budapest. Budapest, Hungary, September 15, 1944. Credit: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.