

Quiet in the Rear: The Wehrmacht and the *Weltanschauungskrieg* in the Occupation of  
the Soviet Union

by

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I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Historians widely acknowledge that the Second World War witnessed a substantial degree of ideology in the conflict itself. This paper will establish the degree to which the ideology of National Socialism shaped the Wehrmacht's decision-making process prior to and during their occupation of the Soviet Union, as well as the outcomes of those decisions. To this end, those in positions of authority in the military – including Hitler himself, the OKW, the OKH and various subordinate commanders – will be examined to determine how National Socialist tenets shaped their plans and efforts to quell and exploit the occupied Soviet Union.

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This work is dedicated to my grandfather, Jack Harvey, whom I never met, but whose service in the RCAF in the Second World War first inspired me to engage in the serious study of history.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- HSSPF – *Hoher SS- und Polizei Führer* (Higher SS and Police Leader) – SS commanders designated to command SS and police forces behind the army groups in the Soviet Union
- NSDAP – *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (National Socialist German Workers' Party) – formal German name of the Nazi party
- NSFO – *Nationalsozialistischer Führungsoffiziere* (National Socialist Leadership Officers) – Wehrmacht Nazi ideological officers established in late 1943
- OKW – *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* – Wehrmacht high command
- OKH – *Oberkommando des Heeres* – Army high command
- OMi – *Ostministerium* – Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories led by Alfred Rosenberg
- RSHA – *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (Reich Security Main Office) – headquarter agency for Himmler in his dual capacities as head of the SS and chief of German police
- SS – *Schutzstaffel* – paramilitary arm of the Nazi party, commanded by Heinrich Himmler
- WiStab Ost – *Wirtschaftsstab Ost* – Economic planning agency for the occupied Soviet Union operated by Four Year Plan and Wehrmacht officials

## INTRODUCTION

Few events have done so much to shape the twenty-first century world as the Second World War, still relatively recent in the context of historical events. By extension, the conflict between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union, where much of the fiercest and bloodiest fighting of the entire war took place, did much to shape the course of history. It was there, in Eastern Europe, that the Wehrmacht – the vast and powerful armed forces of Nazi Germany – was broken. From the protracted siege of Leningrad, to the brutal urban battle in Stalingrad, to colossal armoured battles such as took place in Operation “Citadel”, along with hundreds of other engagements, three years of sustained combat finally sent the Germans definitely reeling back towards their own lands. The defeat of Nazi Germany, however, was paid for with incomprehensible amounts of death and destruction. Recent estimates of the death toll on the Soviet side – civilian and military – put the total between 25,000,000 and 30,000,000, to say nothing of those injured or otherwise affected. In exchange, some 80% of the Wehrmacht’s approximately 13,500,000 total casualties were inflicted in the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> Seen from this perspective, it becomes apparent that the “Eastern Front” or the “Great Patriotic War”, as it is known in the countries of the former Soviet Union, really was the decisive theatre during the Second World War.

Unfortunately, due perhaps to either postwar politics or a focus on the experiences of their respective countries, the other Allied nations, particularly in the West, have largely overlooked the impact and importance of what occurred there. Interest in the West regarding the Soviet Union’s war against Nazi Germany was for decades predominantly academic in nature,

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<sup>1</sup> David M. Glantz and Jonathan M. House, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler*, 2nd ed. (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2015), 356–59. Evan Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East: The Nazi-Soviet War 1941–1945*, 2nd ed. (London, UK / New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 389–91.

and even then often overshadowed by other events in the Second World War. One fact remains true regarding the Second World War, however: there is no shortage of material or topics to study. In recent years more accessible content, in both academia and broader culture, has become available, and it appears that awareness of the scale and severity of what transpired on the Eastern Front is on the rise. This holds true for the focus of this paper: specifically, the war behind the German front line. Yet, in spite of growing interest and understanding of the conflict as a whole, the war between the German occupation and partisans remains understudied and is often mired in misunderstanding and latent politics. In this regard, the chronological proximity of the actual events to today adds an additional context for those studying them, of which they must be aware. Nevertheless, this aspect of the conflict deserves greater exposure and clarification in order to better understand what occurred there.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the manner in which the Wehrmacht fought on the Eastern Front, in particular in the rear areas. In other theatres of the Second World War the Wehrmacht fought in a way that hardly differed from that of its opponents, but on the Eastern Front German plans, actions and even basic precepts, such as the humane treatment of prisoners, were altered. This seems to have primarily been the case as a result of the *Weltanschauung* (worldview) of National Socialism. Although politics and the outlook of the ruling party are not always determinative for the attitudes and actions of armed forces, in the case of the Wehrmacht and National Socialism, they were. In the case of the relationship between the German people and National Socialism, there was real and significant adherence amongst the populace to the ideology offered by this political party, including in the armed forces. This included a renewal of 1914-era patriotic unity, a sense of a new national direction, and the establishment of the much-

desired *Volksgemeinschaft* (“people’s community”).<sup>2</sup> Forged amidst the economic and political uncertainty that dominated the German Weimar Republic during the interwar period, this relationship found the two agreeing upon the need to restore Germany as a great power, via the revival of militaristic nationalism and the combating of left-wing radicals. With the charismatic leader of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP), Adolf Hitler, pushing rearmament at breakneck pace following his election in 1933, the Wehrmacht quickly became further entangled with the darker aspects of National Socialist ideology. This included the 1934 revision of the oath taken by German soldiers to reflect this new relationship. Rather than swearing loyalty to the German nation and its constitution, soldiers instead pledged themselves to the person of Adolf Hitler as leader of Germany. This entirely altered the links between the leader of Germany and the military. The outcome of this was the abandonment by the Wehrmacht of its long-held political neutrality in favour of the *Weltanschauungskrieg* concept. Best described as the belief in a war between worldviews, this concept, in tandem with Hitler’s ideology, were applied particularly with regard to the Soviet Union.

This existentialist framework, applied to a war long before it had begun or even been planned, set the stage for a brutal struggle which was further exacerbated by the desire to secure smooth logistics in occupied areas. As old as warfare itself, this concept was defined a month prior to the invasion of the Soviet Union as “combat in the front, quiet in the rear.”<sup>3</sup> The definition of what “quiet” meant, however, was open to interpretation. Much has been made of the fact that the German Army had a long tradition of harsh reactions to resistance from civilians, perceived or real, dating at least from the Franco-Prussian War. The extent to which this tradition

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich* (Cambridge, MA / London, UK: Harvard University Press, 2008), 24-39.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Felix Römer, "The Wehrmacht in the War of Ideologies: The Army and Hitler's Criminal Orders on the Eastern Front," in *Nazi Policy on the Eastern Front, 1941: Total War, Genocide, and Radicalization*, eds. Alex J. Kay, Jeff Rutherford, and David Stahel (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2012), 77.

informed and shaped the Wehrmacht's occupation in the Soviet Union is not entirely clear. What is apparent is the fact that an existential ruthlessness planned for the front line combat there was purposefully extended to the rear. The plans for the conflict with the Soviet Union, specifically regarding the policies of occupation and counterinsurgency, were a direct outcome of the ideology of National Socialism as formulated by Hitler and accepted by the Wehrmacht. This ideology played a key role in encouraging the suppression of all resistance by any means, including the most extreme violence, undermining attempts to secure the rear via a more rational and balanced approach, the end result being that the Wehrmacht failed to subdue the populace. Beliefs, after all, have significance and the ideology of National Socialism must not be taken lightly for its role in shaping how the Wehrmacht fought its war in the Soviet Union.<sup>4</sup>

While the purpose of this research is to examine the Wehrmacht's planning for and responses to resistance experienced behind the front line, the scope extends beyond that at times. This stems primarily from the fact that counterinsurgency, as it is properly understood, also encompasses more than merely a military response. As an insurgency is best defined as the attempt to undermine political, social and economic governmental control of a given area via an organized effort, an effective counterinsurgency policy necessarily seeks to counteract such efforts through a broad campaign to maintain control in all areas. The central reason for this expansive type of conflict is based on the fact that insurgencies primarily affect the civilian population. This general understanding of insurgent-style warfare was also the case with regards to the occupation of the Soviet Union during the Second World War. While not effective in the sense of achieving victory, the German counterinsurgency there did attempt to utilize methods to reduce resistance that went beyond merely brute force. While the emphasis remains on the

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<sup>4</sup> Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich*, 15.

Wehrmacht's efforts to counteract the partisans, it is vital to the framework of this study that such an examination includes peripheral efforts that had a direct influence on the insurgency and counterinsurgency. To that end, this paper will examine the Wehrmacht's counterinsurgency, and how they operated in the framework of the broader occupation policy. Furthermore, it is vital to keep in mind when discussing this topic that counterinsurgencies, just like broader wars, are often covered in broad strokes, a fact that tends to ignore individual agency. All actors, from German soldiers to Soviet partisans and the civilians caught in the middle experienced this conflict in a myriad of ways and responded in a correspondingly varied number of ways. It is thus best to conclude that these issues are not black and white: instead they are grey at best.

The literature on Germany's war with the Soviet Union is growing, as is the understanding of the impact of ideology in the context of the Second World War. There is, however, little writing on ideology in the occupation. The question that this paper attempts to answer is this: to what extent did the ideology of National Socialism, as institutionalized in the Wehrmacht in the months leading up to the invasion, shape the Wehrmacht's interactions with the Soviet civilian populace, as well as other occupation authorities? This remains an important area of study, particularly in the West, where such research is still lacking. In discussing this topic, however, it is vital to remember that establishing uniform culpability or ideological adherence for all, or even most soldiers of the Wehrmacht remains a difficult task at best. As such, this study investigates institutional policy and practice, rather than debating such general issues. The millions of soldiers that served in the Wehrmacht through the Second World War experienced the conflict and National Socialism in various ways that do not make for easy or reasonable generalizations. Establishing the historiographical and methodological context of this research is the goal of Chapter One. Chapter Two will then clarify what exactly National

Socialism's *Weltanschauung* was, and what it meant for a potential conflict with the Soviet Union. An examination of the planning phase of the invasion – lasting from mid-1940 to June 1941 – will follow in Chapter Three. Chapter Four will focus on the first six months of the invasion, and discuss both the impact of front line combat in shaping the rear, as well as the early occupation efforts of the Wehrmacht. Finally, Chapter Five will outline the occupation and counterinsurgency between 1942 and mid-1944 to highlight the growth and continued influence of ideology in the Wehrmacht's efforts.

## CHAPTER ONE: HISTORIOGRAPHY AND METHODOLOGY

### *The “Clean” Wehrmacht*

The conflict between Germany and the Soviet Union represents a gargantuan piece of human history and suffering. The scale, severity and sheer struggle for survival on the Eastern Front continues to fascinate both historians and the broader public. This interest is in part fuelled by the nature of this war, which was distinctive, framing the intensity that makes this particular conflict so interesting. One of the best examples of this interest is seen in the massive series, entitled *Germany and the Second World War*, by the Bundeswehr’s history office. Published starting in 1979 and first translated in 1990, the thirteen-volume work involves many of Germany’s premier experts and examines the entirety of the Second World War, a substantial portion of which is devoted to Germany’s war with the Soviet Union. This understanding of the singular nature of the war was also a primary topic at issue during the trials that immediately followed the end of the war, particularly the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, as well as the subsequent Nuremberg Military Tribunal. These trials focused on the practical results of the ideology of National Socialism, specifically the charges of aggressive war, genocide and other crimes against humanity. As a result, the Wehrmacht was a key topic throughout the trials. This is indicated by the fact that four of those twenty-four indicted at the Nuremberg Military Tribunal were career Wehrmacht officers.<sup>5</sup> The inclusion of the German military in this trial sparked the beginning of a discussion regarding the role of the Wehrmacht in the National Socialist state.

The more information came out concerning the actions of the Third Reich both prior to and during the Second World War – the source often these very trials – the harder veterans of the

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<sup>5</sup> Specifically, Admiral Erich Raeder, Admiral Karl Dönitz, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel and General Alfred Jodl.

Wehrmacht attempted to separate and distinguish themselves from the Nazis. This is exemplified in the numerous memoirs, diaries and books written and published by these veterans, most notably by those in positions of power. Amongst the most well-known are those of the likes of General Heinz Guderian, General Walter Warlimont and Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel. In addition, prominent war diaries, such as those of General Franz Halder and Field Marshal Fedor von Bock provided further material to constructing postwar narratives.<sup>6</sup> Together, these works form the foundation of the narrative of separate and honourable action that former members of the Wehrmacht attempted to create for it. In this effort, they attempted to distance themselves from the close relationship developed between the person of Adolf Hitler and the Wehrmacht as an institution. It was in this literature that the concept known as the “clean” Wehrmacht first emerged. For example, Guderian at the end of his recollections asserts that soldiers (himself included) are fighters, not policy makers, further arguing that aggressive war was pushed on the military by politicians.<sup>7</sup> Warlimont, a high-ranking officer at the OKW, similarly introduced his book by stating that the responsibility lay with Hitler and his top commanders, conveniently ignoring the fact that many would consider Warlimont himself to be one of those functionaries within the Wehrmacht.<sup>8</sup> Even in death, Hitler’s shadow proved powerful, as well as a convenient scapegoat upon whom all sins could be placed.

It has been noted by scholars that there was substantial acceptance of the notion of the “clean” Wehrmacht among early works on the topic of the German military’s interactions with

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<sup>6</sup> Heinz Guderian, *Panzer Leader* trans. Constantine Fitzgibbon (1952 by Michael Joseph Ltd. Reprint, London, UK: Futura Publications, 1977). Walter Warlimont, *Inside Hitler’s Headquarters, 1939-45* trans. R. H. Barry (1964. Reprint, New York, NY: F. A. Praeger, 1966). Klaus Gerbet, ed., *Generalfeldmarschall Fedor von Bock: The War Diary, 1939-1945* trans. David Johnston (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Pub, 1996). Franz Halder, *The Halder Diaries: The Private War Journals of Colonel General Franz Halder* 2 vols. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press / Dunn Loring, VA: TNDupuy Associates, 1976). Walter Gorlitz, ed., *The Memoirs of Field-Marshall Keitel* trans. David Irving (New York, NY: Stein and Day, 1966).

<sup>7</sup> Guderian, *Panzer Leader*, 463.

<sup>8</sup> Warlimont, *Inside Hitler’s Headquarters, 1939-45*, ix.

National Socialism. Some maintain that this was intended to help project and protect an image of a rehabilitated Germany.<sup>9</sup> However, by the 1960s this trend was being challenged by such historians as Klaus-Jürgen Müller, who argued that the Wehrmacht willingly submitted to the increasing control of Hitler and the Nazis.<sup>10</sup> A similar argument was made in other works, for example in *Anatomy of the SS State* by Helmut Krausnick, Hans Buchheim, Martin Broszat and Hans-Adolf Jacobsen. Composed to provide evidence for a trial of SS men in Germany, this book apportioned blame to the Wehrmacht, especially against the Soviet Union, where the military showed itself willing to submit to ideology and fight for it.<sup>11</sup> This has continued in more contemporary writing, for example with Omer Bartov, whose two works on the subject have strongly emphasized the impact of ideology on the Wehrmacht, although his focus is on front-line units.<sup>12</sup> Other works, such as those of Isabel Hull and John Horne have highlighted examples of German brutality against civilians predating the Second World War, specifically examining how the organization formalized treatment of civilians in colonial experiences, as well as the First World War. Their research indicates that the “military culture” of the German Army had long been based in wanton violence against civilians under its control and a general disregard for international conventions on the topic, a culture that the Wehrmacht inherited.<sup>13</sup> In a similar vein, books by Alexander Rossino and Raffael Scheck examine the campaigns conducted by the

<sup>9</sup> Theo J. Schulte, *The German Army and Nazi Policies in Occupied Russia* (Oxford, UK: Berg Publishers / New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 3–7. Fritzsch, *Life and Death in the Third Reich*, 305–6.

<sup>10</sup> For example, see a later translated and abbreviated version of Müller’s work: Klaus-Jürgen Müller, *The Army, Politics, and Society in Germany, 1933–45: Studies in the Army’s Relation to Nazism* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1987).

<sup>11</sup> Helmut Krausnick, Hans Buchheim, Martin Broszat and Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, *Anatomy of the SS State* trans. Richard Barry, Marian Jackson and Dorothy Long (New York, NY: Walker and Company, 1968).

<sup>12</sup> Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941–45: German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare*, 2nd ed. (Hounds-mills, UK / New York, NY: Palgrave in association with St. Antony’s College, 2001). Bartov, *Hitler’s Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991). This same framework has been followed by other books, including Jeff Rutherford, *Combat and Genocide on the Eastern Front: The German Infantry’s War, 1941–1944* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>13</sup> Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005). John Horne, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

Wehrmacht under National Socialism, highlighting the reality that the outbreak of brutality did not suddenly begin in the Soviet Union, but occurred first in Poland and France, respectively.<sup>14</sup>

### *Ideology and Social History: A Bottom-Up View*

Although a contentious issue in the decades immediately after the Second World War, the notion that ideology influenced the *Landsers* (the general infantry soldiers of the Wehrmacht) is no longer widely disputed. Rather, it is today a question of degree.<sup>15</sup> In order to help clarify this question, there exists a plethora of documents detailing the views and experiences of many ordinary soldiers who served in the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front, providing a rich source base with which to study the topic.<sup>16</sup> This has conveniently intersected with the rise of social history, which, in the context of military history, emphasizes the role of the average person on the front line. Such studies are important for realizing that an ideological mindset and attitude were more common than the rarities they have been sometimes construed to be. The convergence of this perspective with the counterinsurgency in the Soviet Union revolves around primary groups, of which military units around the world are comprised. These primary groups represent the chief contact point for the average soldier with others around them, and it is these groups that form the social bonds through which soldiers are inducted into a particular military culture. On this topic, historians such as Bartov argue that these groups were broken down by the attrition sustained on the Eastern Front, and that the Wehrmacht resorted to ideology to maintain cohesion, which in turn led to brutalization.

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<sup>14</sup> Alexander B. Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland: Blitzkrieg, Ideology, and Atrocity* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003). Raffael Scheck, *Hitler's African Victims: The German Army Massacres of Black French Soldiers in 1940* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Stephen G. Fritz, *Frontsoldaten: The German Soldier in World War II* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1995). Wolfram Wette, *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality* trans. Deborah Lucas Schneider (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941-45*. Bartov, *Hitler's Army*.

<sup>16</sup> For example, Horst Fuchs Richardson, ed. and trans., *Sieg Heil!: War Letters of Tank Gunner Karl Fuchs, 1937-1941* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1987) and H. C. Robbins Landon and Sebastian Leitner, eds., *Diary of a German Soldier* trans. H. C. Robbins Landon (London, UK: Faber and Faber, 1963).

This emphasis on cohesion was in large part a response to the early research done by Shils and Janowitz on this topic conducted shortly after the end of the war. Based on their study, they concluded that the veteran cores of these groups were the fundamental source of the Wehrmacht's cohesion and fighting power throughout the war. Their research, however, does not focus on the role of ideology within this context.<sup>17</sup> Arguing that these groups were strained rather than broken, this research has been supported more recently, for example, by Christoph Rass. Rass, however, has argued that in addition to socializing newer soldiers into combat, these cores also had an ideological impact as a result of the brutality of the conflict and the growing influence of National Socialist ideology within the Wehrmacht.<sup>18</sup> The result of this was that the encouragement of violence, already the primary purpose of military socialization, became combined with ruthlessness. This discussion, while not the topic of this paper, forms a significant part of the research in this area. Focusing almost exclusively on the social historical perspective of the average soldier's experience, there is no clear consensus on this topic. Regardless, it does appear that ideology played a role in shaping the military culture of the Wehrmacht during this time, affecting *Landsers* at the tip of the spear right up to the highest-ranking commanders.

### *Occupation and Counterinsurgency*

On the topic of the Wehrmacht in the Soviet Union, there is a vast and growing historiography. Alexander Dallin's *German Rule in Russia* remains a cornerstone work on the topic. His emphasis, however, is the administration of the occupied territories; he examines the Wehrmacht as only one of many power players, and he only briefly discusses the influence of

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<sup>17</sup> See their contribution in Lerner's volume. Edward A. Shils and Morris Janowitz, "Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht," in *Propaganda in War and Crisis*, ed. Daniel Lerner (George W. Stewart Inc., 1951. Reprint, New York, NY: Arno Press, 1972).

<sup>18</sup> Christoph Rass, "The Social Profile of the German Army's Combat Units, 1939-1945," in Ralf Blank, Jörg Echternkamp, Karola Fings, Jürgen Förster, Winfried Heinemann, Tobias Jersak, Armin Nolzen and Christoph Rass, *German Wartime Society, 1939-1945*, Germany and the Second World War, vol. 9 pt. 1 trans. Derry Cook-Radmore, Ewald Osers, Barry Smerin and Barbara Wilson (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 671-770.

ideology.<sup>19</sup> Another early work, published shortly after Dallin's, came from British historian Gerald Reitlinger. Focusing more on the Wehrmacht's role in the occupation as well as the ideological impact, Reitlinger was nevertheless dismissive of Hitler and his ideology, describing his pronounced anti-Slavism as "characteristically Austrian and lower middle class at that."<sup>20</sup> Another work, written by Matthew Cooper and published in 1979, also studied the topic of the German occupation and counterinsurgency from the perspective of ideology, suggesting that its influence worsened during the partisan war.<sup>21</sup> His examination of this topic is reflected in comparable studies, such as John A. Armstrong's edited compilation on the topic.<sup>22</sup> As a relatively small part of the oft-neglected Eastern Front over previous decades, the partisan war has been increasingly acknowledged as forming a key component of the Second World War.

In the past three decades, there has been a spate of good scholarship on the topic of the German occupation and counterinsurgency in the Soviet Union. Among the first in this period was Timothy Patrick Mulligan's *The Politics of Illusion and Empire*. Although he examined the topic from the perspective of administration, with a particular emphasis on the realities and effect of reform, Mulligan's work does examine this perspective with regards to the counterinsurgency.<sup>23</sup> He does note that many of the "reforms," particularly with regard to the Wehrmacht, were framed by ideology. As a result, Mulligan argues, their impression was often counterproductive, citing for example the November 11, 1942 counterinsurgency directive that

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<sup>19</sup> Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941-1945: A Study of Occupation Policies*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981).

<sup>20</sup> Gerald Reitlinger, *The House Built on Sand: the Conflict of German Policy in Russia, 1939-1945* (New York, NY: Viking Press, 1960), 10, 27.

<sup>21</sup> Matthew Cooper, *The Phantom War: The German Struggle against Soviet Partisans, 1941-1944* (London, UK: Macdonald and Jane's Publisher, 1979).

<sup>22</sup> John A. Armstrong, ed., *Soviet Partisans in World War II* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964).

<sup>23</sup> Timothy Patrick Mulligan, *The Politics of Illusion and Empire: German Occupation Policy in the Soviet Union, 1942-1943* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1988).

advocated for both leniency and brutality.<sup>24</sup> The next and – aside from Dallin’s book – most important study of the Wehrmacht occupation came from Theo J. Schulte. His book is among the first to focus specifically on the military’s role in the rear areas. Looking in detail at two rear area commands in Army Group Center from an operational perspective, Schulte argues that the forces designated for the task of establishing quiet in the rear were inadequate in both quality and quantity.<sup>25</sup> Although he does examine the influence that ideology had on the Wehrmacht, he suggests that it was not the primary motivator, but rather that the military was willingly used as a tool of ideology.<sup>26</sup>

More recently, three works have added further detail in specific studies of the German counterinsurgency. The first, by Ben Shepherd, argues in similar veins to Schulte’s study, although it deviates notably on the issue of ideological impact. This book examines the Wehrmacht’s entanglement with National Socialism from the viewpoint of a security division in the Soviet Union. Shepherd suggests that this interaction was largely willing from the military perspective, based on what the Wehrmacht hoped to gain via the Nazis. This melding radicalized the conduct of the war against the Soviet Union. Shepherd contextualizes this situation with the realities experienced in the occupation, arguing that the counterinsurgency was made ineffective by the weakness of the Wehrmacht efforts in the rear and the ruthlessness stemming from the ideology.<sup>27</sup> Alexander Hill examines partisan war from within the context of the experience of Army Group North. He suggests that while harsh German policies did in fact initially limit the populace’s interaction with the partisans, this ultimately resulted in alienation and defeat in the

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<sup>24</sup> Mulligan, *The Politics of Illusion and Empire*, 139–40.

<sup>25</sup> Schulte, *The German Army and Nazi Policies in Occupied Russia*.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 149–50.

<sup>27</sup> Ben Shepherd, *War in the Wild East: The German Army and Soviet Partisans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

rear areas.<sup>28</sup> The last work in this category, written by Philip Blood, examines the *Bandenbekämpfung* (bandit fight) and the expansion of the SS's role in the counterinsurgency.<sup>29</sup>

In this study, the Wehrmacht is only studied as a peripheral ally to the SS in this fight. From these sources it is apparent that the partisan war in the Soviet Union is increasingly becoming a mainstream topic of research. This recent growth in the literature has been supported by numerous articles by various historians, many compiled in anthologies.<sup>30</sup>

### *Methodology*

This paper is written as a top-down study for two main reasons. First of all, this is because available source material is more conducive to such a format. Diaries and journals of lower-ranking soldiers recording their experiences are enlightening, but they are limited in their scope and perspective, as well as the quantity available. This does not lend itself well to the summative narrative constructed in this paper. For such a task, strategic-level and command-centric documents offer a better view of events as a whole. This manifests itself primarily in this paper as a reliance on documents gleaned from the Nuremberg trials. Focusing in part, as they were, on the Wehrmacht's role in Nazi Germany, strong evidentiary support can be found there for the planning and actions against the Soviet Union by the military, including occupation efforts. This compilation of documentary evidence enables one to perceive and communicate a clearer picture of the events and mindsets behind actions taken. It does not, however, offer a

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<sup>28</sup> Alexander Hill, *The War behind the Eastern Front: The Soviet Partisan Movement in North-West Russia, 1941-1944* (London, UK / New York, NY: Frank Cass, 2005).

<sup>29</sup> Philip W. Blood, *Hitler's Bandit Hunters: The SS and the Nazi Occupation of Europe* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2006).

<sup>30</sup> For example, see Bernd Wegner, ed., *From Peace to War: Germany, Soviet Russia and the World, 1939-1941* (Providence, RI / Oxford, UK: Berghahn Books, 1997). Heer and Naumann, eds., *War of Extermination*. Ulrich Herbert, ed., *National Socialist Extermination Policies: Contemporary German Perspectives and Controversies* (2000. Reprint, New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2004). Ben Shepherd and Juliette Pattinson, eds., *War in a Twilight World: Partisan and Anti-Partisan Warfare in Eastern Europe, 1939-45* (Hounds Mills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). Kay, Rutherford, and Stahel, eds., *Nazi Policy on the Eastern Front, 1941*.

definitive and universal picture of the beliefs and mindsets of individual soldiers, and this is not the intended purpose of this research. These documents have been supplemented, where possible, by additional primary source material from other areas and prior secondary research conducted by others on this topic.

The second and more important reason for the adoption of this perspective is the fact that in the context of a military hierarchy, where orders and plans originate in the upper echelons and are sent down, an understanding of the decision-making command levels is vital. This was even more so the case within the German context, stemming from the nature of the prewar relationship between the Wehrmacht and the National Socialist state as headed by Hitler. This relationship was central in shaping the context of subsequent actions. Hitler's role as head of both the state and army were heavily intertwined with each other. This was made more distinctive by the nature of his style of rule, explained by one prominent historian as "charismatic" leadership, wherein Hitler remained as leader, but shifted responsibility onto subordinates.<sup>31</sup> This perspective is helpful in clarifying the roles of not just Hitler, but also those around him. While Hitler himself remains as a secondary focus in this paper, intended as it is to examine the acts and actions of his subordinates, this notion of agency by all parties provides an important framework. Hitler acted, and remained in overall control, but underlings also had responsibilities and decision-making authority. Amidst rearmament in the 1930s, Hitler was able to gain more direct control of the Wehrmacht via the establishment of the OKW, which replaced the Ministry

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<sup>31</sup> Ian Kershaw, *The "Hitler Myth": Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1987). Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889-1936: Hubris* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 1999). Kershaw, *Hitler, 1936-45: Nemesis* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2001). Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, 4th ed. (London, UK: Hodder Arnold / New York, NY: Copublished in the USA by Oxford University Press, 2000). Kershaw was not the first to propagate this theory either. See two other noted functionalists: Martin Broszat, *The Hitler State: The Foundation and Development of the Internal Structure of the Third Reich* trans. John W. Hiden (London, UK / New York, NY: Longman, 1981). Hans Mommsen, *From Weimar to Auschwitz* trans. Philip O'Connor (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

of Defense and provided Hitler a mouthpiece to issue orders. With the ideological and existentialist framework of the war against the Soviet Union, Hitler's perspective, mostly a compilation of pre-existing ideas, provides a necessary foundation to understanding the orders and ensuing actions in the Soviet Union.

## CHAPTER TWO: HITLER AND NATIONAL SOCIALIST IDEOLOGY

### *National Socialism and the Soviet Union*

As the Red Army stormed Berlin in April 1945 in the final days of the Third Reich, Hitler dictated his final political testament, an epilogue to both his leadership of Germany and the ideology that drove him. In the face of this ultimate defeat, Hitler continued to propagate his ideology from an underground bunker. Recorded the day before he committed suicide, his testimony placed blame for the war squarely on “international Jewry”. He was, however, confident enough to claim that inevitably hatred would again rise out of the ruins of Germany towards those who were truly responsible: Jewry and “its helpers.”<sup>32</sup> It is worth noting that while this testimony mentions both England and the USA, nothing is said of the Soviet Union, the very country whose military was primarily responsible for breaking the Wehrmacht in the Second World War and ultimately capturing Berlin. Despite this lack of acknowledgement, it was never a doubt in Hitler’s mind that the Soviet Union was the ultimate racial antithesis of Aryan Germany. Ruled, he alleged, by Jews – who doubled as the Bolsheviks in Hitler’s view – and populated by primitive Slavs, the Soviet Union was among the greatest of “accomplices” of International Jewry. In the conclusion of his testimony Hitler calls the German nation to continue the race war, declaring “I charge the leaders of the nation and those under them to scrupulous observance of the laws of race and to merciless opposition to the universal poisoner of all peoples, international Jewry.”<sup>33</sup> To Hitler, conflict was inevitable as long as there existed different races, and in his *Weltanschauung* this was nowhere truer than in the relationship between the Soviet Union and Germany.

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<sup>32</sup> *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression* (hereafter NCA) (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1946), 6:260–61. PS-3569.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

Hitler's mindset on this topic is most apparent in his "Barbarossa" Proclamation. Issued the day that Germany's massive invasion of the Soviet Union began, Hitler therein clarified the real purpose of the attack:

National Socialists!

Probably all of you felt this step was bitter and difficult for me. Never has the German Volk harbored feelings of animosity against the peoples of Russia. Alas, for over two decades, the Jewish-Bolshevik rulers have labored from Moscow to set afire not only Germany, but also all of Europe. Never has Germany attempted to carry its National Socialist ideology into Russia. However, the Jewish-Bolshevik rulers in Moscow have constantly undertaken to force their rule on our and other European peoples, and not merely ideologically, but especially in terms of military force and power. In all countries, the consequences of the activities of this regime were chaos, misery, and famine ... The mission of this front, therefore, is no longer the protection of individual countries, but the securing of Europe and, hence, the salvation of all.<sup>34</sup>

Justified as a pre-emptory defensive action against the inherently aggressive and destructive Jew-run Soviet Union for the good of all of Europe, the invasion was framed as an existentialist conflict between two dichotomous worldviews. A zero-sum struggle such as this was bound to be brutal and fought outside of the rules of war; survival supersedes legal niceties. This understanding of the conflict against the Soviet Union as one for existence itself stems from a Social Darwinist framework of race, struggle and survival that was at the very heart of National Socialism, the ideology formulated and shaped primarily by Hitler during the interwar period. These ideas had been clearly expressed long before the Second World War began, and evidently they remained true at the very least to Hitler himself until the last days of the Third Reich. While it is possible to write off Hitler's ideas as simply racist and power-hungry, a more nuanced understanding is vital in order to contextualize the beliefs and subsequent actions of the Third Reich and the Wehrmacht in their war against the Soviet Union. After all, as one scholar aptly

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<sup>34</sup> Max Domarus, ed., *Hitler: Speeches and Proclamations, 1932-1945; The Chronicle of a Dictatorship* (London : I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd Publishers, 1990) 4:2445-51, here 2446, 2451.

put it, “War was the genesis and aim of Nazi actions.”<sup>35</sup> Hitler’s own writings can thus illuminate the roots of German occupation policies.

### *Race and Purity*

Hitler’s primary writing, *Mein Kampf*, explains his political views. One of the most important of these was his perception of race struggle and the supremacy of the Aryans. National Socialism, employing what one scholar describes as an “embattled vision of history,” views all human existence as being fundamentally based in struggle. The logical solution was to make the German people “unassailable.”<sup>36</sup> For Hitler, race was a simple matter of the superiority of the Aryan, to whom he attributed “all the human culture, all the results of art, science, and technology.”<sup>37</sup> Based on this understanding of race, Hitler defines three separate racial categories: those that create culture, those that bear culture and those that destroy culture. In this way, Hitler establishes the basis of his understanding of race and the resultant hierarchy. Placing only Aryans in the first and most important category, Hitler advances his argument for the preservation of these culture-creators over all others.<sup>38</sup> The only way to protect the race, and thus human culture, was actually two-fold: first, to maintain racial purity by avoiding “blood poisoning”, and second by fighting in “this world of eternal struggle.”<sup>39</sup> Based on that interpretation, the only way to ensure the survival of human culture was to ensure racial cleanliness and victory in struggle. Thus, the primary goal of National Socialism was to revive the national spirit, thereby making Germany stronger and more united in their common cause of sustaining the Aryan race in the coming conflict.<sup>40</sup> On this understanding, politics ultimately

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<sup>35</sup> Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich*, 155.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 4-6.

<sup>37</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1943), 290.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 331–34.

becomes the fight for race preservation “so that life in the highest sense is served.”<sup>41</sup> As Aryans were the highest-value race on account of their singular culture-creating capabilities, National Socialism is predicated on the concept of “ends-justify-the-means” morality: whatever is useful for the survival of the race is moral. The intention here was to preserve the Aryan race at all costs, and beyond that to make the nation powerful. “Germany,” Hitler declared, “will either be a world power or there will be no Germany.”<sup>42</sup> An existentialist dichotomy of race had thus been created.

### *The Jews*

Nowhere was such racial protection more evident than in Hitler’s perception of the Jews. He begrudgingly acknowledged that “The mightiest counterpart to the Aryan is represented by the Jew.”<sup>43</sup> The Jewish race was here perceived as being antithetical to the Aryan: where the latter created life and culture, the former destroyed. The Jewish capacity and willingness to corrupt others socially, economically and racially was innate, on Hitler’s view.<sup>44</sup> The greatest manifestation of this corruption was in their invention of Marxism, understood by Hitler as the harnessing of the worker to fight for the future of the Jewish people.<sup>45</sup> Utilizing the cover of communal humanism, Marxism was seen by Hitler as fundamentally serving the Jewish attempt at world domination and the destruction of culture. The real impact of this ideology was to reject individuality and personality via the creation of a global egalitarian community, and thereby shatter the concept of race. The result, the “bastardization” of race, enabled Jews to rule for “he will forever be master over the bastards and bastards alone.”<sup>46</sup> The threat presented by the Jewish

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<sup>41</sup> Hitler, *Hitler’s Secret Book* trans. Salvator Attanasio (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1961), 11.

<sup>42</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 654.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 300.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 308–14.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 319. See further, 243–46, 323, 600.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 320, 325.

race, then, had two central and interconnected thrusts: racial corruption, and social and economic discord. These, Hitler asserted, could both be found embodied in their Marxist ideology.

In his writings, Hitler indicates that this deceptive nature was at the heart of the real threat represented by this Jewish-Marxist conglomerate, stating that

Only a knowledge of the Jews provides the key with which to comprehend the inner, and consequently real, aims of Social Democracy.

The erroneous conceptions of the aim and meaning of this party fall from our eyes like veils, once we come to know this people and from the fog and mist of social phrases rises the leering grimace of Marxism.<sup>47</sup>

It is generally accepted that Hitler borrowed much of his ideology from the prominent *Völkisch* concept that advocated for racial purity, pan-German unity, anti-Semitism and anti-Marxism.<sup>48</sup> Even his conflation of Marxism with Jews was not exclusive or original. However, it was convenient to scapegoat the Jews and to lump left-wing politicians together with them. Thus, Hitler's conception of Jews as a "pestilence," combined with the revolutionary and disruptive nature of Marxism, had a profound effect.<sup>49</sup> It served to create a potent mixture of fear and hatred that would wield substantial influence in Hitler's future policy decisions. Later on, the evidence he offers to justify this viewpoint is the experience of Germany in the First World War. Not only had the Jews shirked front line duty in favour of war profiteering – a bad enough crime on its own – but the Jewish-led Marxists had also disrupted and then taken control of the home front. It was thus the Jewish-Marxist conspiracy that humiliated Germany and crippled the nation in Hitler's eyes, bringing defeat on Germany from within.<sup>50</sup> Taking this notion to its logical extreme Hitler suggests that the gassing of twelve to fifteen thousand "Hebrew corrupters" prior

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<sup>47</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 51.

<sup>48</sup> Brigitte Hamann, "Hitler and Vienna: The truth about his Formative Years," in *The Third Reich between Vision and Reality New Perspectives on German History, 1918-1945*, ed. Hans Mommsen (Oxford, UK / New York, NY: Berg, 2001), 23-24.

<sup>49</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 57–65.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 193–205.

to and during the war would have saved the war effort and meant the loss of millions of Germans was not in vain.<sup>51</sup> Reflecting on this, he concludes that “There is no making pacts with Jews; there can only be the hard: either — or.”<sup>52</sup> Perceiving conflict as the most effective method for purifying and securing race, Hitler was adamant that there was no room for equivocation with lesser races, particularly in this case the Jews.

Hitler viewed the Jew as the ultimate enemy of Germany; furthermore, citing the Jewish impulse to world conquest, he suggests that “As often in history, Germany is the great pivot in the mighty struggle. If our people and our state become the victim of these bloodthirsty and avaricious Jewish tyrants of nations, the whole earth will sink into the snares of this octopus; if Germany frees herself from this embrace, this greatest of dangers to nations may be regarded as broken for the whole world.”<sup>53</sup> Responsibility for the continuation of culture and humanity itself, rather than enslavement and racial debasement, was placed squarely on Germany. It was apparent that the war would truly begin with Germany, as the primary hub of the Aryan race. This further implied that resistance to the Jews and Marxism would culminate in a war for world domination and the victory of one race. This automatically made the Soviet Union – the first state in which Jewish-Marxism was able to establish full control – the primary enemy of Germany. Hitler made this clear when he stated that “In Russian Bolshevism we must see the attempt undertaken by the Jews in the twentieth century to achieve world domination.”<sup>54</sup> Worsening this situation, the “infinite chasm” between Slavs and the Nordic Aryans had further deteriorated with the revolutionary takeover of the Jewish-Bolsheviks.<sup>55</sup> The only bridge over this chasm had been the intelligentsia, which Hitler understood to be non-Slavic in “racial

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<sup>51</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 679.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 623.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 660-61.

<sup>55</sup> Hitler, *Secret Book*, 137–38, 214-15.

character.” When this was removed by the Bolsheviks, there was nothing giving Slavs compatibility with Aryans.<sup>56</sup> In this way the value, and thus importance of the Slavs was entirely removed, leaving their fate to be determined by the needs of Aryan survival.

Despite the threat of the Soviet Union and the lack of potential allies there, Hitler was confident that this was to Germany’s advantage. If anything, the Bolshevik revolution had removed the thin veneer that had kept Russia connected to the rest of Europe. Beyond that, it had also removed any illusion that Russia could be a functional state. The nation now comprised uneducated and illiterate Slav masses serving as slaves to the “Jewish dictators.”<sup>57</sup> Given the inherent destructiveness of Jewry, combined with the inability of Slavs to operate a state, “it is good fortune for the future that this development has taken place in just this way because thereby a spell has been broken which would have prevented us from seeking the goal of German foreign policy there where it solely and exclusively can lie: territory in the East.”<sup>58</sup> In Hitler’s mind, it was not a question of if, but when, the Soviet Union would collapse from within. Too few elements of positive racial and cultural creation existed there, in tandem with too many destructive elements. Conveniently, Hitler’s racial and ideological foci largely aligned in the Soviet Union, where Germany’s existence could be ensured by both removing the primary enemies of and securing a future for the German Aryans.

### *Lebensraum*

Hitler’s concept of *Lebensraum* (living space), first proposed by the nineteenth century German geographer Friedrich Ratzel, is best understood as a response to an alleged land shortage. Presuming the existence of such a shortage, Hitler called for Germany to focus on

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<sup>56</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 524, 654-55.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 524.

<sup>58</sup> Hitler, *Secret Book*, 139.

gaining more territory by any means necessary. He argued that “We must not let political boundaries obscure for us the boundaries of eternal justice. If this earth really has room for all to live in, let us be given the soil we need for our livelihood.”<sup>59</sup> The immediate issue with this perspective was that all potential territorial gains would have to come at the expense of other nation states. To Hitler the answer was apparent: “The law of self-preservation goes into effect; and what is refused to amicable methods, it is up to the fist to take.”<sup>60</sup> His conclusion that overseas colonies were impractical given Germany’s naval vulnerabilities and the risk of endangering a potential alliance with England, meant that only European land was a viable option to acquire *Lebensraum*.<sup>61</sup> The notion of acquiring sufficient land in Europe to enable the growth and continuation of the Aryan race thus represented the primary foreign policy goal of National Socialism: “The foreign policy of the folkish state must safeguard the existence on this planet of the race embodied in the state, by creating a healthy, viable natural relation between the nation’s population and growth on the one hand and the quantity and quality of its soil on the other hand.”<sup>62</sup> Sufficient land to feed the anticipated growth could not be acquired by means other than violence, indicating that National Socialism was fundamentally an ideology predicated on conflict.

Reversing the biblical prophecy, Hitler declares in his *Secret Book* that “The sword was the path-breaker for the plough.” He continues on, arguing that “this earth is not allotted to anyone, nor is it presented to anyone as a gift. It is awarded by Providence to people who in their hearts have the courage to take possession of it, the strength to preserve it, and the industry to put

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<sup>59</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 138.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 138–39.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 139–40; Hitler, *Secret Book*, 71–72.

<sup>62</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 642–43.

it to the plough.”<sup>63</sup> Applying Social Darwinism in a framework of might makes right, Hitler identifies conflict as the unavoidable path to resolving *Lebensraum*. Survival of the fittest and natural selection both factor heavily in his mindset.<sup>64</sup> The alternative, to allow the course of races to continue as their established national boundaries dictated, did not bode well for those better humans. Hitler said as much when he declares that “The culturally superior, but less ruthless races, would in consequence of their limited soil, have to limit their increase at a time when the culturally inferior but more brutal and more natural peoples, in consequence of their greater living areas, would still be in a position to increase without limit. In other words: some day the world will thus come into possession of the culturally inferior but more active men.”<sup>65</sup> To reverse this trend, force alone would be able to solve the problem.

Hitler, envisioning the acquisition of half a million, or even a million square kilometers for the expansion of Germany, anticipated homes for millions of Germans. With overseas colonies or alternative solutions ruled out, the logical conclusion was that Russia was the only viable place in Europe to seize sufficient land. As a result, Hitler identifies the building of Germany’s army as a primary goal, seeing as a rebuilt military would provide the means to achieving this purpose.<sup>66</sup> More important than quantity, however, was quality, in both race value and land fertility. Identifying the United States as a powerful state, Hitler argues that this is the case because of a large number of racially superior people inhabiting a vast amount of high-quality land. This same understanding explained why Russia was not comparably dangerous, given the drastically lower value of the races present there.<sup>67</sup> Given the same land, however, the future of the Aryans was full of potential. For Hitler it was a simple matter of survive or die.

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<sup>63</sup> Hitler, *Secret Book*, 15.

<sup>64</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 653.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>66</sup> Hitler, *Secret Book*, 73–74.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 103–4.

“Whoever will not be a hammer in history,” he argues, “will be an anvil.”<sup>68</sup> As a result, the focus of National Socialism was to mobilize and lead the German people to secure the necessary space for the continued growth and success of the Aryan race.<sup>69</sup>

*Lebensraum*, as the embodiment of an ideology both racial and political in nature, was the primary focus of the National Socialism *Weltanschauung*. This relied heavily on a utilitarian model for both morality and action. Hitler states that foreign policy is ultimately determined by “the necessity to secure the space necessary to the life of our people,” establishing the foundation of a framework that he was to utilize throughout his rule.<sup>70</sup> Assuming the absolute importance of gaining space, Hitler makes it clear that whatever means served that end were acceptable. This also shapes his understanding of the role of the state, describing it in the following way: “The highest purpose of a folkish state is concern for the preservation of those original racial elements which bestow culture and create the beauty and dignity of a higher mankind.”<sup>71</sup> As the securing of *Lebensraum* served to ensure the growth and survival of the German people, the achievement of that goal was the end; the means to that end were entirely flexible and open. Victory in struggle to gain space was the only way to ensure survival. In this zero-sum scenario, being humane and following international laws would only hinder this victory, which was the ultimate goal of both the race and the state. The implications of this mindset were to be experienced primarily in the all-encompassing conflict that was at the heart of National Socialism.

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<sup>68</sup> Hitler, *Secret Book*, 143.

<sup>69</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 646, 652. See also Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitler’s World View: A Blueprint for Power* trans. Herbert Arnold (1981. Reprint, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 106.

<sup>70</sup> Hitler, *Secret Book*, 45.

<sup>71</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 393–94.

## CHAPTER THREE: PREPARING FOR “BARBAROSSA”

### *The Beginning of Planning*

Following the beginning of the Second World War with the invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, and the stunningly successful invasion of France and the Low Countries, there were many within Germany who expected the war to end. With Britain the only remaining great power still in the war, even Hitler had visions of final victory. However, as early as the middle of July, 1940, only three weeks after the signing of an armistice with France, there was instead confusion. “The Fuehrer,” OKH Chief of the General Staff Halder noted, “is greatly puzzled by Britain’s persisting unwillingness to make peace.” Even at this early stage, however, both Hitler and Halder agreed that the answer lay in Russia, whom they assumed was aligning itself with England so as to weaken Germany.<sup>72</sup> Although the operational focus remained on England and how to defeat that island nation, Hitler increasingly turned his eyes to the east, to a military solution against Russia. On July 22, 1940, Halder notes the first operational plans against Russia, suggesting a general outline for a limited strike to provide strategic advantages requiring 80-100 German divisions.<sup>73</sup> At this early stage a prolonged war was not envisioned by the OKH, and the attack on the Soviet Union was intended to cripple that threat and at the same time increase the pressure on England to surrender.

Hitler had never had faith in peace in the east, as noted in a memorandum from October 9, 1939 to the commanders of the three branches of the Wehrmacht, as well as Keitel, the OKW Chief. Soviet neutrality could not be guaranteed by any agreement, the memo argued. Due to this fact, the best solution was a “demonstration of German strength.”<sup>74</sup> This flew in the face of the

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<sup>72</sup> Halder, *The Halder Diaries*, 1:506. Entry July 13, 1940. See also entry for July 22, 1940, 515, 517-18.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 1:128. Entry July 22, 1940.

<sup>74</sup> NCA 7:802. L-052.

Non-Aggression Pact agreed to by the two nations less than two months prior. Hitler reaffirmed this mindset in November, when he spoke to the same commanders to whom the earlier memorandum had been sent. “Pacts, however,” the notes of the speech record, “are only held as long as they serve the purpose.”<sup>75</sup> The perception here was that the agreement was a temporary solution to avoiding a two-front war, a great fear of German military planning throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The notion of the Soviet Union as the linchpin of Germany’s war effort was a strong and common theme throughout the planning phase. “With Russia smashed,” Halder wrote in recording Hitler’s thoughts, “Britain’s last hope would be shattered. Germany then will be master of Europe and the Balkans. Decision: Russia’s destruction must therefore be made a part of this struggle. Spring 41.”<sup>76</sup> While the seizure of vast tracts of land had quickly become the primary goal, the strategic means to that end was to definitively smash the Soviet Union, as that was the only way to achieve victory. This entailed the “destruction of Russian manpower.” Only a few days after estimating 80-100 German divisions, the estimated force required for this task had now jumped to 120.<sup>77</sup> The day prior to this meeting Halder had agreed with Walter von Brauchitsch, Army Commander-in-Chief, that peace with Russia was preferable to a two-front war. In the meeting itself, however, there was no opposition to Hitler’s proposed destruction of the Soviet Union.<sup>78</sup>

The Führer conference on December 5, 1940 was a major moment in the planning of the invasion of the Soviet Union. The strategic goals stated there aided in the alignment of National Socialist ideology with Wehrmacht operations. The destruction of the Red Army west of the

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<sup>75</sup> NCA 3:575. PS-789.

<sup>76</sup> Halder, *The Halder Diaries*, 1:533. Entry of July 31, 1940. Warlimont, *Inside Hitler’s Headquarters*, 111–12. See also NCA 5:740-41. PS-3031, PS-3032.

<sup>77</sup> Halder, *The Halder Diaries*, 1:534. Entry of July 31, 1940.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 1:530. Entry of July 30, 1940.

Dnieper River was seen as of vital importance.<sup>79</sup> This would enable Germany to secure the necessary land to achieve strategic depth and strike Soviet “war potential,” meaning industry and raw material production.<sup>80</sup> Jürgen Förster has convincingly argued that this strategy combined the National Socialist concept of *Lebensraum* with the strategy of short and decisive wars, describing it as a “symbiosis of rational thought and dogma.”<sup>81</sup> Hans Buchheim reinforces this argument when he asserts that “As Führer Hitler was also Supreme Commander; basically therefore he had every possibility of dressing up ideological orders as military ones and then laying claim to the legitimate duty of the soldier to obey, a duty stemming from the general obligations of any citizen.”<sup>82</sup> The annihilation aspect of the plan also fit well within both the ideological and military perspectives. This same sentiment was expressed in detail in Hitler’s War Directive No. 21 for “Case Barbarossa”, issued on December 18, which called for a rapid armoured advance intended to destroy first the Red Army and then the Soviet Union’s ability to wage war.<sup>83</sup> Setting the start date of the invasion as May 15, 1941, Hitler moved from simply planning for a future hypothetical, to actively ordering the German military to prepare for the invasion, set to begin in six months.

The call for a strategic-level armoured encirclement of the Red Army west of the Dnieper amounts to what is best understood as the desire to implement *Blitzkrieg*-style warfare on the entire invasion front against the Soviet Union. Karl-Heinz Frieser suggests that many in the

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<sup>79</sup> Halder, *The Halder Diaries*, 1:722–23. Entry of December 5, 1940.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 1:723. Entry of December 5, 1940.

<sup>81</sup> Jürgen Förster, “Hitler’s Decision in Favour of War against the Soviet Union,” in Horst Boog, Jürgen Förster, Joachim Hoffmann, Ernst Klink, Rolf-Dieter Müller and Gerd R. Ueberschär, *The Attack on the Soviet Union*, Germany and the Second World War, vol.4 trans. Dean S. McMurry, Ewald Osers and Louise Willmot (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998), 27–28. See also Förster, “The Relation Between Operation Barbarossa as an Ideological War of Extermination and the Final Solution,” in *The Final Solution: Origins and Implementation*, ed. David Cesarani (London, UK: Routledge, 1994), 87–91.

<sup>82</sup> Hans Buchheim, “The SS - Instrument of Domination,” in Krausnick, et al. *Anatomy of the SS State*, 317–18.

<sup>83</sup> Trevor-Roper, ed., *Hitler’s War Directives, 1939-1945*, 93–98, here 93–94.

Wehrmacht, Halder included, experienced “blitzkrieg mania” due to the stunning successes of German armoured warfare in the first years of the war.<sup>84</sup> Both he and Ian Kershaw agree that much of the power of the concept was derived from the National Socialist Führer mythos around Hitler himself, itself seemingly demonstrated by the unbroken chain of German military successes up to mid-1941.<sup>85</sup> While the annihilation envisioned by the planned armoured encirclements served to achieve both the violence called for by ideology, as well as the decisive victory in military doctrine – thus making it ideal – there was a significant threat from adopting this model. As Frieser himself argues, modern industrial-scale war is decided primarily on economic and strategic depth, rather than operational success, and the *Blitzkrieg* concept fell squarely within the latter.<sup>86</sup> These weaknesses were obscured by rapid and shocking victories against other countries. In other words, though Germany may have held the operational advantage in modernized military capability, the Soviet Union held the advantage where it mattered – in depth. This meant, first of all, that those tip-of-the-spear armoured forces would experience significant attrition, which would endanger German efforts if the conflict became drawn-out. Second, given the highly-disruptive nature of this form of warfare over such a vast space, rear-area security was both paramount to provide sufficient logistical support, and also open to great vulnerability. As with the invasion itself, an extended campaign would only worsen this state of affairs. The tenets of both military necessity and National Socialist ideology

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<sup>84</sup> Karl-Heinz Frieser, *The Blitzkrieg Legend: The 1940 Campaign in the West* with John T. Greenwood (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2005), 351. For the Halder example, see his entry of July 3, 1941. Halder, *The Halder Diaries*, 2:1001. Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich*, 178.

<sup>85</sup> Frieser, *The Blitzkrieg Legend*, 326–29. Kershaw, “Hitler Myth,” 151–60.

<sup>86</sup> Frieser, *The Blitzkrieg Legend*, 352–53.

advocated for maximum ferocity so as to ensure a swift and complete victory, a hindrance for both the invasion and occupation in the event of a longer conflict.<sup>87</sup>

Despite some concerns regarding the risks involved and skepticism over potential gains from “Barbarossa”, Wehrmacht planning continued in 1941.<sup>88</sup> Distrust of the “gigantic block” of the Soviet Union largely stemmed from the fact that if Stalin, who Hitler perceived as “intelligent and careful,” was removed, Jews would take over, implying war could be the only result.<sup>89</sup> Halder noted that Hitler felt conflict with the Soviet Union was inevitable and that the Bolshevik state had to be eliminated first.<sup>90</sup> Participants of a conference with Hitler in mid-March nevertheless expressed uncertainties regarding the reception of Germany by the various ethnic groups there. What was certain, however, was that the Soviet-established intelligentsia in the broader Soviet Union and Soviet “functionaries” in Russia proper, as distinct from the Ukraine and Belarus, needed to be eliminated. “The controlling machinery of the Russian Empire must be smashed,” and in Russia proper, “force must be used in its most brutal form. The ideological ties holding together the Russian people are not yet strong enough ...”<sup>91</sup> The glue of Soviet rule in both Russia and the other areas was thus perceived to be exclusively imperialistic Bolshevik ideology as propagated by Soviet minions. While it is unclear who exactly made these remarks at the conference, what is clear is that there was a growing consensus between Hitler and his top generals that the Soviet Union was little more than a house of cards.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> David Stahel, “The Wehrmacht and National Socialist Military Thinking,” *War in History* 24, no. 3 (July 1, 2017): 336–61.

<sup>88</sup> Halder, *The Halder Diaries*, 1:764, 770, 782, 787-88. Entries of January 28, 1941 and February 3, 14, 20, 1941. NCA 3:626-36. PS-872-4, 876.

<sup>89</sup> NCA 6:944. C-134.

<sup>90</sup> Halder, *The Halder Diaries*, 1:784. Entry for February 17, 1941.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 2:833. Entry of March 17, 1941.

<sup>92</sup> Ernst Klink, "Land Warfare," in Boog, et al., *The Attack on the Soviet Union*, 237–38.

### *The Criminal Orders*

On March 30, 1941, Hitler explained the ideological implications of the invasion of the Soviet Union to the Wehrmacht's top commanders.<sup>93</sup> At this pivotal meeting he laid out both the ideological justification for, and the necessary responses to this entirely distinctive enemy that the Wehrmacht was about to engage with. While attending that conference Halder summarized the contents of Hitler's comments on the essence of the forthcoming war:

Clash of two ideologies. Crushing denunciation of Bolshevism, identified with asocial criminality. Communism is an enormous danger for our future. We must not forget the concept of comradeship between soldiers. A Communist is no comrade before nor after battle. This is a war of extermination. If we do not grasp this, we shall still beat the enemy, but 30 years later we shall again have to fight the Communist foe. We do not wage war to preserve the enemy...

War against Russia: Extermination of the Bolshevik Commissars and of the Communist intelligentsia... This is no job for Military Courts. The individual troop commanders must know the issues at stake. They must be leaders in this fight. The troops must fight back with the methods with which they are attacked. Commissars and GPU men are criminals and must be dealt with as such. This need not mean that the troops should get out of hand. Rather, the commander must give orders which express the common feelings of his men.

This war will be very different from the war in the West. In the East, harshness today means lenience in the future. Commanders must make the sacrifice of overcoming their personal scruples.<sup>94</sup>

According to Hitler's speech, this new type of warfare was to be accompanied by a new, more brutal response. Based on that assumption, the reply was to be embodied in the special orders, directives and guidelines issued in preparation for warfare against the Soviet Union, known collectively to posterity as the Criminal Orders. The next day, the OKH issued the first draft of the notorious Commissar Order, the first in this set of Orders.<sup>95</sup> Ideology and military planning were now being joined together with tangible results. By briefing the commanders of the

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<sup>93</sup> Halder, *The Halder Diaries*, 2:845. Entry of March 30, 1941.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 2:846–47. Entry of March 30, 1941.

<sup>95</sup> *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals under Control Council Law No. 10, October 1946-April 1949* (hereafter TWC) (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1949), 10:1059-62. PS-877, PS-1471. NCA Supp. A:352-53. PS-884.

invasion of its political implications, Hitler, laid the groundwork for ideological preparations of the Wehrmacht.

This meeting did not spark the beginning of such ideological planning. In fact the first of these ideological preparations began several weeks prior to the March 30 conference, when the Wehrmacht clarified its duties related to security in the occupied territories, ceding some authority to the SS, itself a wing of the NSDAP and thus inherently ideological. On March 5, the OKW circulated a draft of the directive regarding the administration of the occupied regions. Halder, in discussing the agreement, cryptically notes that “Special missions of the Reichsfuehrer SS,” had also been given.<sup>96</sup> Referring to Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS and German police, this is the first time a distinctive role for the SS in the invasion had been noted by those planning it. The OKW “Directives for Special Areas to Order #21 (Case Barbarossa)” – of March 13 – indicates that the Wehrmacht perceived this ideological force – described by one historian as “Modern, racially up-to-date, and lethally anti-Semitic” – to be useful for the administration and pacification of the occupied Soviet territories.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, the very authority of the SS over the German state security apparatus signified that National Socialism and the security of the German state were inseparable. That same day Wehrmacht Quartermaster Eduard Wagner and Reinhard Heydrich began discussing the details of this delineation between the SS and the Wehrmacht.<sup>98</sup> The SS was quickly becoming an irreplaceable facet of occupation security in the Soviet Union.

The real substance of this delineation came in May, first when another directive clarified that although army and army group commanders retained some authority to limit the activity of

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<sup>96</sup> Halder, *The Halder Diaries*, 2:820. Entry of March 5, 1941.

<sup>97</sup> NCA 3:409–13. PS-447. Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich*, 106.

<sup>98</sup> Halder, 2:828. Entry of March 13, 1941.

the *Einsatzgruppen*, these special units had their own tasks to complete. These tasks revolved primarily around the rounding up and execution of ideological enemies. In completing those goals, they were not to be hindered. Comprised of *Sicherheitsdienst* (Security Service – SS intelligence and security organization) and *Sicherheitspolizei* (Security Police) troops, the *Einsatzgruppen* were subordinated to Heydrich as head of the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (RSHA – Reich Main Security Office).<sup>99</sup> This control stemmed from the fact that the German security apparatus had been concentrated under Himmler's leadership as both *Reichsführer-SS* and Chief of the German Police.<sup>100</sup> The second clarification was the Wagner-Heydrich agreement in the middle of May in which Wagner – as the OKH's Quartermaster-General, in charge of both supply and rear areas at that time – and Heydrich, agreed that the Wehrmacht would support the *Einsatzgruppen* and that the RSHA would have complete authority over these units in all but the front-line operational zones.<sup>101</sup> Although the main issue in these documents was the clarification of authority structures, Ernst Klink has argued that any Wehrmacht concerns regarding the separation of authority and the risk of interference by National Socialism or its adherents were cast aside in the event that security in the rear of the military was compromised.<sup>102</sup> Even though the perception seems to have been that these *Einsatzgruppen* would help secure the rear areas, the context of ideological war – both racial and political – was already established, so the real intent of these units, though not explicitly stated in these orders, was obvious.

Around this same time Halder recorded another major meeting with important implications for the Wehrmacht's occupation effort:

<sup>99</sup> TWC 10:1239–42. NOKW-2080.

<sup>100</sup> NCA 4:108-10, 986, 703, 616-34, 194. PS-1551, PS-2284, PS-2061, PS-1992A, PS-1680. See also Buchheim, "The SS," in Krausnick, et al., *Anatomy of the SS State*, 157.

<sup>101</sup> NCA 6:420–23. PS-3710. TWC 10:1242–44. NOKW-2079.

<sup>102</sup> Klink, "Land Warfare," 305.

Gen. z.b.V. Mueller, with Judge Advocate General [Lehmann].

Order to troops along lines of last Fuehrer address to the generals. Troops must do their share in the ideological struggle of the Eastern Campaign.  
Questions of administration of justice in the AGp. Rear Areas.<sup>103</sup>

Referring to the conference with Hitler of March 30, the outcome of this meeting would become the “Decree for the Conduct of Courts-Martials in the District ‘BARBAROSSA’ and for Special Measures of the Troops”, or the Martial Jurisdiction Decree. Issued on May 13, the decree suggested that due to the nature of the war and opponents in the coming invasion, severity against Soviet civilians was to be the status quo. Signed by Keitel, it removed the jurisdiction of courts-martial from civilians, encouraged annihilation by the “most extreme means” of all resistance, permitted collective reprisals on battalion commander orders if individual perpetrators could not be found, and disseminated authority for executions down to any officer.<sup>104</sup> One historian has characterized this plan as the pre-criminalization of the entire Soviet populace.<sup>105</sup> This decree further relieved the compulsion of prosecution for offenses committed by soldiers, justifying it based on the following reasoning: “While judging offenses of this kind, it should be considered in every case, that the break-down in 1918, the time of suffering of the German people after that, and the numerous blood sacrifices were decidedly due to the Bolshevik influence, and that no German has forgotten this.”<sup>106</sup> Based in the popular “stab-in-the-back” theory propagated in Germany after the First World War, the solution as put forward here was the application of ruthless repression against a Soviet populace presumably affected by the Bolshevik ideology.

In spite of the Wehrmacht’s apparent acceptance of the Decree, it seems that they were also aware of how drastically it violated the laws and customs of war. The civilian populace that

<sup>103</sup> Halder, *The Halder Diaries*, 2:907. Entry of May 6, 1941.

<sup>104</sup> NCA 3:637–39. PS-886.

<sup>105</sup> Buchheim, "The SS," in Krausnick, et al., *Anatomy of the SS State*, 318.

<sup>106</sup> NCA 3:638. PS-886.

was to come under their jurisdiction in the Soviet Union was to be largely unprotected by legal means or military discipline, susceptible to extreme violence and excesses of every kind. As a result, two months later – five weeks into the invasion – the OKW ordered the destruction of all the Decree's twenty-three copies. The stated purpose of this was to avoid it falling into enemy hands.<sup>107</sup> However, the removal of the Decree in this way did not abolish the order or change the altered relationship between the Wehrmacht and the Soviet populace.<sup>108</sup> The published version of the Martial Jurisdiction Decree approved by the OKH and OKW emphasized the necessary harshness based on the perceived ideological nature of the conflict. The Wehrmacht's acknowledgement of the shaky legality of this decree is exemplified by the secrecy with which this decree was distributed and then subsequently hidden. In spite of this, the order was not revoked, and there is no indication that this decree faced significant resistance from Wehrmacht commanders on moral or ideological grounds.

The one serious reservation the Wehrmacht did seem to have for this order concerned discipline amongst its own troops. The Decree justified suspension of courts-martial for crimes committed against civilians because of a shortage of staff, combined with the anticipated nature of war against the Soviet Union. Brauchitsch, however, apparently became concerned that the licence for swift justice given to low-ranking officers could ruin discipline. As a result, he attempted to alleviate the tone of the Martial Jurisdiction Decree. His supplement to the Decree, written on May 24, stated that “All counterintelligence measures of the troops will be carried out energetically, for their own security and the speedy pacification of the territory won ...

*Movement and combat against the enemy's armed forces are the real tasks of the troops ... The directives of the Fuerhrer concern serious cases of rebellion, in which the most severe measures*

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<sup>107</sup> NCA 6:872–75. C-50. Ibid., 3:637–39. PS-886.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 6:875–76. C-51.

are required.”<sup>109</sup> In an attempt to return the focus to conventional combat against the Red Army, Brauchitsch called on the commanders to maintain control and prevent excesses. Though this document was used in defense of Brauchitsch and the Wehrmacht as an attempt to countermand the Martial Jurisdiction Decree, it did not alter the Decree, and was sufficiently vague so as to contradict itself.<sup>110</sup> Although excesses were to be avoided and discipline consequently maintained, the occupied areas had to be pacified by whatever means to make the Wehrmacht’s rear secure.<sup>111</sup> Given that mercilessness was seen as the best way to achieve pacification, justification had been given to the troops to suppress any rebellion, real or otherwise, with utmost ferocity.

During this time, on May 19, the OKW issued the Directives for the Behaviour of the Troops in Russia. This document was heavy with ideological implications, pointing to Bolshevism as the ultimate enemy of the German people, as well as the glue holding together the Soviet Union via primarily Jewish representatives.<sup>112</sup> “This struggle requires ruthless and energetic action against Bolshevik agitators, guerrillas, saboteurs, and Jews, and the total elimination of all active or passive resistance,”<sup>113</sup> the Directives stated. Amidst the Wehrmacht’s attempts to distribute and clarify exactly what the Martial Jurisdiction Decree implied for military operations, these Directives aligned all resistance with Bolsheviks and Jews, who were considered to be almost entirely synonymous. The response stems primarily from the existential nature of the enemy that the Bolsheviks, and by extension the Jews, represented to the German people. As a result, resistance of all kinds was to be suppressed “totally”. By itself this document

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<sup>109</sup> TWC 11:518–20. Emphasis in original.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 385, 517, 520.

<sup>111</sup> TWC 11:588–89. Förster, “Operation Barbarossa as a War of Conquest and Annihilation,” in *The Attack on the Soviet Union*, 503–4.

<sup>112</sup> Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, *Nazism 1919–1945* (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter), 3:1090. Jürgen Förster, “Operation Barbarossa as a War of Conquest and Annihilation,” in *The Attack on the Soviet Union*, 514–15.

<sup>113</sup> Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism 1919–1945*, 3:1090.

offers a vague solution to resistance, but in the context of the other Criminal Orders and the military culture of the Wehrmacht, the intention of this OKW order becomes apparent. A prominent historian of the Final Solution has accurately described the theme of these Directives and the Martial Jurisdiction Decree as providing a “shooting license” for the troops.<sup>114</sup> While these Directives had important consequences for the Wehrmacht’s occupation policies in the Soviet Union, they also shaped the final Criminal Order discussed here: that relating to the definition and treatment of commissars.

Despite the fact that the first draft of the Commissar Order did appear the day after the March 30 Führer Conference, it was not actually distributed in its final form until early June. While it went through multiple drafts, an examination of the drafts as compared to the published order reveals three major focal points. First, there was an effort to define what constituted a commissar, and subsequently how to handle them. The decision in this area was to execute all identified commissars, military and otherwise, as soon as possible.<sup>115</sup> Second, Judge Advocate General Rudolf Lehmann explained that military courts were not to judge commissars. Responsibility for determining guilt was instead placed on regular commanders.<sup>116</sup> Furthermore, this clause gave soldiers the right to kill commissars without fear of punishment of overzealousness. Finally, the order stated that non-military commissars apprehended in the rear were to be handed over to the *Einsatzgruppen*, presumably for immediate execution, while military commissars and those captured in the operational zones were to be taken care of by the Wehrmacht.<sup>117</sup> Commissars were to be removed by all means necessary, the logic being that the Red Army’s resistance would simply crumble without these Bolshevik functionaries to motivate

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<sup>114</sup> Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1992), 11.

<sup>115</sup> TWC 10:1061. PS-1471. NCA Supp. A:352-3. PS-884.

<sup>116</sup> TWC 10:1062. PS-1471.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. NCA Supp. A:353. PS-884.

them to fight. The methods for identifying such persons, however, were unclear at best, and this order offered another opportunity to use violence at will against prisoners.

Keitel distributed this order – signed by Warlimont – on June 6. Warlimont clarified that the order was a direct attempt to fulfill the conditions set out in the Martial Jurisdiction Decree.<sup>118</sup> Brauchitsch, who issued the order from the OKH, also added supplements to this order, although they were even less impactful than the one he issued regarding the Martial Jurisdiction Decree. His first clarification was that commissars be definitively identified as hostile or potentially so before they were executed or handed over to the *Einsatzgruppen*. The second was that executions be conducted in an orderly manner, specifically that they be ordered by officers, carried out “inconspicuously” and confined to areas outside combat zones.<sup>119</sup> These supplements neither altered the orders in substance nor clarified precisely how the troops were to confidently identify commissars as hostile or possessing the potential to be so. The order itself justified the liquidation of commissars on the premise that they presented a threat – both ideologically and racially – and that their destruction would aid pacification. Given that, it was likely that the troops would adopt an attitude of pragmatism, in this case immediate execution, rather than a cautious and judicious application.

Referencing both the Martial Jurisdiction Decree and the Directives for the Behaviour of the Troops in Russia, the Commissar Order establishes the framework for acting against those identified as commissars. All thus identified who resisted or were suspected of resisting were to be segregated as quickly as possible and executed. This stemmed from the Wehrmacht’s understanding that “These commissars *will not be recognized as soldiers*; the protection granted

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<sup>118</sup> TWC 10:1054–55. NOKW-484.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 1056. NOKW-1076.

to prisoners of war in accordance with international law will not apply to them.”<sup>120</sup> The judgement of the guilt or innocence of a commissar was to be determined primarily on the personal impression of the commissar’s “outlook and attitude”, rather than facts.<sup>121</sup> Those commissars captured behind the operational zones, regardless of role, were to be turned over to the *Einsatzgruppen*, and military courts were to have no part in determining the guilt or innocence of suspects.<sup>122</sup> Thus, the apparent glue of both the Red Army and the broader Soviet Union were to be targeted with the utmost severity, befitting the imposed nature of the conflict. Overall, the Criminal Orders must be understood to have provided the Wehrmacht’s basis for an existential conflict.<sup>123</sup> The assessment that “The Commissar Order became an excuse for the wholesale murder of prisoners of war, but the ‘Barbarossa’ Jurisdiction Order justified the extermination of the civilian population,” seems accurate given what was endorsed via these orders and their supplements.<sup>124</sup> The Commissar Order completed the ideological preparation of the Wehrmacht’s invasion, but the occupation as a whole had also been defined during this time.

#### *Plans for Administration*

The occupation of the Soviet Union was not solely focused on resource extraction, but also on the establishment of *Lebensraum*, which required clearing most of the populace there. This was a central aspect of what is best known as *Generalplan Ost*, the Nazi vision of Germanizing and colonizing the European territories of the Soviet Union. The lead on this specific mission had been given in late 1939 to Himmler as part of his ever-expanding duties and powers. By the “Decree of the Fuehrer and Reich Chancellor for the Strengthening of

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<sup>120</sup> TWC 10:1057. NOKW-1076. Emphasis in original.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 1058.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Felix Römer, "The Wehrmacht in the War of Ideologies," in *Nazi Policy on the Eastern Front, 1941*, eds. Kay, Rutherford, Stahel, 77.

<sup>124</sup> Reitlinger, *The House Built on Sand*, 82.

Germanism” on October 7, 1939, Himmler was tasked with bringing all racial Germans into the Reich and creating German colonies via resettlement, by any means necessary, through the office of the Reich Commissar for the Strengthening of Germanism. Keitel signed this document, implying the potential role of the Wehrmacht in operations to achieve this purpose.<sup>125</sup> Such operations were first undertaken in Poland, but the Soviet Union as the primary provider of *Lebensraum* was always the preferred target. Hitler, in a speech to the Reichstag the day before the issuance of this decree, had clarified that Germany’s goal was to create German unity from across Eastern and Southern Europe and thus “a new ordering of ethnographic relations.” This then was the mandate given to Himmler in this new role.<sup>126</sup> Hitler’s mid-July 1941 conference, conducted in the midst of the first formulations of what would become *Generalplan Ost*, must be understood in light of the desire to clear *Lebensraum* for German settlement.<sup>127</sup>

The debate over the interpretation of Hitler as either chiefly an ideologue or a pragmatist comes to the fore most notably in his invasion of the Soviet Union. Adam Tooze’s argument that German plans against the Soviet Union derived primarily from the economics of war does not prevent him from pointing to ideology’s prominence in Nazi plans for the Soviet Union.<sup>128</sup> While Tooze, arguably incorrectly, subordinates ideology to economics in his assessment of the invasion’s motivations, the economics of the invasion also did play a prominent role in the occupation of the Soviet Union. In a directive issued on the eve of “Barbarossa”, based on the assumption of a swift victory over the Soviet Union and looking beyond, Hitler declared that “The newly conquered territories in the East must be organized, made secure and, in full

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<sup>125</sup> TWC 13:141–43. NO-3075.

<sup>126</sup> Domarus, ed., *Hitler* 3:1836-7.

<sup>127</sup> NCA 7:1086–93. L-221. Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (New York, NY: Viking, 2007), 466–73. Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941-1945*, 276–97.

<sup>128</sup> Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction*, 430–31, 462.

cooperation with the Armed Forces, exploited economically.”<sup>129</sup> This territory and the resultant economic gain would fuel future operations targeting the Suez Canal, Gibraltar and West Africa, as well as England. In other words, the Soviet Union had become not just the linchpin of defeating England, but was expected to provide the necessary resources and strategic position to secure Germany’s dominance of Europe, Africa and the Middle East, and for that Hitler stated that the *Lebensraum* was to be cleared via “necessary measures,” such as executions and deportations. The resultant hierarchy of priorities was as follows: dominate, administer and exploit.<sup>130</sup> Working from the assumption that vast tracts of the Soviet Union would be occupied and cleared of *Untermenschen* (sub-humans), German plans for occupation were oriented towards the “final settlement.” Plans for the utilization of the resources of the Soviet Union were thus both pragmatic and ideological in character at the same time.

In the Soviet Union the first priority, domination, would be achieved and maintained by the Wehrmacht in coordination with the SS and other security forces. The second, administration, would be primarily conducted by the newly-established ministry under Alfred Rosenberg. Initially designated as Hitler’s main administrator for the expected occupied territories in the Soviet Union on April 20, 1941, Rosenberg had already clarified his perception of an administration of the occupied areas based largely on ideology.<sup>131</sup> In an April 2 memo, Rosenberg called for a clarification of the purposes of the invasion, before proceeding to explain the characteristics and goals for the various distinctive regions of the Soviet Union. Here he is primarily concerned with two aspects: political administration and economic exploitation, laying

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<sup>129</sup> Trevor-Roper, ed., *Hitler’s War Directives, 1939-1945*, 130–34, here 131.

<sup>130</sup> NCA 7:1086–87. L-221.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 3:621–23. PS-865.

out the future goals and expectations of different areas.<sup>132</sup> Given his view, Rosenberg advocated for the creation of a centralized ministry with massive power to politically and economically organize and administer the occupied territories.<sup>133</sup> The implication was that this would also result in some control over military operations in their areas, giving the *Ostministerium* (Eastern Ministry – OMi) more power to conduct and shape counterinsurgency warfare. Rosenberg outlined his administrative plan on April 29. He hoped to utilize the various non-Russian nationalities for Germany's purposes, with the possibility of token self-rule in the future. Meanwhile, the primary economic task of such a ministry was to ensure the Wehrmacht received the necessary war material, which meant ensuring political stability of the occupied regions.<sup>134</sup> Four weeks into the invasion, Hitler appointed Rosenberg as the Reich Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories.<sup>135</sup> In theory as powerful as he wanted the ministry to be, Rosenberg's authority was severely impinged upon by others' spheres of power. They did, however, all unite most notably on one notion: the destruction of the Soviet Union and the exploitation of its resources.

The economy in the occupied Soviet Union was to be controlled by Hermann Göring in his capacity as head of the Four Year Plan, via the *Wirtschaftsstab Ost* (Economic Staff East – WiStab Ost), with significant Wehrmacht cooperation.<sup>136</sup> On the goal of the economy in the occupied Soviet Union, the WiStab Ost and the OMi agreed that the conquered country would support the Wehrmacht, thereby relieving more resources for Germany itself. The expected result was mass starvation amongst the Soviet people, which would serve two goals: providing food to the Third Reich and clearing *Lebensraum*. Rosenberg described this as a “harsh necessity,” while

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<sup>132</sup> NCA 3:674–81. PS-1017.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 680–85. PS-1017, PS-1019.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 685–89. PS-1024.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 693–95. PS-1034. Ibid., 4:634–36. PS-1997.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 3:811–16, 908–13. PS-1157, 1316–17. Ibid., 6:223–24. PS-3544.

a May 2 meeting between the relevant economic authorities concluded that “millions” would die of starvation extracting what was “necessary” for Germany.<sup>137</sup> Based on racial ideology, what was also necessary in this case was the removal of up to thirty million Soviet people; a connection to this policy of starvation confirmed by multiple relevant authorities.<sup>138</sup> Kay, in his study on the starvation plans in this meeting, has correctly suggested that though this was economically-oriented, its foundation was inescapably ideological, assuming that those racial elements to be starved were less important than the Germans to be fed.<sup>139</sup> A May 23 paper issued by the WiStab Ost, stemming directly out of this meeting, made clear that “surplus” areas of food production, or those producing more food than they were consuming, were to be separated from “deficit” areas, or those consuming more food than they were producing. This, when combined with a higher requisition quota, was intended to create a substantial surplus, which was to go to Germany. The consequence, mass starvation, also conveniently aligned with ideological views concerning racial preservation and destruction of the Soviet people.<sup>140</sup> Known as the “Hunger Plan”, and described by one historian as economic “triage,” this document from State Secretary Herbert Backe – head of the agricultural department of the WiStab Ost – formed the backbone of German exploitation policy.<sup>141</sup>

German food imports from the Soviet Union rapidly expanded during the period from 1939 to the first half of 1941 as Germany was isolated from much of the world outside of Europe

<sup>137</sup> NCA 3:716–17. PS-1058. Ibid., 5:378. PS-2718. Kay, “Germany’s Staatssekretäre, Mass Starvation and the Meeting of 2 May 1941,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 4 (2006): 685–700. Kay, “Revisiting the Meeting of the Staatssekretäre on 2 May 1941: A Response to Klaus Jochen Arnold and Gert C. Lübbbers,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, no. 1 (2008): 93–104.

<sup>138</sup> *Trials of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal, Nuremberg, 14 November 1945–1 October 1946* (hereafter TMWC-IMT) (Nuremberg, Germany: Secretariat of the Tribunal, 1947), 4:482. Kay, “The Purpose of the Russian Campaign Is the Decimation of the Slavic Population by Thirty Million: The Radicalization of German Food Policy in Early 1941,” in *Nazi Policy on the Eastern Front, 1941*, eds. Kay, Rutherford, Stahel, 114–15.

<sup>139</sup> Kay, “Germany’s Staatssekretäre, Mass Starvation and the Meeting of 2 May 1941,” 697.

<sup>140</sup> NCA 7:295–306. EC-126.

<sup>141</sup> Peter Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich*, 180.

with the outbreak of war.<sup>142</sup> As part of diplomacy to keep the Soviet Union neutral and generate new trade opportunities, Germany created a heavy reliance on the nation against whom, it was broadly assumed, war would come eventually. This meant that German strategic planning for the invasion of the Soviet Union was in part driven by a serious need to secure food stocks to ensure Germany and its large military continued to be fed.<sup>143</sup> This in itself did not necessitate starvation, but when combined with an ideology that saw *Lebensraum* as vital and Slavs as of little racial value, the gap between “military necessity” and the ideological-strategic goal of cleansing *Lebensraum* was not so significant. Given this, Backe issued his notorious “12 Commandments” for exploitation in early June 1941 as part of his broader “Hunger Plan”. He identified output as the only task of agriculture there, calling for ruthlessness in the name of providing for Germany. This could be achieved because, according to Backe, the Russian stomach was “elastic.”<sup>144</sup> Around the same time and emphasizing the same points as Backe, the “Guiding Principles for the Economic Operations in the Newly Occupied Eastern Territories” were published. The “highest possible exploitation” was to be conducted, with no thought for the Soviet populace.<sup>145</sup> The Wehrmacht was also accepting of this notion, both in their own requisitions (evidenced by their involvement in the WiStab Ost), but also in actively working to eliminate food “deficit” areas via starvation and active destruction.<sup>146</sup> The Soviet populace was certainly not going to be endeared to their German occupiers for long with such a policy in action.

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<sup>142</sup> Mulligan, *The Politics of Illusion and Empire*, 94. See Table 1.

<sup>143</sup> Halder, *The Halder Diaries*, 1:719. Entry of December 3, 1940. Halder, *The Halder Diaries*, 2:828. Entry of March 13, 1941. Gerlach, "German Economic Interests, Occupation Policy, and the Murder of the Jews in Belorussia, 1941/43," in *National Socialist Extermination Policies*, ed. Herbert, 212–13.

<sup>144</sup> TMWC-IMT 8:19–21.

<sup>145</sup> NCA 4:263–71. PS-1473.

<sup>146</sup> Halder, *The Halder Diaries*, 2:1016. Entry of July 8, 1941.

## CHAPTER FOUR: INVASION AND OCCUPATION

### *Attack to Moscow*

The invasion codenamed “Barbarossa” began on June 22, 1941.<sup>147</sup> The Proclamation issued by Hitler on the day of the invasion to the German people served primarily to justify the attack. It interpreted the conflict as a self-defensive necessity to counter the Jewish-Bolshevik threat, end the war with England and protect the German race.<sup>148</sup> Framed as this conflict was within the context of an ideological struggle, the early days of the invasion seemed to confirm that ideology was not only at play, but that National Socialism’s judgement of the Soviet Union had been accurate. The massive Wehrmacht attack rolled forward across an enormous theatre of war, riding a tide of seemingly endless victories. The early stunning successes made Halder optimistic enough to declare on July 3 – a mere twelve days into the invasion – that “the objective to shatter the bulk of the Russian Army this side of the Dvina and Dniepr, has been accomplished.”<sup>149</sup> After indicating that he believed the Wehrmacht would face only minimal resistance east of those rivers, Halder declared that “It is thus probably no overstatement to say that the Russian Campaign has been won in the space of two weeks,” adding the cautionary afterthought that “this does not mean that it is closed. The sheer geographical vastness of the country and the stubbornness of the resistance, which is carried on with all means, will claim our efforts for many more weeks to come.”<sup>150</sup> Aside from fierce Soviet resistance, there was little to indicate to the Wehrmacht that their plans were not going to work.

Many within the Wehrmacht dismissed the Red Army as a worthy opponent. At a conference with Hitler on February 3, both the OKW and OKH acknowledged that while the Red

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<sup>147</sup> Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East*, 54–143. Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed*, 57–118.

<sup>148</sup> Domarus, ed., *Hitler* 4:2451.

<sup>149</sup> Halder, *The Halder Diaries*, 2:1000. Entry of July 3, 1941.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

Army had quantitative superiority, German weapons and troops were better in quality. This same disregard was extended to the Red Army command, of which they adjudged only Semyon Timoshenko to be of noteworthy quality.<sup>151</sup> Similar sentiments were expressed at a conference on April 30, where the soldiers of the Red Army were acknowledged to be tenacious, and yet Brauchitsch here declared severe fighting would only last for a maximum of four weeks.<sup>152</sup> This underestimation, however, was not in any way a distinctly German perspective, and even the Americans were not optimistic regarding Soviet fortitude in the face of a German onslaught.<sup>153</sup> Hitler himself had certainly contributed to this contempt for the Red Army and the broader Soviet Union. He felt confident enough to issue a supplement on July 14 to his directive from a month prior that had laid out his vision for future operations to secure German hegemony. This supplement, in the context of this vision, outlined the manpower and arms production allotments for the army, air force and navy, focusing on drawing down the army in size and expanding the air force and navy.<sup>154</sup> The vision of this directive was, of course, predicated on victory in the war against the Soviet Union, something which the Wehrmacht was still in the midst of at that time.

The Soviet Union, however, was not the rotten edifice, clay giant or house of cards that it had frequently been perceived to be. Amidst the rapid advances of the opening weeks of this massive invasion launched by the Wehrmacht, there were signs that all was not well. Even Halder, as exuberant as he was in the early phase of the attack, acknowledged serious Soviet resistance and heavy pushback against German advances within the first days.<sup>155</sup> Severe

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<sup>151</sup> NCA 3:626–33, here 627. PS-872. Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East*, 24–41.

<sup>152</sup> NCA 3:633–34. PS-873.

<sup>153</sup> David Thomas, “Foreign Armies East and German Military Intelligence in Russia 1941–45,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 22, no. 2 (1987): 261–301. Andreas Hillgruber, “The German Military Leaders’ View of Russia Prior to the Attack on the Soviet Union,” in *From Peace to War*, ed. Wegner, 169–85. William L. Langer and S. Everett Gleason, *The Undeclared War, 1940–1941* (New York, NY: Harper, 1953), 538.

<sup>154</sup> Trevor-Roper, ed., *Hitler’s War Directives, 1939–1945*, 135–39.

<sup>155</sup> Halder, *The Halder Diaries*, 2:970–72, 977, 982, 985. Entries of June 24, 26, 28, 29, 1941.

resistance from the Red Army, especially opposite Army Group Center, forced Hitler to alter plans, halting the central advance to enable the flanks to be secured prior to a renewed advance on Moscow.<sup>156</sup> The impact of attrition by this point was already beginning to have a negative outcome on German capabilities. After just twenty-two days of combat, Halder calculated that the Wehrmacht had suffered over 146,000 casualties. This was balanced, however, by what Halder estimated as enormous losses suffered by the Red Army. While this was true, the potential of the Red Army deploying units was dismissed out of hand at this time as not possible.<sup>157</sup> As a result, despite fierce fighting and heavy casualties, there was little concern expressed that German plans might not be proceeding as expected.

Optimism began to wane drastically soon after, however, as the Wehrmacht continued to come up against unexpectedly furious resistance. By the end of July, the three army groups were reporting a cumulative 179,500 casualties, and only 47,000 of the 300,000 available reserves had been sent as replacements.<sup>158</sup> This left the Wehrmacht forces on the Eastern Front operating at a significant manpower deficit after less than six weeks.<sup>159</sup> Halder recorded his impressions of the growing divide between shrinking German manpower and seemingly unending Soviet forces, expressing great dismay:

The whole situation makes it increasingly plain that we have underestimated the Russian Colossus, who consistently prepared for war with that utterly ruthless determination so characteristic of totalitarian States. This applies to organizational and economic resources, as well as the communications system and, most of all, to the strictly military potential. At the outset of the war we reckoned with about 200 enemy Divisions. Now we have already counted 360. Those Divisions indeed are not armed and equipped according to our standards, and their tactical leadership is often poor. But there they are, and if we smash a dozen of them, the Russians simply put up another dozen. The time factor favors them, as they are

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<sup>156</sup> Trevor-Roper, ed., *Hitler's War Directives, 1939-1945*, 145–51.

<sup>157</sup> Halder, *The Halder Diaries*, 2:1009-10, 1014-15, 1020, 1052-53. Entries of July 6, 8, 9, 17, 1941. Thomas, "Foreign Armies East," 275–79. Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed*, 391–93. See Tables P and Q.

<sup>158</sup> Halder, *The Halder Diaries*, 2:1143–44. Entry of August 2, 1941.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 1164, 1169. Entries of August 8 and 10, 1941. Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East*, 83–84, 114.

near their own resources, while we are moving farther and farther away from ours.

And so our troops, sprawled over an immense frontline, without any depth, are subjected to the incessant attacks of the enemy. Sometimes these are successful, because too many gaps must be left open in these enormous spaces.<sup>160</sup>

This problem of depth, however, was only to worsen, as total Wehrmacht casualties doubled by the time “Typhoon” began on October 2.<sup>161</sup> As expected the heaviest impact in this regard was felt by the armoured divisions, where, for example, Panzer Group 2 in mid-September was down to an average of barely 25% combat effective tank strength across its four panzer divisions.<sup>162</sup> Three weeks later, amidst the opening days of “Typhoon”, Guderian, commanding this same Panzer Group, notes in his memoirs that he encountered exhaustion among his men “less physical than spiritual.”<sup>163</sup> The Wehrmacht was reaching the end of its ability to continue on at the same pace without sufficient replacements.<sup>164</sup> The influence of attritional war was being felt everywhere, but final victory had not been achieved.

With Leningrad besieged and Kiev captured, the Wehrmacht’s attention again turned to Moscow with Operation “Typhoon”.<sup>165</sup> Summarizing the war effort against the Soviet Union to that point, Hitler declared that “the preconditions were finally created for that last gigantic blow.”<sup>166</sup> Echoing much of the same rhetoric utilized in the proclamation read out prior to the launching of “Barbarossa”, Hitler here glossed over the fact that the Soviet Union had still not been defeated. If the cracks in the Wehrmacht and Nazi planning and mindset were beginning to show through by this point, then “Typhoon” served to definitively expose these flaws. Within

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<sup>160</sup> Halder, *The Halder Diaries*, 2:1170. Entry of August 11, 1941.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 2:1271–72. Entry of October 4, 1941.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 2:1235. Entry of September 14, 1941. Rolf-Dieter Müller, "The Failure of the Economic 'Blitzkrieg' Strategy," in *The Attack on the Soviet Union*, 1122, 1129. See Table II.VI.I and Diagram II.VI.I.

<sup>163</sup> Guderian, *Panzer Leader*, 235.

<sup>164</sup> Halder, *The Halder Diaries*, 2:1317. Entry of November 27, 1941.

<sup>165</sup> Gerbet, ed., *Generalfeldmarschall Fedor von Bock*, 288–92. Entries of August 22–24, 1941. Halder, *The Halder Diaries*, 2:1186, 1193–95. Entries of August 18, 22, 1941. Guderian, *Panzer Leader*, 198–202.

<sup>166</sup> Domarus, ed., *Hitler*, 4:2484–86.

two months the offensive had stalled, and the Soviets responded with a counterattack that struck in the dead of the cold Russian December. The counteroffensive did more than just definitively stifle the Wehrmacht's attack against Moscow and its broader offensive capabilities; it also necessitated the utilization of rear-area forces, including Wehrmacht, SS and police units on the front line, thereby relieving pressure on partisans and further weakening rear security.<sup>167</sup> As the conflict stalemated and lines began to settle in for winter, any sense of an impending and definitive end began to slip away. In this situation the stability of the rear became increasingly important at the same time as the forces available for the task were even further overextended. In the first experience of what was to become a pattern, events at the front dictated policies, actions and the very context of the rear-area with significant and often unanticipated impact.

### *The Implementation of the Criminal Orders*

With the beginning of the invasion, the German Army acted in compliance with the ideology that was at the foundations of the invasion. Christian Streit identifies this compliance as stemming primarily from two sources: the widespread fear of Bolshevism, as well as the competition for power between the OKH, OKW and SS within the Third Reich. He suggests that this acquiescence was also based on the expectation of a brief campaign, where the additional severity called for was more palatable based on the brevity of its employment.<sup>168</sup> Felix Römer, however, contends that this was not a temporary measure, but rather what he describes as the “dogmatization” of the *Sicherheit der Truppe* (“security of the troops”), whereby ideology created the conditions for and justified the response to this war of worldviews.<sup>169</sup> Streit confirms this dogmatization, arguing that “The Red Army’s desperate resistance and the repercussions of

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<sup>167</sup> Förster, "Securing 'Living-space'," in *The Attack on the Soviet Union*, 1224.

<sup>168</sup> Christian Streit, "The German Army and the Policies of Genocide," in *The Policies of Genocide: Jews and Soviet Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany*, ed. Gerhard Hirschfeld (London, UK: Allan & Unwin, 1986), 8.

<sup>169</sup> Römer, "The Wehrmacht in the War of Ideologies," in *Nazi Policy on the Eastern Front, 1941*, eds., Kay, Rutherford and Stahel 79–94.

the ‘Criminal Orders’ led to a brutalizing of combat that exceeded anything German soldiers had seen so far. Given this understanding, fear of Bolsheviks appeared to be justified and legitimate, even more so in view of the partisan warfare which itself was largely a reaction to the ‘Criminal Orders’.”<sup>170</sup> This does not prove universal agreement or adherence, but it does explain the high level of obedience within the Wehrmacht to these actions. Both Römer and Streit do agree on the fact that the orders were in fact implemented by the majority of units within the Wehrmacht. One of the earliest developments in this ideological war came from the Wehrmacht’s treatment of Soviet POWs. The OKW, responsible for handling prisoners after they came out of operational zones, was clearly expecting large numbers, as they designated camps capable of holding nearly 800,000 prior to the invasion, as well as establishing rules and regulations to be employed.<sup>171</sup> This same order from mid-June also called for the harshest brutality towards any resistance, which was expected especially from “Asiatic” and “Bolshevist” prisoners. Furthermore, ethnic identification and subsequent separation was to be employed, although no indication is made here of where such actions would lead.<sup>172</sup>

In line with the special role of the *Einsatzgruppen* operating behind the Wehrmacht in the Soviet Union, the army handed over substantial numbers of prisoners to these units. According to Nuremberg testimony by Erwin Lahousen, a high-ranking member of the Abwehr, German military intelligence, this selection process by the *Einsatzgruppen* was agreed on between the OKW and RSHA in the opening weeks of the invasion, the task being twofold: first, to remove commissars in line with the Commissar Order, and second to remove “bolshevized” elements, a vague catchall used most routinely to target Jews and members of other undesirable ethnicities.

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<sup>170</sup> Streit, "The German Army and the Policies of Genocide," 9. Kershaw, *Hitler, 1936-45*, 395.

<sup>171</sup> TWC 10:1008–9. PS-888.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 1009–11.

This format continued throughout the entirety of the war.<sup>173</sup> This agreement was embodied in the July 17 order from Heydrich to the *Einsatzgruppen* regarding the elements to be weeded out and killed from among the prisoners. In this process there was significant assistance from Wehrmacht troops.<sup>174</sup> Initial resistance from the OKH – who had control over camps in the operational zones – came specifically from Wagner, who as Quartermaster General was responsible for prisoners in operational zones. His opposition, however, extended only to *Einsatzgruppen* interference in this filtering process, with Wagner instead calling for only the ideological enemies to be eliminated by the camp commanders themselves. Even this limited dissent was reversed by early October, so as to allow *Einsatzgruppen* access to OKH camps, enabling the ideological targeting process to continue unabated.<sup>175</sup> The most noteworthy resistance came from Admiral Canaris, head of the Abwehr, who appealed against such regulations on legal, propagandistic, disciplinary and intelligence-gathering grounds in a memo to Keitel in September.<sup>176</sup> Ultimately ineffective, Canaris' dissent acknowledges that these guidelines derived from the existentialist ideological framework of the invasion itself, therein referencing that much of the driving force behind this treatment of prisoners stemmed specifically from the Commissar Order.

The mistreatment of Soviet POWs was not limited to commissars, and all were susceptible to neglect at the hands of their captors. A vast haul of prisoners was taken, particularly in the opening months of the invasion. In just seven battles up until the middle of October, the Wehrmacht took at least 2,053,000 prisoners, and the total by the end of 1941 was

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<sup>173</sup> TMWC-IMT 2:452–60. NCA 4:53–55, 158–60. PS-1514, 1650. Reitlinger, *The House Built on Sand*, 87–89.

<sup>174</sup> TWC 11:5–11. NO-3414. NCA 3:123–26, 422–25. PS-078, PS-502. TWC 11:11–29. NO-3417. NCA 5:287. PS-2542. TWC 10:1085–89. NOKW-1449, NOKW-2096, NOKW-1570, NOKW-1569, NOKW-1674.

<sup>175</sup> Förster, "Securing 'Living-space,'" 1228–29. See also Streit, "The German Army," and Förster, "The German Army and the Ideological War against the Soviet Union," in *The Policies of Genocide*, ed. Hirschfeld, 3–4, 21. Gerbet, ed., *Generalfeldmarschall Fedor von Bock*, 353. Entry of November 9, 1941.

<sup>176</sup> NCA 7:411–16. PS-1519. NCA 4:58–65. EC-338.

near four million.<sup>177</sup> This was beyond even what the Wehrmacht had anticipated, a situation aggravated by an ideologically-inspired disregard of perceived sub-humans.<sup>178</sup> The Wehrmacht's prisoner preparations were thus easily surpassed. The outcome of this was widespread mistreatment of Soviet POWs, with one scholar estimating that 1,400,000 died within the first six months of the invasion, most due to starvation.<sup>179</sup> In some camps the situation was so serious that fatality rates of one-hundred percent were anticipated within a few months, and in others fatality rates reached five percent or more per week.<sup>180</sup> Halder, referencing a typhus outbreak in one camp, suggested that starvation was worse in other camps, stating that it was a "Ghastly picture, but relief appears impracticable at the moment."<sup>181</sup> In a meeting between Rosenberg and Hitler at the end of 1941 the high casualties amongst Soviet POWs was noted, but any concern was assuaged by the perception that the land was overpopulated anyways, indicating this culling was good.<sup>182</sup> Such beliefs and reactions were only encouraged by the desire to gain *Lebensraum*.

As the war expanded and greater production and resource extraction were necessary, both Germany and the Wehrmacht specifically required greater numbers of workers. The result of this was that they grew increasingly dependent on foreign labour. One of the main sources quickly became Soviet POWs, who were available in great numbers, if not great quality due to their mistreatment while imprisoned.<sup>183</sup> Within the first months of the invasion this policy became formalized and even here a Nazi-driven racial hierarchy was at play, the intention being to

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<sup>177</sup> Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941-1945*, 69.

<sup>178</sup> Jacobsen, "The *Kommissarbefehl* and Mass Executions of Soviet Russian Prisoners of War," in Krausnick, et al., *Anatomy of the SS State.*, 508–31. Reitlinger, *The House Built on Sand*, 98–102.

<sup>179</sup> Müller, "The Failure of the Economic 'Blitzkrieg Strategy,'" in *The Attack on the Soviet Union*, 1172–73.

<sup>180</sup> TWC 11:31-33, 57-59. NOKW-1605, Von Roques-24. TWC 10:132.

<sup>181</sup> Halder, *The Halder Diaries*, 1976, 2:1296. Entry of November 14, 1941.

<sup>182</sup> NCA 4:55–58. PS-1517.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 7:9–10, 336-37. D-297. EC-194. Ibid., 3:840-1. PS-1199.

exploit Soviet labour to the utmost.<sup>184</sup> In fact, this exploitation was two-fold, with the Germans not only utilizing Soviet labour, but feeding and paying them as little as possible so as to achieve the maximum surplus for the Third Reich.<sup>185</sup> The widespread and severe mistreatment of POWs, especially with regards to a lack of sufficient food or shelter, was widely known even up to the level of Hitler himself. This was reinforced with regards to those POWs working in Germany, despite the concern of some regarding the influence such mistreatment might have on the German populace.<sup>186</sup> In spite of the high mortality rates and discontent this caused, labour exploitation continued unabated throughout the war. The result of this mistreatment and exploitation was increased resistance from both the Red Army and locals. Soviet soldiers in combat fought harder, and those trapped behind the lines were far less prone to surrendering for fear of what would happen to them in captivity. Civilians witnessing this abuse of their countrymen had yet another reason to be discontented with German rule. The detrimental impact of such actions was realized even by the Germans within the first year of the conflict.<sup>187</sup>

### *Occupation and Counterinsurgency, 1941*

Closely connected to the handling of POWs were the administrative responsibilities of the Wehrmacht in the occupied territories. Although military administration of conquered regions during a conflict is common, the occupation of the Soviet Union, like other aspects of that conflict, was framed within an ideological context that shaped its substance. Given the scale of the conquered territory, military rule was divided into three types of zones, increasingly smaller and more specific the further east the zone was. The *Rückwärtige Heeresgebiete* (Army Group Rear Area) was responsible for most of the military-administered area, while the

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<sup>184</sup> NCA 3:834-37, 841-44. PS-1193, PS-1206.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 7:242-46. EC-3.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 3:225-29, 470-72. PS-228, PS-656. Ibid., 4:559-60. PS-1919. Ibid., 8:146-98. R-124. Ibid., 3:540-43, 823-24. PS-744, PS-1165. Ibid., 5:257-58. PS-2520.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 3:126-30, 242-51. PS-081, PS-294.

individual armies had their own rear zones known as the *Rückwärtige Armeegebiete* (Army Rear Area). These two administrative structures were subdivided into smaller local commands largely along Soviet lines. The main goal here was to logically secure the areas to ensure the army received the necessary supply, to be enforced primarily from the military's end by nine security divisions, three behind each army group. These security divisions were smaller and of a poorer quality than combat units, yet the scope of their mission was vast.<sup>188</sup> The final zone of military administration was the operational or combat zone, subdivided by corps, who controlled the area only directly behind their area of operations.<sup>189</sup> That the military's jurisdiction was to be limited as far as possible in favour of establishing the Reich Commissariats of the OMIs had been made clear in the planning phase of the operation, at the same time as the special role of the *Einsatzgruppen* was established.<sup>190</sup>

There were four pillars of German administration in the occupied Soviet Union: the Wehrmacht, the SS, the OMIs and WiStab Ost, all attempting to achieve their own ends concurrently.<sup>191</sup> One author characterized this multi-faceted rule as an “administrative jungle,” appropriately describing the often-conflicting purposes of these various organizations.<sup>192</sup> The two most notably at cross purposes were the semi-military WiStab Ost – emphasizing longer-term exploitation – and the Wehrmacht – more concerned with immediate supply given their mandate to free up resources for Germany and to prosecute the war effort. The result, as

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<sup>188</sup> Schulte, *The German Army and Nazi Policies in Occupied Russia*, 76–77. Shepherd, “The Continuum of Brutality: Wehrmacht Security Divisions in Central Russia, 1942,” *German History* 21, no. 1 (2003): 56–58. Cooper, *The Phantom War*, 44.

<sup>189</sup> Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941-1945*, 96–97. Förster, “Securing ‘Living-space’,” 1190–2.

<sup>190</sup> NCA 3:410–11. PS-447.

<sup>191</sup> Cooper, *The Phantom War*, 37–41.

<sup>192</sup> Mulligan, “Reckoning the Cost of People’s War: The German Experience in the Central USSR,” *Russian History* 9, no. 1 (1982): 29.

characterized by one scholar, was “anarchy”.<sup>193</sup> The real problem here, however, rose with the necessity of exploitation, as perceived by the Wehrmacht. Field Marshal Günther von Kluge, commenting in April 1942 while head of Army Group Center on this situation, correctly pinpoints the real issue:

The demands of the OKH/GenQu for the period from 1 April 1942 to 31 March 1943 total 1,200,000 head of horned cattle and thus exceed existing stocks, as calculated on the basis of a census on 1 December 1941; these stocks have been greatly reduced by the slaughtering of highly fertile animals. But even if one does not shrink from complete pillage, the last cow would have to be collected, with the help of police covering squads, by the very agricultural leaders whose work is based on the results of the new agrarian order. Such compulsory measures would give rise to a growth or a revival of partisan activity, whose liquidation, however, is a prerequisite of any utilization of the land. At present the areas controlled by the partisans still amount to one-third of the entire operations area.<sup>194</sup>

This “last cow” policy, as von Kluge so perceptively understood, was a cycle of ruthless exploitation that only served to fuel resistance. Exploitation nevertheless continued, largely unabated due to the demands of war and the lack of empathy with the woes incurred on the civilian populace. As a result, such exploitation was the rule of the day. The tensions created by this situation, however, were enhanced by the divided administration, especially amidst the severity advocated for the Wehrmacht.

In a July 3, 1941 radio address calling for the total mobilization of the Soviet state and populace, Stalin was adamant that guerrilla warfare had to form part of the resistance. Laying out the mindset of such a resistance, Stalin declared that the occupiers “must be hounded and

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<sup>193</sup> Rutherford, *Combat and Genocide on the Eastern Front*, 180. Rutherford, “The Radicalization of German Occupation Policies: The *Wirtschaftsstab Ost* and the 121st Infantry Division in Pavlovsk, 1941,” in *Nazi Policy on the Eastern Front, 1941*, eds. Kay, Rutherford and Stahel, 132-46. Müller, “The Failure of the Economic ‘Blitzkrieg Strategy’,” 1093–56.

<sup>194</sup> Cited in Bernd Wegner, “The War against the Soviet Union 1942-1943,” in Horst Boog, Werner Rahn, Reinhard Stumpf and Bernd Wegner, *The Global War, Germany and the Second World War*, vol.6 trans. Ewald Osers, John Brownjohn, Patricia Crampton and Louise Willmot (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1006–7.

annihilated at every step, and all their measures frustrated.”<sup>195</sup> The Soviets in the interwar period had for the most part ignored preparations for any kind of partisan war given the disorganizing purges and the doctrinal emphasis on offensive warfare in other countries over defence on their own territory.<sup>196</sup> In a meeting at his headquarters two weeks later, Hitler noted that Stalin’s vague call to guerilla warfare was not all bad: it offered an excuse to “eradicate everyone who opposes us.”<sup>197</sup> That this comment was couched amidst a discussion regarding the plans for establishing and exploiting *Lebensraum* in the occupied areas of the Soviet Union is not coincidental. This concept was further reinforced around the same time in Hitler’s supplement to his Directive No. 33, where he indicated that ruthlessness in the occupation was the only way to achieve pacification:

The troops available for securing the conquered Eastern territories will, in view of the size of the area, be sufficient for their duties only if the occupying power meets resistance, not by legal punishment of the guilty, but by striking such terror into the population that it loses all will to resist.

The Commanders concerned are to be held responsible, together with the troops at their disposal, for quiet conditions in their areas. They will contrive to maintain order, not by requesting reinforcements, but by employing suitably draconian methods.<sup>198</sup>

At this point, exactly one month into the invasion, when little real resistance was being experienced behind the front lines, the *modus operandi* of the occupation was severity.<sup>199</sup> This framework fits well within the mindset systematized by the Criminal Orders. The conflict was understood as ideological and existential, and thus weakness regarding any threat could spell disaster and destruction. Military necessity, fuelled by ideological radicalism, created an atmosphere where any resistance, actual or perceived, necessitated annihilation.

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<sup>195</sup> Joseph Stalin, *The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union* (1945. Reprint, New York, NY: Greenwood Press 1969), 15. Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East*, 228–29.

<sup>196</sup> For example, see Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East*, 19–22.

<sup>197</sup> NCA 7:1086-93, here 1087. L-221.

<sup>198</sup> Trevor-Roper, ed., *Hitler’s War Directives, 1939-1945*, 144–45.

<sup>199</sup> Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941-1945*, 75. Förster, "Securing 'Living-space'," 1198–99.

Although frontline units were part of the same armed forces as the security units and thus influenced by the same ideology, their tasks and composition were quite different. The frontline units were concerned primarily with combat and keeping their troops supplied, and so the real administrative differences appeared with the more permanent occupation forces as the front line moved further east. This perception was also felt by those within the Wehrmacht, for instance by Guderian, who perceived the real issue to lie with the “so-called ‘Reich commissars.’”<sup>200</sup> Cooper highlights two anecdotal examples of this scenario, where combat units achieved a certain peace and calm with the populace, only to have this shaky tolerance reversed by the subsequent permanent occupation in the form of administrators and garrison units.<sup>201</sup> Other formative factors, including a lengthening war, the increasing implementation of ideology into action – such as violence against Jews – as well as the growing chasm between Germany and victory, and even the environment and culture all played a role in shaping the context of the occupation and resistance.<sup>202</sup> What does hold true almost universally is that the longer the German occupation lasted, the further the populace became hostile. Otto Bräutigam, an official of the OMi acknowledged this in late 1942 when he suggested that the harsh inflexibility of German rule was detrimental to the war effort.<sup>203</sup> Rather than utilizing any potential anti-Bolshevik sentiment, especially in the more recently-acquired Soviet territories of the borderlands, the ideological framework within which the occupation was conducted pushed many to resist.

By the fall of 1941 it was apparent that ideology drove the occupation as it drove the invasion itself, providing both the initial justification and the subsequent fuel and framework. The best early example of this came on September 12, when Keitel issued an order regarding the

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<sup>200</sup> Guderian, *Panzer Leader*, 193–94.

<sup>201</sup> Cooper, *The Phantom War*, 23–24.

<sup>202</sup> Hill, *The War behind the Eastern Front*, 62–63.

<sup>203</sup> NCA 3:242–51. PS-294.

nature and expected treatment of Jews in the Soviet Union. Referring to the Martial Jurisdiction Decree, this order declared that “The fight against Bolshevism necessitates indiscriminate and energetic accomplishment of this task, especially also against the Jews, the main carriers of Bolshevism.”<sup>204</sup> Given this, Jews were not to be cooperated with or trusted beyond their utilization as labour, the only acceptable role for them.<sup>205</sup> The OKW here reflects precisely Hitler’s attitude towards the Jews, and it disseminated this ideology to the various formations on the Eastern Front.<sup>206</sup> This perception of the threat of Bolshevism and the Jews as its main propagator was further reflected in Keitel’s infamous order issued just four days later to all occupied territories. Arguing that Europe-wide resistance was Communist in nature and directed by Moscow, this order suggested that efforts to thwart it thus far had been inadequate, and that subsequently “we take action everywhere with the most drastic means.”<sup>207</sup> Assuming the Communist basis of all resistance, as well as dismissing the worth of human lives in occupied territories, the suggested “drastic means” was a ratio of fifty to one hundred civilian hostage executions for the life of every German soldier taken.<sup>208</sup> Harsh action, rather than more peaceful deterrence, was to form the basis of all occupation authorities. Since the largest and most violent occupation and resistance was experienced in the Soviet Union, this order had the most significance for that theatre.

With SS forces in the rear areas growing larger, their interactions with Wehrmacht rear area security forces and their role in the occupation also grew, specifically with regards to how ideology shaped the perception of resistance in the occupied regions. The increasing deployment

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<sup>204</sup> NCA 3:636. PS-878. This draft copy of the decree incorrectly attributes that Martial Jurisdiction Decree’s publishing date to March 19, rather than May 19, although this appears to have been corrected by the time it was issued.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> TWC 10:1210–11. NOKW-3292.

<sup>207</sup> NCA 6:961-3, here 961. C-148. NCA 3:597–99. PS-829.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 6:961–62. C-148.

of the SS in the rear areas was hastened by the strategic attrition and defeats suffered by the Wehrmacht. Reinforcements became vital, further weakening garrison forces and necessitating the growing utilization of the SS. The implications of this were exemplified in the Mogilev Conference organized in September by General Max von Schenckendorff, head of the rear area of Army Group Center and a strong advocate for the utilization of the SS in counterinsurgency efforts. At the conference, which became a watershed moment in the relationship between ideology and the counterinsurgency, the SS shared its ideas with the Wehrmacht.<sup>209</sup> With slogans such as “Where the partisan is, the Jew is, and where the Jew is, there is the partisan,” coming out of this meeting, ideological influence was reinforced.<sup>210</sup> The transfer of additional SS units to bolster security in the rear areas, further blurred the line between liquidation and counterinsurgency efforts.<sup>211</sup> This trend was further exacerbated by the perception of many that Jews were causally connected to partisans by nature of their distinctive relationship to Bolshevism. Schenckendorff, for example declared that “Links between the partisan groups are mostly maintained by Jews. Villages and farms which are free of Jews were never partisan bases up to now, but they were often attacked and looted by partisan groups.”<sup>212</sup> Other groups, including the Roma, were targeted on similar grounds.<sup>213</sup> Thus, ruthlessness in the treatment of the populace by Wehrmacht and SS counterinsurgency forces, as well as the *Einsatzgruppen*,

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<sup>209</sup> Waitman W. Beorn, “A Calculus of Complicity: The ‘Wehrmacht’, the Anti-Partisan War, and the Final Solution in White Russia, 1941–42,” *Central European History* 44, no. 2 (2011): 325–30.

<sup>210</sup> Förster, “Securing ‘Living-space’,” 1204–5. Citing Krausnick and Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges: Die Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, 1938–1942* (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Verlag-Anstalt, 1981).

<sup>211</sup> Jürgen Matthäus, “Controlled Escalation: Himmler’s Men in the Summer of 1941 and the Holocaust in the Occupied Soviet Territories,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 21, no. 2 (2007): 225–27. Ruth Bettina Birn, “Two Kinds of Reality: Case Studies on Anti-Partisan Warfare during the Eastern Campaign,” in Wegner, *From Peace to War*, 277–78. Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 9–11.

<sup>212</sup> Cited in Birn, “Two Kinds of Reality,” 285.

<sup>213</sup> Michael Zimmerman, “The National Socialist ‘Solution of the Gypsy Question’,” in Herbert, ed., *National Socialist Extermination Policies*, 186–209. Martin Holler, “Extending the Genocidal Program: Did Otto Ohlendorf Initiate the Systematic Extermination of Soviet ‘Gypsies’?,” in *Nazi Policy on the Eastern Front, 1941*, eds. Kay, Rutherford and Stahel, 267–88.

was justified on the grounds that the security of the rear areas and the troops was endangered by enemies, Jewish and otherwise. Resistance in any form, or even a presumed connection to resistance, thereby became punishable by the most extreme measures. During the Pripyat Marsh clearings in August 1941, for example, the SS Cavalry Brigade reported to have suffered 56 casualties, including 17 fatalities, while killing 15,878 persons, including 14,178 Jews.<sup>214</sup> Jürgen Förster, discussing this framework, suggested that "The destruction was inspired by ideology, but rational in its implementation. Military necessity provided the bridge."<sup>215</sup> The Wehrmacht, whose security was used as justification in this, also actively participated themselves.

Involvement in a counterinsurgency infused many German soldiers with ideology. For example, the 707th Infantry Division, based in the Reich Commissariat Ostland, increasingly radicalized their perception of the Jewish involvement with the partisans as the conflict wore on. The result of this development and growing concern regarding the threat of partisan war was that in one month of operations in late 1941 the division executed 10,431 of 10,940 prisoners for only two dead of its own.<sup>216</sup> This disparity indicates that little real resistance was encountered at this point, and that even those with little to no evidence of resistance could be killed out of hand. Fear of the insurgency combined with insecurity stemming from the presence of Red Army soldiers behind the front line. This drove similarly harsh treatment by other formations, rear area units and front-line units.<sup>217</sup> This was, for the most part, in line with an OKH directive from July 1941 that had called for such reactions to partisans and Red Army stragglers, a large number of whom found themselves stranded behind the lines as a result of the rapid German advance. These

<sup>214</sup> Förster, "The Relation Between Operation Barbarossa as an Ideological War of Extermination and the Final Solution," 95–96.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>216</sup> Förster, "New Wine in Old Skins? The Wehrmacht and the War of 'Weltanschauungen', 1941," in *The German Military in the Age of Total War*, ed. Wilhelm Deist (Leamington Spa, UK: Berg Publishers, 1985), 317. Förster, "Securing 'Living-space,'" 1218.

<sup>217</sup> Förster, "Securing 'Living-space,'" 1198–1204.

trained soldiers subsequently had a significant impact on the growth of the partisan movement. One scholar estimates that between 300,000 and 400,000 Soviet troops ended up behind the line – some purposefully dropped there later on – eventually comprising sixty percent of the partisan movement by 1942.<sup>218</sup> An ideologically-fuelled invasion which advocated for the immediate employment of unrestrained violence as the first resort had thus helped to create the conditions for extraneous resistance because of the violent methods utilized, both in the advance and occupation.

The most notorious of these orders clarifying the ideological implications of partisan war and the consequentially harsh responses came from Field Marshal Walther von Reichenau, commander of the Sixth Army, on October 10, 1941. He explained that the conflict had as its central goal the victory of National Socialism over the Asiatic-Jewish threat embodied in Bolshevism.<sup>219</sup> Stating that the most serious consideration was the protection of logistics, including food, billeting and arms, Reichenau demanded decisive action without mercy. “The fear of the German counter-measures,” he declared, “must be stronger than the threats of wandering bolshevistic remnants.”<sup>220</sup> These comments indicate that there were glimpses of humanity displayed by German soldiers, particularly regarding sharing food, a reality confirmed by others, such as Halder.<sup>221</sup> This anecdotal evidence, however, represents the exception rather than the rule in this conflict. Strength in this matter, Reichenau concluded, was “the only way to fulfill our historic task to liberate the German people once for ever from the Asiatic-Jewish danger.”<sup>222</sup> Hitler approved this order, after which it was disseminated to other Wehrmacht

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<sup>218</sup> Cooper, *The Phantom War*, 28–31. See also Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941-1945*, 209.

<sup>219</sup> NCA 7:51-3, here 51–52. D-411.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 52–53.

<sup>221</sup> Halder, *The Halder Diaries*, 2:1317. Entry of November 27, 1941.

<sup>222</sup> NCA 7:53. D-411.

formations in the Soviet Union.<sup>223</sup> Reichenau's superior, Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, issued a message to the entirety of his Army Group South along the same lines, directly referencing the efforts of Reichenau's Sixth Army and emphasizing harsh policies as the best deterrent against resistance.<sup>224</sup> Orders similar in nature to this one were also issued, for example by the commander of the Eleventh Army, Erich von Manstein, who specifically spoke on the Jewish-aided partisan threat.<sup>225</sup> The Babi Yar massacre, conducted in the area of operations of the Sixth army only ten days before Reichenau's original order, provides important context. Justified as retaliation for explosions in Kiev and with the agreement of the military authorities in Kiev *Einsatzgruppen* troops and Order Police executed over 33,000 Jews and others in two days.<sup>226</sup> With the war dragging on and resistance growing, ideology as a pivotal factor in the occupation and counterinsurgency became increasingly important to the Wehrmacht.

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<sup>223</sup> TWC 10:1211–15. NOKW-3411, NOKW-663. NCA 7:49–51. D-411. NCA 8:582-7. UK-81.

<sup>224</sup> Cecil Aubrey Dixon and Otto Heilbrunn, *Communist Guerilla Warfare* (New York, NY: FAPraeger, 1954), 138–39. Kurt DeWitt, "The Partisans in Soviet Intelligence," in *Soviet Partisans in World War II*, ed. Armstrong, 358. See further, Hill, *The War behind the Eastern Front*, 5–6, 62–63.

<sup>225</sup> TMWC-IMT 20:641–43. NCA Supp. A:826-8. PS-4064.

<sup>226</sup> Yitzhak Arad, Shmuel Krakowski and Shmuel Spector, eds., *The Einsatzgruppen Reports: Selections from the Dispatches of the Nazi Death Squads' Campaign against the Jews July 1941-January 1943* (New York, NY: Holocaust Library, 1989), 164, 168, 172-73, 217-20. Entries of September 28, October 2, 7, November 2, 1941. Peter Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich*, 196-98.

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE WAR IN THE REAR, 1942-1944

### *Renewed Partisan War*

Disorganized, pressured and with little likelihood of victory, the partisan resistance in 1941 was quite limited in both scale and efficacy. In 1942, with growing Soviet efforts, the fortunes began to reverse. “Partisans blasted the railroad tracks in the central front between Bryansk and Roslavl at five points,” Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels morosely noted in his diary in mid-May. For him this represented “a further proof of the extremely discomfiting activity of the Partisans.” Goebbels’ subsequent comment regarding the counterinsurgency efforts of Hungarian troops seems to directly connect the incongruence of collective reprisals and the occupation efforts of pacification and exploitation.<sup>227</sup> The same could be said of the Wehrmacht’s efforts, although there was a growing realization amongst German soldiers that violence alone was not an effective way to control the populace. For example, in Army Group Center’s rear area, in the first ten months of the war, 80,000 alleged partisans had been killed, for a total of 3,284 German casualties, including 1,094 killed, a fatality ratio of over 73:1. These statistics also indicate that although the Germans were inflicting serious casualties, the partisan movement was not being suppressed, as shown by the increase of German casualties in the period from March to the beginning of May 1942. Behind Army Group Center, for example, a third of all German casualties in that rear area in 1942 were killed between March and the beginning of May. This increase does not correspond with any noticeable change in the average losses inflicted on partisans.<sup>228</sup> With the increase of partisan activity in the spring and summer, the fighting intensified, as the Germans utilized large-scale sweeps during which they suffered

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<sup>227</sup> Lochner, Louis P., ed. and trans, *The Goebbels Diaries, 1942-1943* (New York, NY: Popular Library, 1948), 138, 151, 228, 254-55. Entries of March 6, 16, April 29 and May 19, 1942 (quote from latter entry).

<sup>228</sup> Mulligan, “Reckoning the Cost of People’s War,” 32. See Table 1.

greater casualties.<sup>229</sup> The partisan war was growing fiercer as experienced by both the Wehrmacht and SS, who were increasingly indistinguishable in their counterinsurgency actions.<sup>230</sup> More importantly, the partisans did not seem to be defeated.

### *Economic and Labour Exploitation*

The growing violence of the counterinsurgency in 1942 was exacerbated by the nature of the occupation itself. A primary example of this was the conscription of labour from the occupied areas of the Soviet Union, which became widespread with the appointment of Fritz Sauckel as Plenipotentiary General for the Utilization of Labour by a decree from Hitler on March 21, 1942. Subordinated to Göring's Four Year Plan, Sauckel was tasked with mobilizing labour to aid the renewed push to expand war industry as the conflict continued.<sup>231</sup> Over the next two months Sauckel established his position and laid out his vision for the task he had been assigned, clarifying that the goal of managing labour and making greater use of foreign labour was primarily intended to maximize war output and to free up men for service in the Wehrmacht. Given this mission, conscription was expected if volunteering was not sufficient to fill quotas, necessitating the assistance of the military and other competent authorities in this process.<sup>232</sup> In this, Sauckel ensured that those aware of his task were also aware of the superseding necessity of it:

The solution of the task concerning the war mobilization of labor is of such decisive importance that even the most important local or regional interests concerning most vital peace tasks must not interfere with it. Whoever violates that rule must be made responsible if the German soldier in his decisive struggle for the fate of our nation lacks arms and ammunition, synthetic gasoline or rubber, vehicles or airplanes.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Mulligan, "Reckoning the Cost of People's War," 34-35, 40. See Tables 2, 3 and 5.

<sup>230</sup> NCA 6:431-33. PS-3715.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 4:181-82. PS-1666. Ibid., Supp. A:347-50. PS-580. Ibid., 5:744-54.PS-3040.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 3:46-59. PS-016. Ibid., 5:756-64. PS-3044.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 3:59. PS-016.

Given this mindset, cruel application was the best method of achieving the goals. This is exemplified in a quota update sent to Rosenberg from Sauckel in October wherein 550,000 Ukrainians were to be drafted for labour over the next seven months. Sauckel there clarified that “I do not ignore the difficulties which exist for the execution of this new requirement, but I am convinced that with the ruthless commitment of all resources, and with the full cooperation of all those interested, the execution of the new demands can be accomplished for the fixed date.”<sup>234</sup> In addition to the exploitation of resources, the German occupation was on its way to being shaped by the exploitation of Soviet manpower.

Despite the fact that Sauckel’s early directives had established that the treatment of labour was to be civil, the reality was quite different. A memo written in September, just five months after Sauckel’s appointment, noted that on almost every point the treatment of the *Ostarbeiter* (Eastern workers) directly contravened Sauckel’s idealized plan, indicating systemic disregard rather than sporadic issues.<sup>235</sup> Tooze, in his study of the economic nature of the Third Reich in war, attributes this destructive process to the intersection of the need for increased production and an ideological disregard for the life of *Untermenschen*.<sup>236</sup> The Wehrmacht routinely complied with this policy, as can be seen by the fact that of the 1,685,000 *Ostarbeiter* in March 1943, fully half had come from Wehrmacht-administered areas.<sup>237</sup> This labour conscription also, as noted by Sauckel himself, aided the Wehrmacht by freeing up “hundreds of thousands” of German men for military service.<sup>238</sup> The Wehrmacht’s role in this process was immense, and their involvement speaks volumes. Amidst growing evidence of the cruelty and abuse exhibited in the conscription and transportation of this labour, Sauckel’s power only grew,

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<sup>234</sup> NCA 3:60–61. PS-017.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 130–46. PS-084. Ibid., 7:2–4. D-288. Ibid., 3:90–99. PS-054.

<sup>236</sup> Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction*, 550.

<sup>237</sup> Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941–1945*, 451. Mulligan, *The Politics of Illusion and Empire*, 114.

<sup>238</sup> NCA 3:389–90. PS-407-II.

resulting in increased quotas and higher importance in the Nazi administration, especially in 1943. Such a policy was so unsustainable that even those responsible for implementing the “Hunger Plan” complained, with one official in Minsk stating in 1943 that “The recruitment measures in the last months and weeks were absolute manhunts, which have an irreparable political and economic effect.”<sup>239</sup> It also came up directly against the eliminations being conducted by the *Einsatzgruppen* in the Soviet Union, where the need for labour contradicted a general disregard for human life. In an order issued to its subordinate units, *Sonderkommando 4a* – a part of *Einsatzgruppe C* – ordered that the necessary “special treatments” be limited as far as possible in favour of gathering labour, including the provision that “As a rule, no more children will be shot.”<sup>240</sup> The labour effort had thus become paramount.

The primary intersection between the German occupation and the average Soviet citizen was in agriculture, where, after the destruction of most industry in the scorched earth strategy utilized by the Red Army in retreat, much of the populace was employed. Arguably one of the most effective ways in which the German occupation could have helped to win over the Soviet populace was a land reform, presuming the dissolution of the collective farms and the privatization of land for farmers. Such a reform could have earned the sympathy of the population, thereby impeding partisan growth. There was, however, little movement on this issue in the first year of the occupation. Goebbels himself identified this problem in mid-1942:

The new slogan, ‘Land for the Peasants!’ appealed especially strongly to the rural population. We could have achieved this success much earlier if we had been cleverer and more farsighted. But we were geared altogether too much to a brief campaign and saw victory so close to our very eyes that we thought it unnecessary to both about psychological questions of this sort. What we then missed we must now attempt to catch up with the hard way.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> NCA 4:546–47. PS-1903. NCA 3:65–66. NCA 4:969–71. PS-2280. NCA 5:726. PS-3000.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 5:731–32. PS-3012.

<sup>241</sup> Lochner, ed., *The Goebbels Diaries, 1942-1943*, 228. Entry of April 29, 1941.

Even had the Germans cared about the well-being or support of the Soviet populace, few of their decision-makers believed that the war would last long enough for that to become a relevant concern. They were far more concerned with exploiting the Soviet Union to the greatest extent, especially with regards to foodstuffs. As Keitel made clear in an order from autumn 1942,

The food situation of the German people is such that it is necessary for the Armed Forces to contribute as far as possible towards alleviating it. All the necessary means of doing so exist in the combat zones and in the occupied zones in the occupied territories both in the East and West.

It is essential, above all, that much greater quantities of supplies and forage ... should be secured in the occupied territories of the East than has been the case up to now.

All establishments should consider it their pride as well as their duty to attain this goal at all costs so that in this field, too, they may play a decisive part in achieving victory.<sup>242</sup>

This order indicates continuity rather than a change of policy. Nevertheless, as the conflict in the Soviet Union entered its second year, advocates of reform became louder and more numerous as it became increasingly apparent that the dogmatic application of ideology was harming rather than aiding the war effort.

Whether for political or practical reasons, the OMi was among the first organizations to advocate for true reform. As early as a May 1942, Rosenberg noted that the economic situation in the occupied Soviet Union – dominated by Germans and geared towards exploitation – caused great resentment and discontent amongst the populace.<sup>243</sup> In a memo written in October 1942, Bräutigam comprehensively critiqued the attitude behind and actions of the German authorities in the Soviet Union. He believed that an agrarian reform would be a highly effective method for winning over the people: “A form of government which was not intent only on plundering and exploitation and which put aside the Bolshevik methods would have kindled the greatest

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<sup>242</sup> TMWC-IMT 8:43. USSR-175.

<sup>243</sup> NCA 4:66–67. PS-1520. TWC 13:848–51, 857-66. NI-3777, NI-440. NCA 7:242-44. EC-3.

enthusiasm and put at our disposal a mass of millions. And the enthusiasm in the occupied Eastern territories would have had its reaction on the force of resistance of the Red Army.”<sup>244</sup> Suggesting that agrarian reform and the dismantling of collective farms would have gone a long way to providing this eagerness, Bräutigam decried the hesitation and opposition on the part of some authorities, specifically of those enforcing the Four Year Plan and the heads of both Reich Commissariats. This, he argued, was having an increasingly negative impact on the populace’s perception of the German administration, thus fuelling Soviet propaganda and resistance.<sup>245</sup> For Bräutigam, the overall solution was obvious: treat the Soviet populace better and give them something to look forward to, otherwise “the power of resistance of the Red army and of the whole Russian people will mount still more, and Germany must continue to sacrifice her best blood.”<sup>246</sup> This assessment was concurred with by a detailed report in December from the OMi liaison with Army Group North, which asserted that “the present Eastern policy must undergo a fundamental change in its basic points.”<sup>247</sup> This sentiment was again reinforced at a conference between the OMi and Wehrmacht in the same month, although the conclusion was rejected by Hitler.<sup>248</sup>

#### *Counterinsurgency Policy Changes in 1942*

Good relations between the administration and the civilian populace are vital to a successful counterinsurgency, and reform is a key tool in the arsenal of the occupier to encouraging this state of affairs. Misunderstanding of this fact was one of the primary issues in the German occupation. As Dallin points out, the reforms that were made in 1942 and 1943 were for the most part negated by the cruelty exhibited in the process of the anti-partisan war and the

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<sup>244</sup> NCA 3:244. PS-294.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 244–45.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 245–50.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 932–58, quote at 933. PS-1381.

<sup>248</sup> Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941–1945*, 152–54, 358. Mulligan, *The Politics of Illusion and Empire*, 50.

occupation: “Terrorism and other German measures, notably forced labour conscription, wiped out whatever political benefit the Reich might have derived from the more substantial agrarian reform.”<sup>249</sup> Half-hearted and belated reforms did little to change people’s minds in the face of so much negative experience, further exacerbated by the fact that the partisans increasingly frustrated their enforcement. For example, in a mid-1943 report to Rosenberg from a region of Reich Commissariat Ukraine, while reforms were underway to redistribute land in cooperatives – a half-way measure between collectivization and privatization – less than half of the area’s resources were under German control due to the widespread activity of partisans. Furthermore, those working for Germany were increasingly in danger of being attacked by partisans.<sup>250</sup> Worsening this situation, the OKW initiated a scorched-earth policy in tandem with the complete evacuation of economic and human resources from areas threatened by the Red Army, as the war decisively turned against Germany in the summer of 1943.<sup>251</sup>

This growing sense of a need for change in the German occupation authority was matched in the military, and the results were equally mixed. The OKW first attempted to come to grips with the reality which hit them in the 1941-2 winter reverses: that the Red Army and thus the Soviet Union were not broken. As Warlimont notes, Hitler agreed – largely at the Wehrmacht’s behest – in May 1942 to temporarily reverse the policy targeting commissars and guarantee their lives. Intended as an experiment, the purpose was to encourage desertion and surrender, despite Warlimont’s subsequent and dubious assertion that the original order had been largely ignored from the beginning.<sup>252</sup> It does, however, suggest that although the Wehrmacht had shown itself more than willing to accept ideological orders, it had doubts about their

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<sup>249</sup> Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941-1945*, 320-75, here 348.

<sup>250</sup> NCA 3:234-38. PS-265.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 7:405. EC-317.

<sup>252</sup> Warlimont, *Inside Hitler’s Headquarters, 1939-45*, 169-70.

implementation when it saw that these orders were counterproductive. This style of reform became increasingly common as the war continued. Rather than expressing moral reservations in this situation, the Wehrmacht justified their concern of the impact of such policy on their ability to achieve victory, their primary goal as a military force. The fact that Hitler had the final say in military decision-making was to have grave consequences for the German counterinsurgency in 1942 amidst the growing call for overall reform. The partisan war was expanding and becoming increasingly violent, meaning that more Wehrmacht resources were being utilized to fight the growing insurgency in the rear.<sup>253</sup>

The first response took place on August 18, 1942, when Hitler issued his Directive No. 46. This, however, was more a continuation than an alteration. Citing the growing threat of “banditry” – the name given to partisans by the Germans – to the Wehrmacht’s logistics and the economic exploitation, the directive demanded that the guerrillas be “substantially exterminated” with all means available.<sup>254</sup> “Active operations” and “rigorous measures,” including collective reprisals, were to be applied at the same time as the population was to be dealt with “strictly but justly.”<sup>255</sup> This directive acknowledged the role of the population in defeating the partisans, but both severity and leniency were called for. One scholar has classified the internal contradictions of this directive, in relation to the earlier supplement to Directive No. 33, as an attempt to “square the circle.”<sup>256</sup> The delineation between the areas of responsibility in the counterinsurgency between the SS and the Wehrmacht was reinforced, with the SS in total control in the Reich Commissariats, while the Wehrmacht were exclusively in control in the areas of military administration. In areas of responsibility that crossed over administrative

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<sup>253</sup> See, for example, NCA, 6:424–25. PS-3711.

<sup>254</sup> Trevor-Roper, ed., *Hitler's War Directives, 1939-1945*, 197–202, here 197–98.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>256</sup> Wegner, "The War against the Soviet Union 1942-1943," 1014.

boundaries, however, it was the SS who gained power. Himmler was designated as the “central authority” in the war against the partisans, and while Wehrmacht units could still be subordinated to SS commanders, there is no mention of SS forces being subordinated to Wehrmacht commanders.<sup>257</sup> Furthermore, an increase of forces, both German and collaborator, was to take place. That collaborator units were being built up indicates that National Socialist ideology could be overruled by pragmatic needs in certain situations.<sup>258</sup> The promotion of the SS to the primary authority on counterinsurgency, however, suggests that ideology remained central. The growing role of the SS stemmed primarily from the same motivation as what drove the development of collaborator forces: a pragmatic need of dedicated manpower. While they possessed more sufficient forces for the task than the Wehrmacht, their prominent ideological basis was no disqualifier. As a result, this increasingly came to define the counterinsurgency.

In his new capacity as head of the counterinsurgency in the Soviet Union, Himmler appointed Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski as “Chief of Anti-Partisan Combat Units” on October 23, 1942. Formerly *Hoher SS- und Polizei Führer* (HSSPF) Center – the ranking SS commander behind Army Group Center – Bach-Zelewski’s new position had him serving as the head of the German counterinsurgency in the Soviet Union as Himmler’s representative.<sup>259</sup> This reflected the SS’s growing role in the counterinsurgency, as well as their established authority over the German state’s security apparatus. His appointment was also looked on favourably by Hitler, who viewed him as a “clever chap,” who could handle difficult missions.<sup>260</sup> The increasing power of the SS in the counterinsurgency indicates that the growing impact of partisans was to

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<sup>257</sup> Trevor-Roper, ed., *Hitler’s War Directives, 1939-1945*, 199–200.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 200–202.

<sup>259</sup> TMWC-IMT 4:475-96. NCA 6:425-29. PS-3712. TWC 13:321. PS-1919. See further, Blood, *Hitler’s Bandit Hunters the SS and the Nazi Occupation of Europe*.

<sup>260</sup> Warlimont, *Inside Hitler’s Headquarters, 1939-45*, 291–92.

be countered with more ideology, rather than less.<sup>261</sup> This continued, rather than countered, a pattern of ideologically-influenced counterinsurgency.<sup>262</sup> The “reform” in the counterinsurgency came on November 11, 1942, when the OKW issued the “Combat Directive for the Anti-Partisan Warfare in the East” described by one historian as providing justification for both the reformer and the radical.<sup>263</sup> It was only slightly more lenient than the framework established by Directive No. 46, calling for decisive but fair responses to resistance. This Wehrmacht directive, however, did not sit well with Hitler, who as a result issued a further clarification on December 16 wherein he stressed that there were to be no restrictions in the combating of partisans:

If this war against the bands in the East and in the Balkans is not waged with the most brutal methods, the available forces will in the near future no longer be sufficient to overcome this plague.

For this reason the troops are justified and obliged in this combat to resort to all measures—even against women and children—without leniency, as long as they are successful.<sup>264</sup>

The reasoning for this decision was not new or any different from previous directives on the matter. Rather, it was a continuation of policy, flying directly in the face of any desires for reform. Fearful that any hints of leniency in the counterinsurgency might mean ultimate defeat, Hitler reacted quickly to ensure there was no confusion.

#### *Counterinsurgency, 1942-1944*

Military necessity, the justification which had initially encouraged ideological alignment subsequently became one of the primary motivators for changing policy. Ideological adherence was not so blind in the Wehrmacht as may be presumed based on the military’s overall record during the Second World War. As Dallin notes, Ewald von Kleist and Erich von Manstein, commanders of Army Group A and Army Group South, respectively, among others began

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<sup>261</sup> TWC 13:269–72. NO-1128.

<sup>262</sup> NCA 3:416–17. PS-498. NCA 6:1014–16. C-179. NCA 4:262–63. PS-1742.

<sup>263</sup> Mulligan, *The Politics of Illusion and Empire*, 139–40.

<sup>264</sup> TMWCC-IMT 15:545, 557–58. NCA 8:575–76. UK-66. TWC 10:1166–69, quote at 1168. NOKW-2961.

issuing calls for moderation and cooperation with the populace.<sup>265</sup> The varying perspectives of how to handle the people so as to best subdue them were all provided with justification by the orders and directives issued in late 1942. The occupation authorities were never fully able to escape from the notion that resistance was to be punished in the most violent way. This attitude came increasingly into contact with that perspective that saw a more balanced and nuanced approach as the way to achieve the sought-after quiet in the rear. General Hans Röttiger, Chief of Staff for the Fourth Army in Army Group Center, noted in an affidavit for the Nuremberg Trials that while harshness was often advocated from up the Wehrmacht hierarchy, other methods could be and were implemented. In the case of the Fourth Army, he claims that their area was for the most part clear of partisans by the spring of 1943, the result of a more balanced approach that included taking – rather than executing – prisoners and employing propaganda alongside incentives.<sup>266</sup> Similarly, Adolf Heusinger, head of the OKH's Operations Department, was highly critical after the war of the occupation's methods. According to his statement at Nuremberg, he had disapproved of the “military insanity” throughout the war, believing such ruthlessness to have been a “welcome opportunity” to eradicate undesirables.<sup>267</sup> Though this retrospective condemnation must be treated cautiously, it becomes apparent the tying together of counterinsurgency and ideologically-motivated mass killing was a widespread policy, and that many were aware of it.

Although this ambiguous approach to counterinsurgency did enable certain flexibility, the overarching emphasis remained with the application of force. This was exemplified in Operation “Cottbus”, which took place in the early summer of 1943. Utilizing units of the Wehrmacht, SS

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<sup>265</sup> Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941-1945*, 549–50.

<sup>266</sup> NCA 6:429–31. PS-3713-3714.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 434–35. PS-3717.

and police, and commanded by SS General Curt von Gottberg, the operation targeted a partisan stronghold in Belarus. The result was 6,000 killed in battle, 3,700 “liquidated” afterwards and 600 prisoners taken. A further 5,500 men and women conscripted for labour, and another 2-3,000 civilians died in “cleaning-up” – by walking over – minefields. In exchange, the Germans and their auxiliary forces suffered a total of 672 casualties, including 127 killed. The collection of weapons seized totalled 47 artillery weapons and 1,025 small arms. All of this information comes from an SS report on the operation, signed by Bach-Zelewski himself, further indicating awareness at the highest levels.<sup>268</sup> The disparity in casualties, as well as in weapons found indicates that while this operation did engage partisans, the vast majority encountered were nothing of the sort. This operation was heavily criticized, specifically by officials from OMi and the Reich Commissariat Ostland, where the operation took place. Reich Commissar Lohse went so far as to compare the operation to an infamous Soviet massacre of Poles discovered by the Germans earlier in the invasion, asking “What is Katyn against that?”<sup>269</sup> The outcome, however, was no change in counterinsurgency policy. In fact these methods were approved by the OKH, as witnessed by the medal given several months later to Oskar Dirlewanger, a notoriously brutal SS commander. Partly in recognition for his units’ actions in “Cottbus”, the citation commended the unit and its commander for killing 15,000 “guerillas” and seizing 1,456 weapons while suffering “a minimum of losses” with 318 casualties, including 92 fatalities.<sup>270</sup>

Such sweeps and harshness did not, however, defeat or even discourage partisan activity. Hill, in his study of the counterinsurgency by Army Group North, has shown that in their area of

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<sup>268</sup> TWC 13:305–9, here 308-9. NO-2608.

<sup>269</sup> NCA 8:205–8. R-135. TWC 13:516–22. NO-3028.

<sup>270</sup> TWC 13:527–29. NO-2923.

responsibility alone, partisan actions in 1943 increased by up to 500%.<sup>271</sup> Alfred Jodl, Chief of the OKW's Operations Department, in his testimony at Nuremberg cited 1,560 train attacks in July and a further 2,600 in September of that year against Axis forces in the Soviet Union as evidence of the increasing tempo of partisan activity.<sup>272</sup> The deteriorating security of the rear was further exacerbated by the front-line context of 1943. The year opened with the decisive defeat of Germany at Stalingrad with the surrender of Field Marshal Friedrich Paulus' Sixth Army in the midst of large-scale Soviet counteroffensives. This continued with the stunting of the Wehrmacht's Operation "Citadel" at the Kursk Salient in the summer.<sup>273</sup> The German forces, already overextended, were further stretched by the losses suffered. This further undermined security in the already-undermanned rear areas. From the summer of 1943 on, the Red Army decisively held the strategic advantage, although the German withdrawal from the Soviet Union took more than another full year. With the SS increasingly responsible for counterinsurgency efforts and the plan to retreat behind a policy of scorched earth, the situation of occupation did not improve, although Hill does note that there were limited displays of humanity from some Wehrmacht soldiers.<sup>274</sup>

The deteriorating strategic situation that faced the Wehrmacht from 1943 did not result in a growing distance between National Socialism and the armed forces. Rather, 1943 represents a year in which that relationship grew closer than it had ever been previously.<sup>275</sup> This can be seen most especially in the utilization of Nazi-style ideological officers within the Wehrmacht. These *Nationalsozialistischer Führungssoffiziere* ("National Socialist Leadership Officers" – NSFOs) were intended to maintain morale and ensure adherence to the tenets of National Socialism.

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<sup>271</sup> Hill, *The War behind the Eastern Front*, 156–57.

<sup>272</sup> TMWC-IMT 15:336–37.

<sup>273</sup> Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East*, 154–77, 244–67, 390.

<sup>274</sup> Hill, *The War behind the Eastern Front*, 150–55.

<sup>275</sup> Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich*, 179, 276.

Deep-seated fear of the power of the military to interfere with or bring down the National Socialist state, as well as a growing desperation for the reinvigoration of the military made this move appealing. Such a move was in part welcomed by the troops themselves.<sup>276</sup> The introduction of these officers discarded military rationality in favour of an insistence on fervent ideological loyalty.<sup>277</sup> The true result, however, as noted by one scholar, was a growing prevalence of nihilism amidst an already-stringent atmosphere in terms of discipline worsened by the increasing politicization of the war.<sup>278</sup> Such an attitude perpetuated German reactions to resistance. Even the failed plot of July 20, 1944 to kill Hitler only reinforced the sincerity with which the military maintained its adherence to National Socialism, as well as the ties binding the two pillars together.<sup>279</sup> The creation and power of this cadre within the Wehrmacht signifies just how far this alliance had progressed.

It was in the final phase of retreat from the Soviet Union that the Wehrmacht made its first sincere attempt at reforming their occupation. Issued on May 6, 1944 by the OKW, the directive entitled “Warfare against Bands” was a direct successor to the November 11, 1942 directive.<sup>280</sup> Perceived by Jodl, the author of the document, as a moderate approach to the counterinsurgency, the reality is that this was an example of too little, too late.<sup>281</sup> While it certainly advocated for a more lenient counterinsurgency policy, the harshness was still prevalent. For example, collective reprisals were still allowed, and instead the threshold of

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<sup>276</sup> Wette, *The Wehrmacht*, 165–75. Stephen G. Fritz, “‘We Are Trying... to Change the Face of the World’—Ideology and Motivation in the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front: The View from Below,” *The Journal of Military History* 60, no. 4 (1996): 695.

<sup>277</sup> Rutherford, *Combat and Genocide on the Eastern Front*, 355–56.

<sup>278</sup> Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 239–40. Manfred Messerschmidt, “The Wehrmacht and the Volksgemeinschaft,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 18, no. 4 (1983): 735.

<sup>279</sup> John Wheeler-Bennett, *The Nemesis of Power: The German Army in Politics, 1918–1945*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke, UK / New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 678.

<sup>280</sup> Cited in Dixon and Heilbrunn, *Communist Guerilla Warfare*, 201.

<sup>281</sup> TMWC-IMT 15:335–38.

responsibility was simply shifted upwards to the division commander level with regards to the Wehrmacht.<sup>282</sup> Nevertheless, the directive does seem to have had some positive influence in the brief time it was implemented. This can be seen by the drastic change in the number of captured and deserting partisans compared to those killed in the area of Army Group Center. In the preceding months, February to April 1944, the approximate ratios of partisans captured or deserted to those killed were, respectively, 1:3.5, 1:3.8 and 1:4.8. Meanwhile, in May and June the ratios in this same area were 1:1.9 and 1:2.5, respectively. While based on incomplete data, these numbers nevertheless indicate that newly-implemented policies had an important influence on how the counterinsurgency was conducted.<sup>283</sup> The impact, however, was brief and the new policy could never take root in any meaningful way. This document was issued only seven weeks before the Red Army's Operation "Bagration" began, which ultimately drove the Wehrmacht out of the Soviet Union. In other words, a significant alteration to the Wehrmacht's counterinsurgency policy that might have positively improved their practice to the point of success was not in the making until the occupation itself was at an end.

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<sup>282</sup> Cooper, *The Phantom War*, 107.

<sup>283</sup> Mulligan, "Reckoning the Cost of People's War," 44.

## CONCLUSION

Following the end of the occupation of the Soviet Union in 1944 when Germany had been forced to leave its territory, Rosenberg reflected back on the administration effort. While arguing for a united command in future endeavours, the former head of the OMi also characterized the three years of occupation as being defined by “a boastful arrogance, which in wide circles, indeed sometimes even in public, proclaimed the inferiority of the subject peoples without the elementary political awareness that such an attitude must provoke hatred and resistance in any people”<sup>284</sup> Rosenberg’s comments illustrate the fact that contempt for the Soviet people was prominent, both before and during the conflict. Dallin, discussing the German occupation of the Ukraine specifically, clarifies exactly what this meant in the context of the counterinsurgency:

... ignoring the voices clamouring for a new ‘enlightened’ policy, those who had authority – from Hitler to Koch – remained stubbornly committed to their myths and visions. While the German troops were victorious, concessions to popular aspirations were considered superfluous; when they lost, concessions were deemed dangerous. When resistance snowballed, the reply was increased terror against the ‘unruly hordes’.<sup>285</sup>

These two reflections, one from a leader in the administration and the other a scholar studying it after the fact can both be summed up in one word: ideology. While resistance further soured this ideological framework, the reality is that it had been established before the first soldier crossed the Soviet frontier on June 22, 1941.

In the decades since the Second World War came to an end, debate has raged over the roots and causes of the evils committed by the Nazi regime, as well as the motivations of the many thousands of Germans who aided its efforts in a variety of roles. In more recent years this

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<sup>284</sup> Cited in Jonathan Steinberg, “The Third Reich Reflected: German Civil Administration in the Occupied Soviet Union, 1941–4,” *The English Historical Review* CX, no. 437 (July 1, 1995): 623.

<sup>285</sup> Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941–1945*, 166–67.

can be seen in the debate which was ignited from some dormancy by the controversial work of Daniel Goldhagen, who argued from a deterministic perspective for the success of National Socialism in Germany.<sup>286</sup> While this argument has, for the most part, been discarded by academics as deterministic and insufficiently evidenced, the question of individual responsibility in the era of Nazi Germany remains. Another scholar has identified broader cooperation as representing an “array of complicity” within German society towards National Socialism.<sup>287</sup> As an organization, the Wehrmacht was the largest group among Germans that supported Hitler in his goals. Proving knowledge, intent and support of National Socialism and what it stood for among individual members of the German military is impossible on any grand scale, although examination of the diaries of various soldiers – from *Landsers* to field marshals – provides an enlightening glimpse. Undoubtedly the reactions and convictions of individual soldiers varied widely, from total adherence to total disregard, across the entire structure of the Wehrmacht. Nevertheless, military hierarchies are rigid and institutional, so individual feelings rarely factor in any meaningful way without great external pressure. So while the Wehrmacht was represented both by soldiers who killed unarmed civilians and soldiers who gave other civilians food, the organization within which such actions took place viewed the former action as necessary harshness and the latter as weakness. As a result of the long and profound infiltration of National Socialism into the Wehrmacht, its subsequent actions are best understood as being framed by this ideology. Even though understanding intent might help explain why certain actions were or were not taken, it does not change the fact that actions were taken. In this context, those actions had a direct and important impact on the chances for success of the counterinsurgency conducted by the Wehrmacht throughout the occupation. The fact is that National Socialism was able to seep

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<sup>286</sup> Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).

<sup>287</sup> Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich*, 7.

into and alter mindsets. This made the requisite patience and balanced strategy necessary to achieve victory in a counterinsurgency difficult to establish at an institutional level or for extended periods of time.

National Socialism, as established by Hitler, was based around three primary concepts: land, race and struggle. Oversimplified, National Socialism, with specific reference to the German nation, advocated for struggle to secure land to protect the superior Aryan race. Because the Aryans – as culture-creators – were important to the survival of humanity, they required greater land to thrive, the logic following that this land should come primarily at the cost of inferior peoples, in this case the Slavs of Eastern Europe. Conveniently, the Soviet Union offered the perfect ideological trifecta for National Socialism in that: 1) its destruction was justified on account of its Bolshevik and Jewish leadership; 2) it had vast and bountiful lands; and 3) it was populated by Slavs who were both weak and superfluous, and therefore easily conquered and removed. Upon gaining power, this animosity towards the Soviet Union was not readily apparent amongst many in the Nazi party, largely for reasons of practicality and more immediate concerns, including securing and purifying Germany itself. It was, however, during these early years that the ideological groundwork and political control was achieved by Hitler over the Wehrmacht. As a result, when plans for war against the Soviet Union finally came to the forefront in 1940, this *Weltanschauung* was quickly introduced, as can be seen with plans for the mostly Slavic nation following its conquest, as well as the Criminal Orders implemented in the months prior to the actual invasion. The influence of this ideology remains central to understanding why the counterinsurgency was conducted in the way that it was. While ideology helped to shape military thinking, nowhere was this more prevalent than in the Wehrmacht's actions in the Soviet Union.

Though clear and detailed plans regarding the exploitation of the Soviet territory were established both prior to and during the invasion, the same cannot be said for the Wehrmacht's role in securing the rear areas. This can be attributed to the fact that the war against the Soviet Union, like other wars conducted by the Wehrmacht to that point in the war, was intended to rapidly lead to a conclusion. In the Soviet context a gamble on the *Blitzkrieg*-style warfare was aggravated by the ideological premises formulated by Hitler, premises that had thoroughly infected both the political and military authorities in Germany. Events in the first weeks of the invasion did not alter this mentality, although even by July it was becoming apparent that the war was not progressing as planned. As a result, as the Wehrmacht began to occupy Soviet territory, either in its own administration or as a subordinate force to the Reich Commissariats, the conflict was not drawing down, but instead growing, further straining an already-immense task. Large numbers of Red Army soldiers, stranded by the speedy German advance and discouraged from surrendering by the German treatment of prisoners, engaged in partisan war. When the front stabilized, the Soviet state could invest in aiding the partisans with equipment, training and experts, thereby encouraging further and fiercer resistance. The German occupation did little to effectively discourage or defeat such efforts.

Ideology, more than just influencing the planning phase of operations, also shaped how the Wehrmacht fought its war. The Criminal Orders, specifically the Martial Jurisdiction Decree, the Directives for the Behaviour of the Troops in Russia and the Commissar Order, had the intended consequence of further brutalizing the nature of the invasion, on both the front line and in the rear. In contradiction to the highly-structured and highly-disciplined nature of military organization and authority, these orders disseminated responsibility regarding the treatment of both Soviet civilians and soldiers, in addition to advocating for greater reliance on brutal force

and ruthless exploitation of local labour and resources. The fact that the underlying mentality changed slowly over the course of the war suggests that the concept of military necessity still held weight. There was, however, little change at the highest levels, particularly among the strongest ideological adherents to Nazism. While the Third Reich's war effort crumbled, ideological influence over the Wehrmacht grew drastically, rather than receding. As the conflict progressed and the security situation in the rear deteriorated, it became increasingly apparent that a more nuanced and balanced approach to the civilian populace was vital to separating them from the partisans. This was, however, the opposite of what was being propagated by the decision makers, who believed that the real issues were a lack of energy in suppressing any and all resistance. This mentality can be witnessed in the growing leadership role which the SS took in the counterinsurgency, not a good sign for a more balanced approach. The bed that the Wehrmacht had made with National Socialism now came around to almost entirely deny them any flexibility they might have desired.

Even though the war against the Soviet Union would lead the Third Reich to its grave, the partisan resistance played a relatively minor role in the Soviet war effort. While the partisans did achieve success, particularly regarding logistical disruption, intelligence gathering and the maintenance of Soviet authority in the occupied areas, the partisans were not central to destroying the Wehrmacht.<sup>288</sup> The fact remains, however, that the war in the rear was brutal, as called for by both sides. The scale of the area involved, the desperation experienced by those on both sides and the realities of war all shaped how this counterinsurgency was perceived and fought. In contextualizing this issue, it becomes even more apparent that ideology did not play a role as an afterthought or that it was introduced *ex post facto* as a motivator. Rather, National

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<sup>288</sup> Cooper, *The Phantom War*, 146–47. Mulligan, *The Politics of Illusion and Empire*, 45–47.

Socialism altered the very foundations of military planning, discipline and hierarchy prior to and during the conflict with the Soviet Union. This was done deliberately with the intention of providing the fuel necessary to drive a *Weltanschauungskrieg*. While this approach certainly encouraged ruthlessness in the counterinsurgency, it also made alternative approaches undesirable and difficult to implement. The partisans may not have been as effective as the Red Army had hoped, but neither did the Wehrmacht achieve “quiet in the rear.” Ideology did then play a vital role in the nature of the counterinsurgency by radicalizing the means, although it did not achieve the desired ends.

In the years following the war it has been the role and motivations of the German military in particular that have received the most focus and created the greatest debate. One needs to look no further than the notorious *Historikerstreit* experienced by Germany in the 1980s to realize that this issue, and the broader problem of how to remember and contextualize the experience of the Second World War has not been resolved. Efforts to absolve average Germans of any sense of guilt or culpability, together with the desire to entirely distinguish between actions of the military and of the Nazis, intended to heal the nation, only offered a temporary bandage, and a weak one at best.<sup>289</sup> One historian even described the entire resultant historiographical episode as “more heat than light,” reflecting the fact that the war – as a historical event – is still very fresh in the minds of many.<sup>290</sup> This extends beyond simply the strong sentiments engendered by the legacy of this conflict. The contemporary world is much the product of the Second World War, and many of the events experienced today have direct connections to events which transpired during and because of that conflict. This is also true of the two main topics at issue here: specifically,

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<sup>289</sup> Peter Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich*, 305-6.

<sup>290</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution* (Jerusalem, Israel: International Institute for Holocaust Research, Yad Vashem / New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 13.

the influence of National Socialism and Hitler on the Wehrmacht, and the resultant counterinsurgency against the Soviet partisans. In both of these it can be safely said that the Wehrmacht was a central actor, forming one of the most prominent intersections between these two subjects. Ideology was a decisive factor in shaping the counterinsurgency, and its impact was counterproductive in the effort to either defeat the partisans or appease the populace. If history is, as Hitler thought, the tracing of human struggle, then the Wehrmacht's counterinsurgency represents a microcosmic example of National Socialism's failure.

The impact of such unconventional conflicts on broader struggles has continued on through to the twenty-first century. In fact, the utilization of guerilla warfare seems to be on the rise in the era of nuclear deterrence and powerful conventional militaries. While the dominant ideologies have changed drastically from those experienced during the Second World War, the overall influence of ideology has remained significant. The best contemporary example of this can be seen in the irregular conflicts fought by democracies against para-religious insurgencies in both Afghanistan and Iraq over the past fifteen years. Led by the United States and aided by numerous other nations sharing their political, social, economic and moral values, both of these conflicts stem from the War on Terror declared after the events of September 11, 2001. Initially intended as conflicts against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan and the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, these dual conflicts quickly morphed into extended counterinsurgencies to aid in establishing viable democracies in both countries. Rather than wholeheartedly embracing democracy and what it offers, there has been a noticeably more lukewarm reception to this imposition by the populaces. The assumption and hope of those who launched these campaigns that democracy would be enthusiastically embraced by the majority indicates ideological bias.

Markedly different from the conflict between the Third Reich and Soviet partisans, there are nevertheless noteworthy parallels to be found in the West's struggle.

The imposition of democratic values, while significantly less violent in its application than National Socialism, still contextualized how the insurgency was to be countered, just as the Wehrmacht was influenced by Hitler's ideology. This shaped strategy and tactics at all levels, but has not led to a definitive closure of the conflict. Western militaries, primarily trained for conventional conflict in the Cold War vein, have had to entirely alter their mindset and skills to implement effective counterinsurgencies, which in the case of democratic ideology require an immensely deft approach. Furthermore, the implementation of democratic principles in all spheres of life requires enormous financial investment, as well as the commitment of personnel and political willpower. As liberal ideology understands national self-determination to be vital, the near-total reliance on local forces has resulted in festering insurgencies that continue in the form of ISIS and the Taliban. The heavy dependence on firepower, justified not only by the desire to reduce counterinsurgency casualties but also by ideology labelling the opponents as "terrorists", and the ensuing disregard of "collateral damage", aggravated this trend. Finally, the influence of public opinion on the governmental decision-making process in liberal democracies, in tandem with unprecedented public exposure to the events of such conflicts around the globe via technology and far-reaching news coverage has created a situation in which proper counterinsurgencies are difficult or impossible to maintain. Counterinsurgencies, by their nature, are drawn out attritional conflicts. With the public in democracies made aware of casualties and costs incurred in counterinsurgencies immediately and often in great detail, support for the continuation of such conflicts is largely unsustainable. As members of a liberal democracy, the public has significant power to oppose and even vote against the continuation of such conflicts.

The serious and sustained commitment of sufficient forces and support necessary to defeat insurgencies seems to have been lost to twenty-first century democracies moving forward. This presents a difficult problem to these countries, particularly in a world seemingly moving toward such types of conflicts with increasing regularity.

While the counterinsurgency practiced by Nazi Germany and fought by the Wehrmacht varies widely from this more contemporary scenario, the impact of ideology on war planning remains strikingly similar. Just as the Wehrmacht and other occupation authorities were unable and often unwilling to escape the constraints placed on their efforts by their adopted worldview, so too have democracies demonstrated ideological determinism in their approaches to counterinsurgency. This determinism is no more or less central to shaping worldviews in the West than National Socialism was in Nazi Germany, although the outcome is markedly different. Ideology remains an inescapable part of the national character in every country and across the political spectrum. The application of this research regarding the Wehrmacht's struggles to contain Soviet partisans should serve as a call to contemplation as to how Western liberal states shape, influence and constrain engagement in counterinsurgencies. Regardless of whether history repeats, rhymes or simply guides, the anecdotal evidence would suggest that democracies, just like National Socialism, are doomed to fail against insurgencies if they remain inflexible in their own worldview and ignorant of their biases.

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