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**THE HOLOCAUST  
IN HISTORY**

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### 3. THE FINAL SOLUTION

**T**HE TERM *Final Solution* (*Endlösung*) first appeared as Nazi terminology, used by German themselves to designate their policy toward Jews. But what did the Nazis mean by these words? And what was the reality behind the phrase they employed? We must take care, in answering, lest we apply our own understanding, invariably associated with European-wide deportations and death camps. For while this undoubtedly *became* the Final Solution, this was not what those who first used these words with respect to Jews intended to convey. As we shall see, the stated objectives of the Third Reich changed over time. A look at how this particular term entered the Nazi lexicon raises the important question of why this occurred and how decisions on the Jews were made in the Third Reich.

As suggested in the last chapter, 1938 marked the intensification of persecution of Jews in Germany, with a new round of violence and a drive to expel Jews from the recently expanded Reich. In January 1939, the German Foreign Office told its representatives abroad about the "necessity for a radical solution of the Jewish question," referring also to the long-term goal as "an international solution." At the time, however, to quote the document further, "the ultimate aim of Germany's Jewish policy [was] the emigration of all Jews living on German territory." By "international solution" the Foreign Office meant a negotiated settlement with receiving

countries, according to which Jews would leave Germany, possibly taking a pittance of their property with them. Eight months later, just after the German conquest of Poland, Reinhard Heydrich alerted his SS Einsatzgruppen to a forthcoming "final aim" (*Endziel*), which would require extensive periods of time. Heydrich also referred to "planned total measures," which were "to be kept strictly secret." His communication indicates that some sort of vast population movement was contemplated, for one of the purposes of the instructions was to concentrate Jews in large urban areas, at rail junctions, and along railway lines.<sup>2</sup>

As a habitual programmatic short form, *final solution*, or *Endlösung*, may have first appeared in June 1940 in the context of a "territorial final solution" (*territoriale Endlösung*), and clearly linked with evolving schemes for massive forced emigration of Jews to the island of Madagascar, in the Indian Ocean, off the east coast of Africa. At the Jewish desk of the Foreign Office, Franz Rademacher used the phrase in this sense in September of the same year, when he was drafting concrete plans for installing the Jews in Madagascar and planning a visit to the island to map out details. The term appeared increasingly in the first half of 1941 and was mentioned notably by SS bureau chief Walter Schellenberg on 20 May, when discussing Jewish emigration priorities for the SS across Europe. As then understood, the "final solution" had to await the end of the war—the defeat of Great Britain and the definitive settlement of affairs with France through a peace treaty.<sup>3</sup> Early in the Russian campaign, a few months later, the language shifted once more. On 31 July 1941, there was a new, urgent reference in a telegram from Hermann Göring to Reinhard Heydrich, head of the vast SS police apparatus. Göring now instructed Heydrich to begin substantive preparations for a "total solution [*Gesamtlösung*] of the Jewish question in the German sphere of influence in Europe," considering this to be "the intended final solution of the Jewish question."<sup>4</sup> The pace quickened thereafter. In a letter of 28 August Adolf Eichmann referred to an "imminent final solution" as "now in preparation."<sup>5</sup> There was mention once again of a "final solution" at the Wannsee Conference of January 1942, with every indication that it was now under way. Calling the meeting to order, Heydrich told the assembled "Jewish experts" from across Europe that Göring had placed him in charge of preparations for "the final solution of

the Jewish question" and that implementation was to be directed through Himmler's office.<sup>6</sup> The time for waiting was over.

Most historians agree that with this meeting, European-wide mass murder emerged as the essence of the Final Solution. I shall now examine how historians have understood the evolution of this particular "solution" to this point, given that the Nazis seemed in earlier times to lean in quite another direction, and given the frequent reference to other kinds of "solutions"—nonmurderous, at least in Pan-European terms—that were apparently taken seriously within the Nazi hierarchy.

The Nazis' own records provide little help. Typically, Hitler and his lieutenants cloaked their most criminal activities in euphemistic language, tried strenuously to keep their murderous plans secret, and were notoriously vague in delimiting lines of authority, especially on the most sensitive issues. Beyond this, Hitler had a positive aversion to orderly procedures and almost never discussed various policy options with his subordinates. As opposed to his British counterpart, Winston Churchill, who left mountains of documents, ruminating endlessly on possible courses of action, the Nazi dictator was reluctant to commit himself to paper with concrete ideas and preferred always to give orders orally, sometimes even then avoiding detailed instructions. As a result, important German officials were used to living with ambiguities and imprecisions on important issues, especially those in which the Führer had shown a special interest. At the top of the Nazi hierarchy, high-ranking Nazis were accustomed to Hitler's procrastination, particularly on the most difficult or dangerous problems. Further down, Nazi underlings avoided asking questions, especially when, as was often the case in the Third Reich, policy lines depended on ideology rather than empirical evidence, and hence could veer off in unexpected directions. On sensitive issues it was unwise to take policy initiatives before the Führer made up his mind.

In the absence of a clear record of Hitlerian decision making on the Final Solution, interpretations have varied considerably. In a book published in 1977, British writer David Irving even suggested that the Führer had nothing to do with the matter. Building his case on the inability of historians to discover written orders from Hitler to kill all the Jews of Europe, Irving contended that the Führer was not responsible for anti-Jewish policy at all, was basically uninter-

ested in Jews, and knew nothing about their terrible fate—at least until 1943.<sup>7</sup> As a chorus of reviewers immediately pointed out, however, this contention not only ignored Hitler's hate-filled rhetoric about Jews, it also disregarded reports on the killings destined for him, plus the repeated statements of his underlings, including Himmler, that policy was determined at the highest level, by the Führer himself.<sup>8</sup>

What was particularly mischievous about Irving's argument was the notion that without explicit, written orders, it was impossible to assign responsibility for the Final Solution. Numerous critics have made clear that such orders were probably not necessary at all to begin the killing process. Authority in the Third Reich flowed not from laws and orders, issued by carefully delimited agencies, but rather from expressions of Hitler's will. Channels of government were frequently circumvented in favor of proclamations that such or so was "the Führer's wish." This is what Raul Hilberg, the dean of Holocaust historians, has called "government by announcement." In Hilberg's view, it is quite possible that a signed order to kill the Jews may never have been issued. What counted was a "mandate" from Hitler to proceed. Hitler frequently issued such mandates, and there is plenty of evidence that others understood just what the Nazi leader meant. Those in charge did not trouble with documentary niceties when the Führer expressed himself. "What he actually meant, or whether he really meant it, might have been a matter of tone as well as of language. When he spoke 'coldly' and in a 'low voice' about 'horrifying' decisions 'also at the dinner table,' then his audience knew that he was 'serious.'" From one to another, Nazi leaders transmitted the latest impulse. The problem historians have is reconstructing what these signals were, and when and under what circumstances they were given.

#### INTENTIONALISTS: THE STRAIGHT PATH

For an important body of historical opinion, the questions asked about the emergence of the Final Solution can be answered easily with reference to Hitler's anti-Jewish rhetoric, drawn from various points in his career but seen to reflect a consistent murderous objec-

tive. In this view, Hitler is seen as the driving force of Nazi anti-semitic policy, whose views indicate a coherent line of thought from a very early point. Hitler is also seen as the sole strategist with the authority and the determination to begin the implementation of the Final Solution. In what is probably the most widely read work on this subject, Lucy Dawidowicz argues that the Führer set the stage for mass murder in September 1939, with the attack on Poland. "War and the annihilation of the Jews were interdependent," she writes. "The disorder of war would provide Hitler with the cover for the unchecked commission of murder. He needed an arena for his operations where the restraints of common codes of morality and accepted rules of warfare would not extend." September 1939, therefore, saw the beginning of "a twofold war": on the one hand there was the war of conquest for traditional goals such as raw materials and empire; on the other there was the "war against the Jews," the decisive confrontation with the greatest enemy of the Third Reich.<sup>10</sup> Orders to begin Europe-wide mass murder, issued in the late spring or summer of 1941, are seen as flowing directly from Hitler's idea on Jews, expressed as early as 1919. On various occasions his "program of annihilation" may have been camouflaged or downplayed. But Dawidowicz insists that it was always his intention: "Once Hitler adopted an ideological position, even a strategic one, he adhered to it with limpetlike fixity, fearful lest he be accused, if he changed his mind, of incertitude, of capriciousness on 'essential questions.' He had long-range plans to realize his ideological goals, and the destruction of the Jews was at their center."<sup>11</sup>

Borrowing from the British historian Tim Mason, Christopher Browning was the first to dub this interpretation "intentionalist," linking it to other historiographical themes in the history of the Third Reich. This line of thought accents the role of Hitler in initiating the murder of European Jewry, seeing a high degree of persistence, consistency, and orderly sequence in Nazi anti-Jewish policy, directed from a very early point to the goal of mass murder. Like much of the interpretative literature on Nazism, this explanation of the Final Solution rests on quotations and depends, in the final analysis, on the notion of a Hitlerian "blueprint" for future policies, set forth in *Mein Kampf* and other writings and speeches. Critics of this approach, referred to as "functionalists," are rather

impressed with the evolution of Nazi goals, with the sometimes haphazard course of German policies, and with the way that these are related to the internal mechanisms of the Third Reich.<sup>12</sup>

Intentionalism, it may be supposed, was born at Nuremberg in 1945, when American prosecutors first presented Nazi crimes as a carefully orchestrated conspiracy, launched together with the war itself. At that time American legal experts hoped to prove that there had been a deliberate plan to commit horrendous atrocities as well as other breaches of international law; in this way they expected to designate certain German organizations and institutions as part of a criminal conspiracy, vastly simplifying the work of future prosecutions.<sup>13</sup> Years later, after much historical analysis, many historians still accept the notion of an unfolding Hitlerian plan. In his detailed critique of David Irving, for example, Gerald Fleming sees an "unbroken continuity of specific utterances" leading from Hitler's first manifestations of antisemitism "to the liquidation orders that Hitler personally issued during the war." A major task of Fleming's work is the collection of such utterances, which the author hopes will tear away the camouflage covering Hitler's primary responsibility.<sup>14</sup>

One can sympathize with an effort to remind a sometimes negligent audience of Hitler's incessant, raving hatred of Jews. And it is similarly valuable to expose the Nazis' linguistic perversions—distortions intended to conceal the killing process from the victims, from the Allies, and from the German public as well. Nevertheless, the problem of interpreting Hitlerian rhetoric still remains. For the fact is that Hitler was forever calling for the most ruthless action; for sudden, crushing blows; for the complete annihilation of his foes; or evoking his irrevocable, ironlike determination to do this or that. We cannot ignore Hitler's amply demonstrated blood lust, and there is no doubt that the contemplation of mass killing inspired him on more than one occasion.<sup>15</sup> In retrospect, historians have little difficulty in tracing "direct lines," but it is much more problematic to ascertain what Hitler actually intended and how he acted on such expressions at specific moments.<sup>16</sup> In May 1938, for example, Hitler told his generals of his "unalterable decision to destroy Czechoslovakia by military action in the foreseeable future." According to Gerhard Weinberg, the Nazi leader indeed wanted military action, but believed he could avoid a general war. When he learned in September, on the eve of his attack, that a general war

threatened, that neither Mussolini nor the German public were likely to follow him, and that he could achieve a stunning success peacefully, he changed his mind.<sup>17</sup> So "unalterable decisions" could be altered. The implication is that Hitler's words should indeed be taken seriously, but that they must also be seen in the context of his actions and the concrete situations he faced.

This is a reasonable reply to the use made of Hitler's famous speech of 30 January 1939 by intentionalist historians such as Dawidowicz and Fleming. Adopting a characteristically "prophetic" tone in his address to the Reichstag, Hitler issued a terrible warning: "One thing I should like to say on this day which may be memorable for others as well as for us Germans: In the course of my life I have very often been a prophet, and I have usually been ridiculed for it. During the time of my struggle for power it was in the first instance the Jewish race which only received my prophecies with laughter when I said that I would one day take over the leadership of the State, and with it that of the whole nation, and that I would then among many other things settle the Jewish problem. Their laughter was uproarious, but I think that for some time now they have been laughing on the other side of their face. Today I will once more be a prophet. If the international Jewish financiers outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, then the result will not be the bolshevization of the earth, and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe."<sup>18</sup>

Fleming is certainly right to stress the importance of Hitler's self-portrayal as a "fighting prophet," and Hitler's subsequent references to this speech in the middle of the war indicate a conscious desire, once the Final Solution was under way, to assert a continuity of actions against the Jews. This is but one of many pieces of evidence that suggest Hitler insisted on a definitive solution to the Jewish question, and in this sense the speech is an important measure of his priorities. Less clear, however, is what the January speech tells us about Hitler's objectives at the time. A look at his words in context shows that Hitler spoke for several hours, but devoted only a few minutes to the Jews. Speaking in the wake of the Munich conference, Hitler focused mainly on economic matters, in an address judged by the British ambassador to be relatively conciliatory. One of the purposes of Hitler's address was likely to sow confusion and

division among the Western powers. He probably did envisage war in Europe as his "prophecy" suggested; but this was likely not a world war, but rather a fight over Poland, which would be over quickly. As Uwe Dietrich Adam points out, Hitler and other Nazi leaders looked to an even more ruthless crackdown on Jews in the event of war.<sup>19</sup> We shall never know for certain precisely what plans lurked in Hitler's consciousness and whether his reference to "annihilation" at that particular time should be taken literally. But it is not at all plain that he had fixed upon mass murder, which presumably would have to begin once the short Polish campaign was over. And it is even less likely that Hitler thought concretely about European-wide killings, which he was not in a position to undertake until his stunning military successes in 1940-41.

In utterances such as Hitler's 30 January address, Eberhard Jäckel identifies the "universalist-missionary touch" in the Führer's anti-semitism, which became an integral part of Nazi war aims. Hitler's antisemitism in *Mein Kampf*, according to Jäckel, "presupposes war, it demands the methods of warfare, and it is therefore not surprising that it should have reached its bloody climax during the next war, which was a part of Hitler's program from the start." Once the fighting continued into 1941 and 1942, "the extermination of the Jews became increasingly the most important aim of the war as such; as the fortunes of war turned against Germany, the destruction of the Jews became National Socialism's gift to the world." Finally, in the eery atmosphere of Hitler's bunker beneath the ruins of Berlin, antisemitism assumed supreme importance. The extermination of the Jews "now appeared to him as his central historical mission."<sup>20</sup> A key suggestion, I think, is that antisemitism *became* ever more salient. But was there a "blueprint" from a very early point, as Jäckel implies? Was extermination an inevitable outgrowth of this antisemitism? These questions remain open.

Some intentionalists link Hitler's determination to murder the Jews with other aspects of his thought and strategy. In his book *The Three Faces of Fascism*, first published in German in 1963, intellectual historian Ernst Nolte presented National Socialism as part of a European-wide opposition to modern ideas and development, of which the Jews were a principal symbol in the eyes of antisemites.<sup>21</sup> In Hitler's thinking, said Nolte, the Jew came to stand for "the historical process itself." Unlike some of his followers, Hitler and

Himmler were "logically consistent" in their thought and practice. Assuming that everything they detested in the world derived ultimately from this mainspring of modernity, annihilation made sense. "In Hitler's extermination of the Jews it was not a case of criminals committing criminal deeds, but of a uniquely monstrous action in which principles ran riot in a frenzy of self-destruction."<sup>22</sup> For Andreas Hillgruber, on the other hand, the key lies in the Barbarossa campaign and the struggle against the Soviet regime. The Final Solution, he argues, derived from the ideological fixation with Bolshevism and the east, seen as inseparable in Hitler's mind from "international Judaism." Killing on a mass scale emerged from the ideological mobilization for the onslaught on the Soviet Union that began on 22 June 1941.<sup>23</sup>

In the absence of reliable guides to Hitler's plans for the Jews, apart from his murky "prophecies," intentionalists differ among themselves as to when precisely Hitler's intentions became fixed. In his most recent book, Jäckel rules out the idea that there was "a single killing order." Rather, "extermination was divided into several phases and covered a wide variety of methods and victims."<sup>24</sup> The weight of opinion about a turning point falls on the war against the Soviet Union. According to Helmut Krausnick, there was a wartime decision of the Führer, but its timing remains obscure. "What is certain is that the nearer Hitler's plan to overthrow Russia as the last possible enemy on the continent of Europe approached maturity, the more he became obsessed with an idea—with which he had been toying as a 'final solution' for a long time—of wiping out the Jews in the territories under his control. It cannot have been later than March 1941, when he openly declared his intention of having the political commissars of the Red Army shot that he issued his secret decree—which never appeared in writing though it was mentioned verbally on several occasions—that the Jews should be eliminated."<sup>25</sup> Together with a colleague, Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, Krausnick has pored over the activity of the murderous Einsatzgruppen, the killing teams of motorized SS troops who followed in the van of the Wehrmacht when they swept into the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941. Ultimately these and related units are responsible for more than 2 million deaths, one of the greatest orgies of mass killing in the history of mankind. Krausnick and Wilhelm have documented the genocidal character of the campaign, which Hitler re-

ferred to as a *Vernichtungskrieg*, a war of destruction, and they have incidentally demonstrated the extensive support and assistance given to their slaughters by the regular army. In their view the extermination of the Jews was included in the Barbarossa planning process.<sup>26</sup> This assessment has been contested, however, with other authorities arguing rather that the killing evolved into genocidal proportions during the early course of the fighting. But of genocide itself there is no doubt. Christian Streit and others have documented the active participation of the Wehrmacht in a whole complex of killing orders and massacres—including Jews, Communists, and prisoners of war.<sup>27</sup>

#### FUNCTIONALISTS: THE TWISTED ROAD

Against this interpretation, so-called functionalist historians present a picture of the Third Reich as a maze of competing power groups, rival bureaucracies, forceful personalities, and diametrically opposed interests engaged in ceaseless clashes with each other. They see Hitler as a brooding and sometimes distant leader, who intervened only spasmodically, sending orders crashing through the system like bolts of lightning. While in theory the power of the Führer was without limit, in practice he preferred the role of arbiter, according legitimacy to one or another favorite or line of conduct. Add to this Hitler's curious leadership style—his inability to mount a sustained effort, his procrastination, his frequent hesitation—and one can understand the reluctance of many to accept the idea of a far-reaching scheme or ideological imperative necessitating the Final Solution. Few historians of this school doubt that Hitler was murderously obsessed with Jews; they question, however, whether he was capable of long-term planning on this or any other matter, and they tend to look within the chaotic system itself for at least some of the explanation for the killing of European Jews.

Reflecting this perspective, Martin Broszat's 1977 critique of David Irving's *Hitler's War* presented to a wide public a serious interpretation of the origins of the Final Solution in which Hitler did not have full operational responsibility.<sup>28</sup> Broszat's approach was hardly an exculpation of the Nazi leader. On the contrary, he took Irving to task for his "normalization" of Hitler and pointed to dan-

gerous forces within the German Federal Republic that utilized the apologetic drift in the British historian's work. Broszat reasserted Hitler's "fanatical, destructive will to annihilate" that traditional historiography has always seen at the core of the Führer's personality. He stressed Hitler's "totally irresponsible, self-deceiving, destructive and evilly misanthropic egocentricity and his lunatic fanaticism." As the author of a 1969 work, *Der Staat Hitlers*, Broszat had no doubt about who was in charge and what kind of a person he was.

Nevertheless, the heart of Broszat's argument was that the Final Solution was not begun after a single Hitlerian decision, but arose "bit by bit." He suggested that deportations and systematic killings outside the sphere of the Einsatzgruppen in Russia started through local Nazi initiatives, rather than a directive from the Führer. According to this view, Hitler set the objective of Nazism: "to get rid of the Jews, and above all to make the territory of the Reich *judenfrei*, i.e., clear of Jews"—but without specifying how this was to be achieved. In a vague way, the top Nazi leadership hoped to see the Jews pushed off to the east, and uprooted large masses of people with this in mind. Top Nazi officials had "no clear aims . . . with respect to the subsequent fate of the deportees," however. Their policy was "governed by the concept that the enormous spaces to be occupied in the Soviet Union would . . . offer a possibility for getting rid of the Jews of Germany and of the allied and occupied countries," but they also toyed with other schemes, such as the Madagascar Plan, to achieve their objectives. Expectations of an early resolution heightened during the Russian campaign, which was supposed to finish in a matter of weeks. Deportation trains carrying Jews from the Reich began to roll eastward. Yet by the autumn these plans were upset. Military operations slowed, and then came to a standstill. Transportation facilities were overloaded. Nazi officers in the occupied east, receiving shipments of Jews from the Reich, now complained that they had no more room in the teeming, disease-ridden ghettos. It was then, in Broszat's view, that Nazi officials on the spot started sporadically to murder the Jews who arrived from the west. Killing, therefore, "began not solely as the result of an ostensible will for extermination but also as a 'way out' of a blind alley into which the Nazis had manoeuvred themselves." In its early stages, annihilation was improvised, and its execution was

marked by confusion and misunderstanding. Only gradually, in early 1942, did Himmler and the SS establish the coherent structures of the Final Solution, coordinated on a European-wide basis.<sup>29</sup>

Among functionalists, Hans Mommsen has presented the most forceful case for a Führer uninvolved in and perhaps incapable of administration, concerned rather with his personal standing and striking propaganda postures. Mommsen goes even further than Broszat in suggesting that Hitler had little directly to do with anti-Jewish policy. While not denying his intense hatred of Jews, Mommsen sees the Nazi leader as thinking about the Jews mainly in propagandistic terms, without bothering to chart a course of action. The Final Solution, he observes, resulted from the interaction of this fanatical but distant leader with the chaotic structure of the Nazi regime. In the Third Reich, office was piled upon office, and underlings were left to find their way in a bureaucratic and administrative jungle. The only guide to success, and a compelling one, was fidelity to the Hitlerian vision. Underlings competed for the favor of this ideologically obsessed, but essentially lazy leader. Given the Führer's mad compulsions, this competition programmed the regime for "cumulative radicalization," a process that ended ultimately, of course, in its self-destruction. Hitler's heightened rhetoric prompted others to realize his "utopian" ravings about Jews and undoubtedly stimulated murderous excesses. But he issued no order for the Final Solution and had nothing to do with its implementation.<sup>30</sup>

"Hitler's precise role remains hidden in the shadows," says Ian Kershaw, reviewing this literature recently.<sup>31</sup> Given the paucity of documentation, this issue may forever remain obscure, without disputing either the importance of the Führer in the process or the demonic potency of his antisemitism. Whatever their view of Hitler, however, functionalist historians agree that the Final Solution emerged through improvisation, rather than deliberate planning. In his survey of Nazi policy toward the Jews, Karl Schleunes suggested that there was a "twisted road to Auschwitz." The paths that led to the extermination camps, he elaborates, "were by no means direct or, for that matter, charted far in advance."<sup>32</sup> Unlike Broszat, Uwe Adam posits a distinct Hitlerian decision to murder the Jews as occurring sometime "between September and November 1941" and assumes there was an order from the Führer to this effect. But he too considers that there was no course set from a very

early point for European-wide mass murder. Instead, one decision led to another piecemeal, with mass murder emerging as a way to resolve a hopeless contradiction. Having set in motion deportations from the west, the Nazis had to do something with the Jews accumulating in Poland. When the "territorial" option in Russia was foreclosed, the Führer decided on the Final Solution. Hitler and his relentless anti-Jewish ideology were the dynamic element, pressing for a solution to the "Jewish Question"; policy evolved, however, in the chaotic institutional environment of the Third Reich, where planlessness and internal contradictions were the norm.<sup>33</sup>

In the most recent scholarly analysis of this issue, Browning settles upon a position that he terms "moderate functionalist."<sup>34</sup> He finds it implausible that Hitler was merely "awaiting the opportune moment" to realize his murderous intentions, since the Nazi leader allowed nearly three years to pass between the conquest of Poland and the onset of European-wide mass murder. If the outbreak of war simply provided Hitler with a "cover" for mass murder, "why were the millions of Polish Jews in his hands since the fall of 1939 granted a thirty-month 'stay of execution'?" They were subjected to sporadic massacre and murderous living conditions but not to systematic extermination until 1942." During this time there was no "blueprint" for mass destruction, but rather an ideological imperative that called for some sort of ultimate reckoning with the Jews in a manner that would satisfy Nazi racial preoccupations. Competing Nazi agencies put forward one proposal after the next, schemes that continually shattered against practical obstacles. Nazi activists appealed to a Führer whose mind was sometimes elsewhere, who was worried about tactical issues of many sorts, and who often delayed making up his mind about important matters.

The crisis came with Barbarossa, not only because of the apocalyptic character of the campaign, but also because it promised to bring hundreds of thousands more Jews within the hegemony of the Reich. What were the Germans to do with them? During the early course of the campaign Hitler tipped the scales for mass murder. The decision to massacre the Soviet Jews was probably taken in March, as part of the Barbarossa planning process. Before the end of July, Hitler, buoyed up by the spectacular successes of the Wehrmacht in the early part of the Russian campaign, probably issued his order for European-wide mass murder. At that point, the



Führer likely felt, everything was possible. On 31 July, Göring authorized Heydrich to prepare a "total solution" (*Gesamtlösung*) of the Jewish question in the territories under the Nazis' control. Before long, work began on the first two death camps—at Belzec and Chelmno, where construction started in the autumn. On 23 October, Himmler issued a fateful order that passed along the Nazi chain of command: henceforth there would be no Jewish emigration permitted anywhere from German-held territory. On 29 November, invitations went out to the Wannsee Conference, intended to coordinate deportations from across Europe. The Final Solution was about to begin.

Browning and others have criticized the work of various functionalists on three grounds.<sup>35</sup> First, they challenge Adam's notion that pushing great masses of Jews off "to the east" was still an option for the Nazis in the summer of 1941. No concrete preparations for such a massive deportation have ever been discovered, and it is unlikely that serious planning for it could have been under way without leaving a trace in the historical record. Göring's authorization to Heydrich on 31 July to prepare a "total solution" could hardly have referred to such expulsions, they say, since Heydrich already had such authority and had been expelling Jews on a smaller scale since the beginning of 1939. Seen in the context of the furious killings then under way by the Einsatzgruppen, Göring's communication appears rather like a warrant for genocide. Like many, Klaus Hildebrand finds it difficult to distinguish between the gigantic operations of the killing teams in Russia and the other aspects of the Final Solution. "In qualitative terms the executions by shooting were no different from the technically more efficient accomplishment of the 'physical final solution' by gassing, of which they were a prelude."<sup>36</sup> Second, historians have challenged Broszat's idea of locally initiated mass murders. Not only does it seem unlikely that the systematic killing of Jews from the Reich, for example, could have been undertaken without the Führer's agreement, there is also too little evidence of local initiatives with which to sustain this theory. As Eberhard Jäckel noted recently, there is rather "a great deal of evidence that some [local officials] were shocked or even appalled when the final solution came into effect. To be sure, they did not disagree with it. But they agreed only reluctantly, referring again to

an order given by Hitler. This is a strong indication that the idea did not originate with them."<sup>37</sup>

Third, Browning contends that the decision for European-wide mass murder was taken in the summer of 1941, in the euphoria of the first victories in the Barbarossa campaign, and not a few months later. He draws upon postwar evidence from Rudolf Höss, the commandant of Auschwitz, and Adolf Eichmann, from the start a key official in the bureaucracy of the Final Solution, to the effect that the Führer's mind was made up during the summer. This sense of timing differs notably from functionalists who conclude that the Final Solution arose from disappointment with the outcome of the fighting in Russia. Adam, for example, sees the Nazis depressed by the prospect of having to spend another winter with the Jews; the journalist Sebastian Haffner imagines, much less plausibly, that Hitler saw as early as the end of 1941 that the European war could not be won and that the other contest, "the war against the Jews," could at least be pursued to its final conclusion.<sup>38</sup>

Outsiders to these disputes may well suspect that some of the sharp edges of the controversy are wearing off and that there is more agreement among these historians than meets the eye. Opinion is widespread that there was some Hitlerian decision to initiate Europe-wide killing. The range of difference over timing extends across only a few months, with intentionalists positing a Führer order sometime in March 1941, with Browning and others opting for the summer, and with a few, such as Adam, looking toward the early autumn. What finally precipitated this decision, however, is likely to remain a mystery. Military historians tell us that, despite the extraordinary successes of the Wehrmacht in the first weeks of the Barbarossa campaign, the Germans found the going difficult as early as mid-July 1941. Although their forces advanced great distances and destroyed much of their opposition, they were surprised at the extent and efficacy of Soviet resistance and were greatly slowed by faulty intelligence, poor roads and bridges, and marshes. Chief of the army general staff Franz Halder portrayed an exasperated Führer after only six weeks of fighting, and it seems likely that by late August Hitler already knew that the war would continue well into 1942. This was a major setback, even though the Germans did not taste real defeat until December.<sup>39</sup> Whether euphoria or dis-

appointment prompted the decision is therefore difficult to say. On the other hand, the idea of Hitler breaking the logjam caused by an ill-defined policy rings true, given what we know of his leadership style. Students of Hitler's behavior in other areas have been struck by his preference for sudden, unexpected, spectacular coups. His was the method of the supreme gambler, "forever looking for short cuts."<sup>40</sup> For someone as ruthless and fanatical as Hitler, a decision for the Final Solution can well be imagined in the apocalyptic atmosphere of Barbarossa, the war to settle once and for all the fate of the thousand-year Reich.

"La guerre révolutionna la Révolution," French historian Marcel Reinhard once wrote about the revolutionary impact of the war of 1792 on the revolutionaries in Paris. So it has been observed that the war against the Soviet Union revolutionized the Third Reich, and it is not surprising that this campaign transformed Nazi Jewish policy as well. It is difficult to follow the process of political and ideological radicalization in detail, for this was a period of extensive fluidity—even for a regime that, as Karl Dietrich Bracher has said, "remained in a state of permanent improvisation."<sup>41</sup> Ian Kershaw observes that "the summer and autumn of 1941 were characterized by a high degree of confusion and contradictory interpretations of the aims of anti-Jewish policy by the Nazi authorities."<sup>42</sup> It seems useful, however, to understand Jewish policy in this period as evolving within a genocidal framework—extending beyond Jews to include the incurably ill, Soviet intelligentsia, prisoners of war, and others as well. In this fevered atmosphere, incredible as it may seem, an "order" to send millions of people to their deaths may have been no more than a "nod" from Hitler to one of his lieutenants.<sup>43</sup>