

UNITED STATES  
HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM  

---

CENTER FOR ADVANCED HOLOCAUST STUDIES

**Germany's War for World Conquest  
and the Extermination of Jews**

Gerhard L. Weinberg

WASHINGTON, D. C.

Germany's War for World Conquest  
and the Extermination of Jews

Gerhard L. Weinberg

JOSEPH AND REBECCA MEYERHOFF LECTURE SERIES

11 JUNE 1995

The assertions, opinions, and conclusions in this occasional paper are those of the author. They do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council or of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Copyright © United States Holocaust Memorial Council 1995  
Third printing 2002

THE JOSEPH AND REBECCA MEYERHOFF ANNUAL LECTURE on the Holocaust has been endowed by a 1994 grant from the Meyerhoff family to promote excellence in and to disseminate Holocaust research. Life-long residents of Baltimore, Joseph and Rebecca Meyerhoff were involved in philanthropic activities in the United States and overseas in music and the arts, Jewish learning and scholarship, and human services, among other concerns. Jewish history and education were a primary focus in their philanthropic efforts. This tradition has been upheld and enhanced by their children and their children's children. Their son, Harvey M. Meyerhoff is Chairman Emeritus of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council. The annual lecture will be held in the Joseph and Rebecca Meyerhoff Theater of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

FIFTY YEARS AGO the war between Germany and the Allies had finally ended. In the East, the Red Army had broken the German front and had taken Berlin after a lengthy fight. In the Mediterranean, the Allies in Italy had fought their way into the Alps to meet other Allied troops coming from the north and had also reached Trieste.

The success of the Axis powers—with the assistance of Vichy France—in holding a bridgehead in Tunisia through the winter of 1942-43 had forced the Western Allies to postpone their planned invasion of Northwest France from 1943 to 1944; but that invasion had succeeded and had brought them into Germany from the west.

The Germans had not been fighting because they enjoyed it or had nothing better to do. They had fought for vast conquests, and, within whatever areas they conquered, for a demographic revolution, which would leave them the sole possessors of the land. A major portion of that demographic revolution had long been under way in the area under German control. The majority of the Jews in the centers of Jewish population in Poland, adjacent portions of the former USSR, the Baltic States and parts of Western and Central Europe had been killed. In 1943 the Germans made a systematic effort to kill those Jews who had yet survived, either because they were working in factories for the German war effort or because some of Germany's allies and satellites had balked at turning them over to the Germans to be killed.

During 1944 the process of killing both groups of survivors had been pushed forward. The smaller remnant ghettos in German-occupied Eastern Europe had been largely emptied of their inhabitants. Enormous pressure had been applied to Germany's allies to surrender *their* surviving Jewish inhabitants for killing.

Furthermore, the surrender of Italy in September 1943 had removed what the Germans considered an intolerable obstacle to the killing of Jews not only in Italy itself but in those portions of France, Yugoslavia, and Greece which had been assigned to Italian occupation. After German troops occupied those territories in September 1943, these refuge areas were emptied of their Jewish inhabitants by deportation to the killing centers. During 1944 the Germans had also occupied Hungary, the last of the major hold-outs against Germany's hopes of killing all Jews within reach, and had deported a large part of its Jewish population to Auschwitz.

Even as the Germans were trying hard to complete this portion of the massive changes they intended to effect, and while they conducted that final sweep in this process which they called the *Erntefest*, the "harvest festival," they were already working on the *initial* stages of further segments of the demographic revolution. They had begun with the deportation of substantial numbers of Sinti and Roma, of Gypsies, to the killing centers, in early 1943. Furthermore, they were experimenting with the development of measures of mass sterilization designed to enable them to utilize the labor power of those segments of conquered populations of any territory they could seize workers they might find useful until these could be replaced by German settlers.

Although the war had turned against them, the German leadership continued its policies into the last days of the conflict. The wretched survivors of camps were either killed or driven to other camps inside the shrinking perimeter of the Third Reich. New weapons, especially the new submarines, until the last days of the war had been expected to help turn the tide in Germany's favor; strategy on the Eastern Front had been subordinated to this consideration; and hopes were always expressed that somehow the coalition Germany had forged against herself might be disrupted.

What does all this mean and how did it come to be? It seems to me that if we are ever to understand the upheaval, which tore the world apart half a century ago, we need to look at the origins of those events and at the purposes and intentions of those who initiated them. That neither means that everything had been planned out in detail ahead of time nor that everything moved forward as intended. What it does mean is that original intentions shaped events to a considerable extent, and that even as the developments of the war took a course the initiators neither wanted nor anticipated, they still made enormous efforts to maintain and reassert their original purposes.

In the years when Adolf Hitler was trying to gain power in Germany he invariably insisted on a fundamental distinction between himself and the other self-appointed prospective saviors of

the country which had lost World War I. He referred to the others disdainfully as *Grenzpolitiker*, border politicians, who sought German's recovery in an undoing of the peace treaty of 1919 and in the regaining of land lost by that treaty. In his eyes clear evidence of the stupidity of his rivals, such a policy could only mean a costly war for a useless goal: a return to the pre-war situation in which Germany had been unable to feed itself from its own soil. He described himself as a *Raumpolitiker*, a politician of space, not borders; one who would insist not on war for the regaining of minuscule bits of territory, but on wars for the conquest of enormous areas which would be settled by German farmers whose numerous offspring would both replace the casualties incurred in those wars and also provide the incentive as well as the means thereafter for making the additional conquests on which they would need to live. This process, as he explained to his secretary in 1927, would end only when one people, the racially best one—by which he meant the Germans—controlled the whole globe.<sup>1</sup>

The wars for space, Hitler insisted, could be waged effectively only by a country ruled by a one-party state, and he held up the contemporary Soviet Union and Italy to German voters as models of such single party constructions. A dictatorship would preclude the possibility of a stab-in-the-back at home, which he believed responsible for Germany's loss of World War I; given the inherent superiority of the Germans, victory was then guaranteed. But the acquisition of space was to be accompanied by the displacement of the local population with Germanic settlers; the land, not the people, was to be germanized. And inside Germany that process was to begin with the revocation of the citizenship of the country's approximately half-million Jews. This was a central demand of the Nazi Party from its beginnings; and it was, as any index of the collected speeches and writings of National Socialists from the 1920s will show, by far the most frequently raised subject. The policies of race and space were to begin at home and then, as a product of a series of wars, were to be extended around the globe. The capital for the new world empire was to be in Berlin, and long before he became chancellor Hitler was drawing up designs for the buildings of that world capital and the rearrangement of city space to accommodate these huge new structures.<sup>2</sup>

Once installed as chancellor sixty-two years ago, Hitler and his government immediately began with the first steps toward the program he had outlined. By the summer of 1933, all other parties other than his own had been dissolved and the creation of new ones prohibited. The abrogation of the rights of Jews had been initiated—as had a huge program for the sterilization of those Germans allegedly likely to pass on hereditary defects. And Germany began its preparations for the wars the new regime intended to fight. Those preparations were, not surprisingly, tied to the intended wars, and a word must therefore be

said about this interconnection between the wars planned, the degree of difficulty anticipated in them, and the weapons systems developed for them. The course of events after 1933 would not always go as the Germans anticipated; but what was to prove remarkable was the extent to which they held to their original concepts; and it is to these that we must therefore turn.

The Germans early decided that they would fight a sequence of four wars. The first was to be against Czechoslovakia. Designed to destroy that country, take over its industry and utilize its German population to provide additional divisions for Germany's army, this first war was expected to be fairly simple. It was to be followed by the second war, the one against the Western Powers of Britain and France. This conflict was needed to make it safe for Germany to turn eastwards to seize enormous land areas from the Soviet Union. The bulk of the land of the Eurasian area lies in that direction, and by what Hitler considered an extraordinary piece of good fortune for Germany, the Germanic ruling elite of Russia had been eliminated by the Bolshevik revolution so that inferior Slavs were now ruled by total incompetents. The third war, that against the Soviet Union, was thus assumed to be simple and quick; it was the one against the Western Powers that had to precede it which was expected to be difficult and must therefore be the focus of Germany's military preparations. It was in the West that Germany had been unable to win in the last war, and it was against the Western Powers that Germany's weapons systems were developed during the 1930s.

For warfare on land, Germany built her new tanks. Designed with narrow treads for the short distances and elaborate road system of Western Europe, Germany's new armored divisions were designed exclusively with Western Europe in mind. It might be added parenthetically that the Germans did not begin to build tanks for Eastern Europe until after they had discovered their miscalculation by running into bigger and better Soviet tanks in the summer and fall of 1941.<sup>3</sup> Preparations for the air war were also geared to the West. The single-engine dive-bomber, the JU-87, was designed with France in mind, and its two-engined follow-up, the JU-88 "wonder bomber," was designed for use against Great Britain. At one time, in the years between 1923 and 1934, Hitler had thought that perhaps England could be detached from France, but he had given up on the possibility by the end of 1934. In 1935, the very year of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, the Germans began building warships in violation of that agreement, anticipating that they could steal a march on the British by completing the new warships at a time when the stupid English still believed that Germany was adhering to that treaty. Knowing that large warships, especially battleships and aircraft carriers, took a long time to build, Hitler wanted these started as early as possible, and he



insisted on sizes and specifications that could outclass anything in the British navy, either already afloat or likely to be built.

The German naval construction projects aimed not only at Great Britain but looked beyond that enemy to the United States. For those like Hitler, who believed that Germany had lost the last war because of a stab-in-the-back, it was the military role of the United States as a factor enabling the Western Allies to win in 1918 which was the legend. The United States was a racially divided and weak country; Germany's only difficulty in dealing with it would be the great distance separating the two. The construction of a huge navy, including super-battleships designed to outclass anything the United States might have, combined with very long range planes that could cross the Atlantic and return without refueling, would provide the means of coping with this technical problem. Once German military might could be brought to bear on the United States, that war, too, would be easy.

The specifications for what was called at times the "America-Bomber" and at times the "New York-Bomber" were issued to German aircraft manufacturers in 1937. In the same year, specifications for the super-battleships were turned over to the navy's shipyards, and the keels for the first ones were laid in the spring of 1939.<sup>4</sup> The Third war, that against the Soviet Union, would provide the added industrial capacity and above all the needed oil resources for the fourth war, the one against the United States. Germany, Hitler anticipated, would go into that conflict with the world's strongest battle fleet; as he explained to his associates afterwards, he had already picked the names for the largest of the battleships.<sup>5</sup>

While Germany was preparing for the four wars, others, and especially the British government, were trying to keep her from starting any war at all. But as we now know, all those attempts were turned aside by a German government determined on its own course of action—it was only afterwards, when all had gone so differently from the confident anticipations of the Nazi leaders, that they fabricated a whole set of fairy tales designed to prove the opposite of what had happened.

When the Germans broke the Locarno Treaty in 1936—the first defensive alignment Germany had had with England since German unification in 1871—it was Berlin which refused British attempts to create a replacement. When the German foreign minister was invited to London, it was the Germans who made sure that he would not go. When the British sent Lord Halifax to Germany instead, the Nazi leaders tried hard to keep him from coming.<sup>6</sup> When the British government made a formal offer of talks leading to a comprehensive agreement in early March of 1938, Hitler immediately rejected the concept; persuaded at least

to give a written reply, he never did find the time to put one together.<sup>7</sup> In early May of 1938 Hitler decided to have the first of his four wars later that year; but he backed down at the last moment and agreed to the Munich settlement, a decision he regretted to the end of his life and quickly came to consider the worst mistake of this career.<sup>8</sup>

In the same years that these steps were being taken, the measures in the racial field were also moving forward. There were steps to increase the German birthrate, to accelerate the sterilization of those deemed unfit to have children, and to propagandize for program of killing those considered by the government unfit to live. Simultaneously, the persecution of Germany's Jewish population was accelerated, to impoverish them, to deprive them of all rights, to drive them out of the country if possible, and to isolate them from the rest of the population. These measures culminated in the pogroms of November 1938 when the Jewish houses of worship were burned down, tens of thousands of Jews were taken to concentration camps, and hundreds were killed. The various measures then taken, like those in the preceding years, were proudly announced in the country's newspapers. Not all Germans were enthused nor were all foreigners. The American president, Franklin Roosevelt, recalled the United States ambassador; the subsequent Austrian president, Kurt Waldheim, on the other hand, decided that this was the time to join the synagogue-burning brownshirts.

It was during the winter of 1938-39 that Hitler decided that war number 2, the one against the Western Powers, was to take place in 1939. He wanted his eastern flank quiet for that conflict so that Germany could concentrate all its forces in what he had always believed would be the most difficult of his wars. Accordingly, during that winter considerable effort was put into an effort to subordinate Germany's eastern neighbors, primarily Poland and Hungary, to Germany. The Germans succeeded with Hungary but failed with Poland; that country's leaders were not about to surrender Poland's regained independence without a fight. Hitler, therefore, decided that a short war to crush Poland must precede the attack against the Western Powers, but he was quite willing to take them on right away if they lined up with Poland. Since Japan was unwilling to ally herself with Germany against the West at that time, Hitler reversed his earlier disregard of approaches from the Soviet Union, assuming that a temporary alignment with that country would speed up the crushing of Poland as well as break in advance any blockade the Western Powers might try to impose on Germany. Since a German victory in the West was to be followed by a quick victory over the Soviet Union, it made very little difference to him what the in any case incompetent Soviets might be allocated in an agreement with Germany. The German foreign minister was authorized to give

away even more than Stalin thought to ask for; in fact his instructions were so general that no one could afterwards quite remember what they had been!<sup>9</sup>

Although we do not have very detailed evidence on this point, there is a good deal to show that the same months of early 1939 in which Hitler decided on war were also a time when there was further thinking and discussion in the highest Nazi circles about new steps against Jews.<sup>10</sup> Hitler's own public statement on January 30, 1939, that in any new war the Jews of Europe would all be killed belongs in this framework. It is surely not a coincidence that in his own repeated later *public* references to this prophecy and its implementation, he always changed the date to 1 September 1939, a misdating maintained in the Nazi Party's official publication of his speeches.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, it seems to me to belong in this same category of association of the war with a campaign of racial extermination, that Hitler's late October 1939 secret order for the initiation of the so-called euthanasia program - the large-scale killing of Germany's old folks, people in mental institutions, and children with allegedly major disabilities—was back-dated to the same September 1, 1939.<sup>12</sup> In the thinking of Germany's leaders, the war for space and the demographic revolution were parts of the same process.

The two did indeed proceed at the same time. The Germans crushed Poland, divided it with the Soviet Union, initiated a whole series of measures against Poland's large Jewish population, and began the development of the techniques of systematic, bureaucratically organized mass murder on their own people. It was in the course of applying the so-called euthanasia program that the Germans experimented with and found the ways to define categories of people to be killed, of gathering them from whatever locations and institutions in which they might be, transporting them to special facilities where they were to be killed, devising what seemed to be the most efficient ways of killing them there, and thereafter disposing of the enormous number of corpses. Similarly, it was during these program in 1939-41 that they located and trained a very substantial group of doctors, nurses, and other auxiliary personnel who could be depended upon to commit not individual murders, something that unfortunately can happen in all societies, but who would kill people day in and day out from morning to lunch break and then until dinner time, six days a week, month in and month out. By the time there was a special celebration at one of the killing centers, that at Hadamar, to commemorate the ten thousandth victim killed, the Germans had both perfected important new techniques needed for their racial program and had made major advances in the wars for space in which to carry it out.

Originally Hitler had wanted to launch the attack on the Western Powers still in late 1939, but several factors, primarily the bad weather, forced him to postpone the attack until the spring of 1940, but that postponement only whetted his appetite for more rapid action thereafter. Already in the last days of May 1940, just as soon as the breakthrough near Sedan showed that the German offensive in the West was going to succeed, both Hitler himself and his military associates began thinking about the third war, that against the Soviet Union. Once again Hitler originally planned to move right away: the attack on the Soviets was to take place still in the fall of 1940. Simultaneously, the preparations for the fourth war, that against the United States, could be resumed. Construction on the huge blue-water navy had had to be temporarily interrupted in the fall of 1939; on July 11, 1940, that program was ordered resumed.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the Germans began construction of a big naval base at Trondheim on the Norwegian coast and insisted to the Spaniards that Germany required naval bases on the Northwest coast of Africa and on the Spanish and Portuguese islands in the Atlantic for the forthcoming war against America.<sup>14</sup>

By the end of July 1940 Hitler's military advisors had convinced him that the transfer of Germany's military forces to the East and the building up of adequate logistic bases there made a campaign in the East in the fall of 1940 unwise; it would be better to attack in the last spring of the following year. The months after the end of July 1940 were, therefore, a time when preparations for that attack were made in a context of its also depriving England of hope for aid from the Soviet Union—because of that state's anticipated rapid defeat—as well as from the United States—because that country would be kept busy in the Pacific by a Japan that could head south when no longer concerned about air raids from Soviet Far Eastern bases.

As for England, if not defeated by air attack or invasion, it would be hopelessly isolated once the war in the East had both crushed the Soviet Union and provided the broader resource base for Germany's building and maintaining the forces needed to defeat the United States. If necessary, the British could always be starved out by submarines now based not only in Norway but also on the French Atlantic coast.

When one looks at the German preparations for the attack on the Soviet Union, one cannot help but be amazed by the extent to which ideological preconceptions continued to dominate German planning. The army that was to head East would be no larger than that used in the West in 1940; the air force would be substantially smaller than that which had struck in the West, and the same thing was true of the navy. The major preparations were of an entirely different sort. In the field of military planning, most German high-level staff time in the last

weeks before the assault was devoted not to that assault but rather to the planning of the operations which would follow on the anticipated quick defeat of the Red Army. The Germans would rapidly move into the Middle East during the winter of 1941-42, striking across the Caucasus from the north, through Turkey from the west, and from Libya across Egypt from the south. I shall come back to this project shortly. Simultaneously, the Germans would move forces across Spain into Northwest Africa and seize the bases on and off the coast which the Spaniards had declined to let them have.

As for the Soviet areas to be seized, these were the focus of most German planning and preparations. A vast program of economic exploitation was intended; it was assumed that not only was most Soviet industry to be razed and many large cities leveled to the ground, but thirty to forty million Russians were expected to starve to death as a result of German food requisitions. This was not the only part of the demographic revolution planned before June 1941. Special squads of killers were to be attached to the advancing German armies. They were to kill the great numbers of additional Jews who would come under German control as their armies moved forward. The systematic killing was to begin with the initiation of hostilities, and it was to be extended to several additional categories of people, including those in the hospitals and old-folks homes as well as certain categories of prisoners of war. As for those prisoners not killed upon capture, it was assumed that most would die in German camps, and in fact the great majority, well over three million out of some five million, did perish in German custody.

The first weeks of fighting in the East appeared to the Germans to confirm their hopes of speedy victory. As all appeared to them to be going as planned, new decisions on the follow-up projects were made in July 1941 as they had been made in the summer of 1940 when it looked as if the war in the West was over. Once again the first decision concerned the next war against the United States. The material demands of refurbishing the German army for the campaign in the East had once again forced a temporary postponement in the construction of the blue-water navy. The first thing ordered in July 1941, when it looked as if all were going well in the East, was once again a resumption of the huge naval construction program. As for the immediate military follow-up, that was to be into the Middle East as already planned; and no replacement tanks were sent to the Eastern Front for months since these were, as Hitler carefully explained to the army chief of staff, scheduled for employment in the Middle East.

The development of the fighting on the Eastern Front was to oblige the Germans to make some adjustments in these projects. By the end of 1941 tank replacements had to be sent

to the armies fighting in the East, though the German soldiers there were astonished to see them arriving in a snow-covered area with desert camouflage. As for the naval contracts, once again these had to be postponed, though there was either a deliberate or an accidental slip-up: in June 1944 the German navy was informed by one of its contractors that four battleship engine systems were ready for delivery!<sup>15</sup> Naturally these useless contraptions were promptly scrapped.

In one field, however, a new decision made in July 1941, when victory in the East seemed assured, was not reversed even though the fighting did not go as the Germans expected. This new decision was the one to extend the killing of Jews in the newly conquered portions of the USSR to all Jews in German-controlled Europe. A combination of three factors appears to have been responsible for this step: the first, the belief that victory in the East was at hand, has already been mentioned. The two others were aspects of the mass killing process already under way in the East: on the one hand, the shooting of tens of thousands of Jews appeared to be going smoothly, on the other hand, there seemed to be minimal grumbling, to say nothing of outright opposition, from within the German military to the murder program. Both of these assumptions were to prove at least partially incorrect; remedial stops had to be taken, but at least for a short time all looked ready for the big shift to a program of total extermination. By July 22, 1941, Hitler himself explained that all of Europe would be emptied of Jews, one country at a time, and predicted that the Hungarians would be the last to fall into line - one of the few predictions he made in the summer of 1941 that proved to be correct.<sup>16</sup>

But not only Europe was to be emptied of its Jews, with the victims now to be shipped to the killers instead of the prior procedure of bringing the killers to the victims. In the fall of 1941 the Germans still anticipated a complete victory in the East, even if a slightly delayed one, and they still expected to follow up with the implementation of their plans for the occupation of the Middle East. Such a move would bring Germany control of not only the immense oil resources of that region, but it would also extend German power to the Jewish communities of Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. As Hitler personally assured Haj Amin el Husseinie, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, on November 28, 1941, when the German army reached Palestine, the whole Jewish population there would be killed.<sup>17</sup> As we know today, the German army did not reach Palestine and could not implement the Führer's promise, but it did reach one small portion of the continent of Asia all the same: the island of Rhodes which they seized after the Italian surrender to the Allies of 1943. Those Jews were deported by ship to Greek ports and then by train to the killing centers.<sup>18</sup>

Well before then, even before Hitler's promise to kill all the Jews of Palestine, the two assumptions which had helped bring on the decision to extend the killing program to all the Jews of German-controlled Europe had proven to be only partially correct. The absence of substantial opposition from the German military to the mass killing was a fact, but there were signs of at least some criticism. It was in my judgement the grumbling among officers and men in the German army who were witnessing the early shootings which led to the preparation, distribution, and reading to the troops of that series of notorious orders by German field marshals and generals calling on the soldiers to accept the killing of the Jews as a just punishment for their existence.<sup>19</sup> The highest ranking German military leaders were not ordinarily in the habit of explaining their actions to the men; if they found it advisable to do so in the fall of 1941, that should, it seems to me, be taken as an indication that at least some negative comments were being carried back to those at the top of the military hierarchy. All quickly calmed down.

The other assumption, which proved to be incorrect was the one based on the smooth functioning of the killing program itself. It soon transpired that the endless rounds of mass shootings demoralized the units engaged in that process; frequently drunk, at least some of the men were coming apart under the strain. Furthermore, the extension of the program from the Jews of the newly occupied area to the whole of German-controlled Europe meant an enormous increase in the number of prospective victims. While mass shooting would continue to be a major feature of the killing program until the end of the war, other techniques were going to be needed if millions and millions were to be killed; furthermore, a very much larger number of individuals and agencies would have to participate in the program beyond those who had been recruited into the killing squads in the spring of 1941 or had been sent to reinforce them subsequently.

It was these practical difficulties in the implementation of the extermination program which led to the two major changes in it which began in the winter of 1941-42. In the first place, the mass shootings were to be supplemented, and eventually largely replaced, by the establishment of special killing centers in German-occupied Poland. There the victims would be killed in ways less taxing for the killers. And there was a core of experienced individuals ready to hand: those who had for the preceding two years been busy killing Germans in the so-called euthanasia program. That program had caused increasing dissension and opposition inside Germany; by the summer of 1941, when something over 100,000 had been murdered, the criticism had reached such a public and loud pitch that the regime decided to reduce it temporarily. That of course meant that many of those who had acquired experience and

expertise in this killing program were now available for the enormous new killing program associated with the creation of special installations in occupied Poland. A high proportion of those who had been in the euthanasia program were transferred east, constituting the basic personnel and many of the higher ranking officials in the new killing centers. Their gas was substituted for bullets; by early 1942 this aspect of the practical problem of huge numbers was on the way to solution.

The second practical issue, that of increasing participation in the vast program, was being addressed at the same time. What was needed was not only the individuals who had been trained in the euthanasia program but an enormous number of German agencies with their bureaucracies to arrange for the collection of millions of people all over Europe, their transportation to the killing centers, the confiscation and utilization of the property stolen from them, and the development of policies toward Germany's allies to assure their participation. It was this great expansion of the numbers of personnel who would play some part in the whole program, an expansion from a few thousand to literally hundreds of thousands, that was the subject of the notorious conference, originally scheduled for early December 1941 but then postponed to January 20, 1942, and known after its location as the Wannsee Conference. From here on in, the major German ministries and agencies would see as one of their main tasks for the remainder of the war participation in this portion of the demographic revolution in a German-controlled world. The program would be continued into the last days of the Third Reich.

While the program for the killing of Jews was moving forward, and as it was extended to include the Sinti and Roma, the Germans still hoped to win their war for control of the globe. Repeatedly they turned to the offensive on the Eastern Front, trying to defeat the Soviet Union either by forcing its collapse or by exhausting its manpower and material reserves. But that was by no means the only focus of German military effort. They seriously expected that sooner or later their Soviet enemy would drop of exhaustion, if nothing else, but they believed that victory over the Western Powers required a different approach. Because the demands of continental warfare had repeatedly obliged them to postpone the construction of the blue-water navy, they looked more and more hopefully at the obvious alternative to building their own navy: getting an ally who already had one. It was from this perspective that one must look at German policy toward the United States and Japan in 1941. As long as Japan was unwilling to tackle the United States, it behooved Germany to postpone war with the US until the large German surface navy could be built. But if Japan were willing to join in the war, taking advantage of Germany's 1940 victory in the West to seize a vast



empire in South and Southeast Asia, then Germany would have the world's strongest navy on her side and could go to war with the United States right away.

It was from this perspective that they promised the Japanese that they would join them in war against the US if Japan took that step, and since the key factor was the existence of the Japanese navy, it made no difference to the Germans what the timing might be. They were willing to join Japan either before or after their own invasion of the Soviet Union. The Japanese waited until December 1941, whereupon Germany and Italy immediately joined them in war with the United States. Hitler was, in fact, so eager to start hostilities that he ordered them begun as soon as he heard of the attack on Pearl Harbor and even before he could get back to Berlin for the formal ceremonies of declaring war.

Although the planned German weapons systems for fighting the United States had not yet materialized, the availability of a big navy from Germany's Japanese ally at least partially remedied that deficiency. Until German power could be brought to bear directly on the distant enemy across the Atlantic, it seemed to him important to try to terrorize that country's British ally out of the war. It is too frequently overlooked because of German post-war apologies and the focus on Cold War realignments that the whole program of newly developed German weapons systems—the V-1, 2, 3, and 4—was designed with the destruction of London in mind. These devices, no doubt a sign of Hitler's special love for the English, all required immense allocations of scarce human and material resources, and not only for their development and mass production. Most of them required further massive allocations of resources to the construction of launching facilities, all located in occupied Western Europe, and all initially pointed at London.

It was Germany's hope that the rain of destruction from the sky, combined with the imposition of starvation by the submarine offensive at sea, would serve to deprive the United States of its potential base for any assault on Europe from the west; the large-scale transfer of troops and equipment to Tunisia in the winter of 1942-43 was to perform a similar function in depriving the United States of any base for assault from the south. I have already mentioned that this German effort—mounted at the expense of any serious effort to relieve the German forces cut off in Stalingrad—obliged the Western Allies to postpone the invasion in the west from 1943 to 1944.

This is not the time or place to review the later stages of World War II, but two key points about them need to be emphasized in this context. In the first place, there was, as I have already stated, no letup in the program of mass killing. On the contrary, those whose careers, promotions, and safety from far more dangerous duty at the front gave them a great vested

interest in the continuation of the killing program did their best, or worst, to keep it going. They searched frantically for new victims; they did what they could to prevent any Jews from escaping; they pressured Germany's few remaining satellites to surrender their surviving Jews for slaughter. Allied victories in battle in 1942 and 1943 had kept the Germans from reaching Jewish communities around the globe—communities that they had hoped to destroy; only the Allied victory of 1945 ended the mass killing. But some of those in the euthanasia program were so enthusiastic about it that they tried to keep going even after defeat. They put out signs warning of epidemics in order to keep Allied soldiers out of the hospitals where these Germans were still killing patients in May of 1945.

The other point to be stressed is that in the eyes of the German leadership, the perspective out into the wider world continued to be dominant to the very end as well. Strategy at the northern end of the Eastern Front was completely dominated during the last year of war by the German navy's hope of getting back into the war at sea with new submarines, submarines which could be readied and their crews trained only in the central part of the Baltic Sea.<sup>20</sup> There was indeed lots of land to be re-conquered in Eastern Europe, and until the very end, the Germans very much hoped to be able to do just that. But Hitler always looked beyond the oceans around the globe. We can see this most clearly in his final actions in the bunker in Berlin: his political testament concludes with an admonition to his people to continue with the racial policies including the killing of Jews, of which he was very proud indeed. His successor as head of Germany, however, was to be not one of his favorite field marshals but Grand Admiral Dönitz, the commander-in-chief of the Germany navy, who was busy trying to arrange for the sending of German naval officers to Japan by submarine so that they could learn how to build up Germany's big blue-water navy in the future.<sup>21</sup>

From the beginning to the end of the Third Reich there was an extraordinary consistency of purpose. Strategy and planning, weapons systems and resource allocations, all were attuned to the concepts of world domination, the extermination of Jews, and a general demographic revolution. Intervening events, setbacks at the front, even the most colossal defeats, were not allowed to impose any basic reorientation on the course of German policy. Contrary advice, when offered, was invariably disregarded. Germany, Hitler had asserted, would be the world power or it would not be at all. He strove toward his goals with unequalled consistency, and the vast majority of the German people harnessed enormous energy to his striving. The smoldering ruins of 1945 should warn us never to underestimate the capacity of human beings for evil. The tools of science and society can be used for good or evil purposes, and if they are not directed properly, the costs can be horrendous.

## Endnotes

1. Gerhard L. Weinberg (ed.), "National Socialist Organization and Foreign Policy Aims in 1927," *Journal of Modern History* 27 (1964), 428-33; now also in the author's book, *Germany, Hitler, and World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 23-29.
2. A most helpful discussion in Jochen Thies, *Architekt der Weltherrschaft: Die "Endziele" Hitlers* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1976), pp. 35ff.
3. Note the recently discovered text of Hitler's comments on this subject to Finnish Marshal Mannerheim in Bernd Wegner (ed.), "Hitlers Besuch in Finnland: Das geheime Tonprotokoll seiner Unterredung mit Mannerheim am 4. Juni 1942," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 41 (1993), 132.
4. This can be followed best in Jost Dülffer, *Weimar, Hitler und die Marine: Reichspolitik und Flottenbau 1920 bis 1939* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1973).
5. Hitler's comments on 19 June 1943 in Werner Jochmann (ed.), *Adolf Hitler: Monologe im Führerhauptquartier 1941-1944* (Hamburg: Albrecht Knaus, 1980), No. 206, p. 402. Like most of Hitler's comments which show him expecting war with Britain and the United States long before 1939, this one is always carefully ignored by those who have come to imagine he wanted good relations with Britain.
6. The belief voiced in my book, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany: Starting World War II, 1937-1939* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980; Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1994), p. 116, that the Germans hoped to scuttle the Halifax visit, is now fully confirmed by the published diary of Joseph Goebbels. See Elke Fröhlich (ed.), *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, Teil I, Bd. 3 (Munich: Saur, 1987), pp. 336f., 348.
7. On this whole subject see my "Hitler and England, 1933-1945: Pretense and Reality," *German Studies Review* 8 (1985), 299-309; and *Germany, Hitler, and World War II*, pp. 85-94.

8. See now Gerhard L. Weinberg, "Germany and Munich," in Maya Latynski (ed.), *Reappraising the Munich Pact: Continental Perspectives* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1992), pp. 9-20.
9. Gerhard L. Weinberg, "The Nazi-Soviet Pacts: A Half-Century Later," *Foreign Affairs* 68, No. 4 (1989), 175-89; *Germany, Hitler, and World War II*, pp. 168-181.
10. Richard Breitman, *The Architect of Genocide: Himmler and the Final Solution* (New York: Knopf, 1991), pp. 57ff.
11. Compare the speech of 30 January 1941 in Max Domarus (ed.), *Hitler: Reden und Proklamationen, 1932-1945*, 2 vols. (Neustadt a.d. Aisch: Verlagsdruckerei Schmidt, 1962), 2: 1663, with Philipp Bouhler (ed.), *Der Grossdeutsche Freiheitskampf 2* (Munich: Eher, 1941): 222; and the speech of 30 January 1942 in Domarus, 2: 1829, with Bouhler, 3 (Munich: Eher, 1944): 197.
12. The literature on this issue is now quite extensive, but the early summary by Alexander Mitscherlich and Fed Mielke, *Das Diktat der Menschenverachtung* (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1947), pp. 110ff., remains useful.
13. Thies, p. 130.
14. See Norman J. Goda, "Germany and Northwest Africa in the Second World War: Politics and Strategy of Global Hegemony," PhD diss., Chapel Hill, NC, 1991. Goda summarized his findings in a paper at the 1992 meeting of the American Historical Association in Washington, DC.
15. Michael Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung 1935-1945*, Vol. 2 (Munich: Bernard & Graefe, 1975), 514.
16. *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik 1918-1945*, Serie D, Bd. XIII/2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1940), Anhang III.
17. *Ibid.*, No. 515.
18. Leni Yahil, *The Holocaust: The Fate of European Jewry, 1932-1945* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990), pp. 420-21.

19. See Christian Streit, *Keine Kameraden: Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen 1941-1945* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1980), pp. 109ff.

20. Howard Davis Grier, "Hitler's Baltic Strategy, 1944-1945," PhD diss., Chapel Hill, NC, 1991.

21. The documentation on this project from the American intercepts of Japanese telegrams is cited in the author's book, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994).

GERHARD L. WEINBERG is William Rand Kenan Jr. Professor of History Emeritus, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and 2001-2002 J.B. and Maurice C. Shapiro Senior Scholar-in-Residence, Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies. Among other honors, he has twice been awarded the George Louis Beer Prize of the American Historical Association, and he has received the Halverson Prize of the German Studies Association. He was recently appointed chair of the Historical Advisory Panel of the Interagency Working Group Implementing the Nazi War Crimes Disclosure Act. In addition to his many articles on the Holocaust and Nazi Germany, Professor Weinberg's numerous writings include the books *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II*; *World in the Balance: Behind the Scenes of World War II*; *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany*; and most recently *Germany, Hitler, and World War II*.

---

## *Available Occasional Papers*

“Lithuania and the Jews,” CAHS symposium presentations, 2005

“The Path to Vichy: Antisemitism in France in the 1930s,” by Vicki Caron, 2005

“Sephardim and the Holocaust,” by Aron Rodrigue, 2005

“In the Shadow of Birkenau: Ethical Dilemmas during and after the Holocaust,” by John K. Roth, 2005

“Jewish Children: Between Protectors and Murderers,” by Nechama Tec, 2005

“Anne Frank and the Future of Holocaust Memory,” by Alvin H. Rosenfeld, 2005

“Children and the Holocaust,” CAHS symposium presentations, 2004

“The Holocaust as a Literary Experience,” by Henryk Grynberg, 2004

“Forced and Slave Labor in Nazi-Dominated Europe,” CAHS symposium presentations, 2004

“International Law and the Holocaust,” by Thomas Buergenthal, 2004

“Initiating the Final Solution: The Fateful Months of September-October 1941,” by Christopher Browning, 2003

“On Studying Jewish History in Light of the Holocaust,” by David Engel, 2003; web version [www.ushmm.org/research/center/publications/occasional/engel\\_02/engel.pdf](http://www.ushmm.org/research/center/publications/occasional/engel_02/engel.pdf)

“Past Revisited: Reflections on the Study of the Holocaust and Contemporary Antisemitism,” by Steven J. Zipperstein, 2003; web version [www.ushmm.org/research/center/publications/occasional/zipperstein\\_03/zipperstein.pdf](http://www.ushmm.org/research/center/publications/occasional/zipperstein_03/zipperstein.pdf)

“From the Holocaust in Galicia to Contemporary Genocide: Common Ground—Historical Differences,” by Omer Bartov, 2003

“Confiscation of Jewish Property in Europe, 1933–1945: New Sources and Perspectives,” CAHS symposium proceedings, 2003

“Roma and Sinti: Under-Studied Victims of Nazism,” CAHS symposium proceedings, 2002

“Life After the Ashes: The Postwar Pain, and Resilience, of Young Holocaust Survivors,” by Peter Suedfeld, 2002

“Why Bother About Homosexuals? Homophobia and Sexual Politics in Nazi Germany,” by Geoffrey J. Giles, 2002

“Uncovering Certain Mischievous Questions About the Holocaust,” by Berel Lang, 2002

“World War II Leaders and Their Visions for the Future of Palestine,” by Gerhard L. Weinberg, 2002

“The Conundrum of Complicity: German Professionals and the Final Solution,” by Konrad H. Jarausch, 2002; web version [www.ushmm.org/research/center/publications/occasional/conundrum.htm](http://www.ushmm.org/research/center/publications/occasional/conundrum.htm), 2002

“Policy of Destruction: Nazi Anti-Jewish Policy and the Genesis of the ‘Final Solution,’” by Peter Longerich, 2001

“Holocaust Writing and Research Since 1945,” by Sir Martin Gilbert, 2001

“Jewish Artists in New York during the Holocaust Years,” by Matthew Baigell, 2001

“The Awakening of Memory: Survivor Testimony in the First Years after the Holocaust, and Today,” by Henry Greenspan, 2001

“Hungary and the Holocaust: Confrontations with the Past,” CAHS symposium proceedings, 2001

“Facing the Past: Representations of the Holocaust in German Cinema since 1945,” by Frank Stern, 2000

“Future Challenges to Holocaust Scholarship as an Integrated Part of the Study of Modern Dictatorship,” by Hans Mommsen, 2000

“Moritz Fröhlich—Morris Gay: A German Refugee in the United States,” by Peter Gay, 1999

“Jewish Resistance: A Working Bibliography,” by CAHS staff, 1999; third edition 2003; web version [www.ushmm.org/research/center/resistance/biblio.htm](http://www.ushmm.org/research/center/resistance/biblio.htm), 2000, third web edition, 2003

“Profits and Persecution: German Big Business and the Holocaust,” by Peter Hayes, 1998

“On the Ambivalence of Being Neutral: Switzerland and Swiss Jewry Facing the Rise and Fall of the Nazi State,” by Jacques Picard, 1998

“The Holocaust in the Netherlands: A Reevaluation,” a USHMM-RIOD conference summary by Patricia Heberer, 1997



“Jewish Resistance: Facts, Omissions, and Distortions,”  
by Nechama Tec, 1997

“Psychological Reverberations of the Holocaust in the  
Lives of Child Survivors,” by Robert Krell, 1997

“The First Encounter: Survivors and Americans in the  
Late 1940s,” by Arthur Hertzberg, 1996

“The ‘Willing Executioners’/‘Ordinary Men’ Debate,” by  
Daniel Goldhagen, Christopher Browning, and Leon  
Wieseltier, 1996

“Preserving Living Memory: The Challenge and Power of  
Video Testimony,” by Geoffrey H. Hartman, 1995

“Germany’s War for World Conquest and the Extermination  
of the Jews,” by Gerhard L. Weinberg, 1995

***Single copies of occasional papers may be obtained by addressing a request to the Academic Publications Branch of the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies. A complete list of the papers is also available on the Museum’s website at [www.ushmm.org/research/center](http://www.ushmm.org/research/center).***

**T**he Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum promotes the growth of the field of Holocaust studies, including the dissemination of scholarly output in the field. It also strives to facilitate the training of future generations of scholars specializing in the Holocaust.

Under the guidance of the Academic Committee of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, the Center provides a fertile atmosphere for scholarly discourse and debate through research and publication projects, conferences, fellowship and visiting scholar opportunities, and a network of cooperative programs with universities and other institutions in the United States and abroad.

In furtherance of this program the Center has established a series of working and occasional papers prepared by scholars in history, political science, philosophy, religion, sociology, literature, psychology, and other disciplines. Selected from Center-sponsored lectures and conferences, or the result of other activities related to the Center's mission, these publications are designed to make this research available in a timely fashion to other researchers and to the general public.



CENTER FOR ADVANCED HOLOCAUST STUDIES  
100 Raoul Wallenberg Place, SW • Washington, DC 20024-2126 • [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)