

SPECIAL ISSUE

In Tribute to Sir Martin Gilbert

S:I.M.O.N.

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S:I.M.O.N. – Shoah: Intervention. Methods. DocumentatiON.

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Special Issue in Tribute to Sir Martin Gilbert

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A-1010 Wien, Rabensteig 3, Österreich

CONTACT | KONTAKT

simon@vwi.ac.at

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Yaron Pasher, Verena Buser and Boaz Cohen

Introduction

Special Issue in Tribute to Sir Martin Gilbert

Abstract

This special issue of the S.I.M.O.N. Journal, dedicated to the memory of Sir Martin Gilbert, examines the intersection of the Second World War and the Holocaust – two pivotal events that shaped modern history but, quite surprisingly, were long studied as separate and disconnected phenomena. Inspired by an international conference organised by Western Galilee College in March 2024, this collection explores interconnected narratives of military strategy, genocidal policies, and resistance. Topics include Winston Churchill's complex relationship with Zionism, the controversial question of bombing Auschwitz, British responses to the Holocaust, and the ideological and genocidal dimensions of Nazi policies. The issue also delves into the experiences of children during the Holocaust, Wehrmacht operations, and Jewish resistance in Belarus. By bridging military and Holocaust studies, this volume underscores Sir Martin Gilbert's legacy and his pioneering approach to integrating Jewish history into broader historical narratives. Through this collection, the issue seeks to deepen understanding and inspire further exploration of the intertwined histories of war and genocide.

The interconnected histories of the Second World War and the Holocaust have increasingly garnered scholarly attention in recent decades. For too long, these pivotal events were examined in isolation, treated as separate spheres of academic inquiry. However, as Sir Martin Gilbert – one of the most prolific and respected historians of the twentieth century, the official biographer of Winston Churchill, and the creator of numerous historical atlases – demonstrated in his pioneering works, the intersection of these two histories offers insights into the ideologies, decisions, and consequences that shaped the modern world.¹ This special issue of *S.I.M.O.N.* is dedicated to the memory of Sir Martin Gilbert and his enduring contributions to Holocaust and Second World War studies.

This project has its roots in an international conference hosted by the Holocaust Studies Program at Western Galilee College in Akko, Israel, in March 2024. Scholars from around the world gathered to discuss and debate the intertwined narratives of the Second World War and the Holocaust, inspired by Gilbert's legacy. Considering the fact the conference took place in the shadow of the October 7 massacre and the Iron Swords War that followed, this event became more relevant than ever. What began as a vibrant exchange of ideas has now evolved into this special issue, which brings together a series of specially written articles that collectively explore the connections between military history, genocidal policies, resistance, and the lived experiences of those who endured and resisted the horrors of war and genocide.

The issue opens with Lady Esther Gilbert's reflection on her late husband's methodology and legacy. Drawing on Sir Martin's extensive body of work, she highlights his unique ability to weave the Jewish experience into broader historical narra-

1 Martin Gilbert, *The Official Biography of Winston S. Churchill*, vols. 3–8 (London: Heinemann, 1971–1988).

tives, ensuring that the voices of victims and survivors were never lost amid the grand strategies of war. Her essay sets the tone for the issue, emphasising the moral imperative of integrating Holocaust history into the study of the Second World War.

The contributions that follow examine the diplomatic and strategic challenges faced by world leaders during the war. Allan Packwood – drawing on his role as director of the Churchill Archives Centre at the University of Cambridge and his personal connection with Sir Martin Gilbert – delves into Winston Churchill’s evolving relationship with Zionism and the Jewish people. Packwood’s detailed analysis reveals Churchill’s ideological alignment with Jewish self-determination, set against the backdrop of British imperial constraints, and offers a nuanced view of his statesmanship and personal convictions.

Building on this exploration of wartime diplomacy, Glen Segell examines the role of Polish intelligence and its interaction with Allied decision-making. His work highlights the controversial question of why Auschwitz was not bombed – an issue tangentially addressed by Martin Gilbert in his groundbreaking work, *Auschwitz and the Allies*² – and sheds light on the diplomatic and logistical barriers that contributed to missed opportunities to save lives. Segell’s analysis provides critical insights into the complex interplay of intelligence, military strategy, and moral responsibility during the war.

Yaacov Falkov’s study brings a nuanced perspective to the geopolitical tensions of the time, exploring the fraught relations between Britain, Poland, and Germany during the early years of the conflict. Using newly uncovered archival materials, Falkov highlights the moral and strategic compromises that characterised wartime alliances and reveals the delicate balancing act of realpolitik in an era of existential threats.

Yaron Pasher shifts the focus to Britain’s strategic priorities, critically examining its responses to the Holocaust in the context of broader wartime objectives. Pasher’s exploration of the Evian Conference, the White Paper of 1939, and the Allied Joint Declaration of 1942, with an emphasis on the Casablanca Conference resolutions on “unconditional surrender”, illustrates the tensions between strategic imperatives and humanitarian obligations, revealing the complexities of British policy during the war.

From the focus on policy, diplomacy, and strategy, the collection moves to the ideological and genocidal dimensions of the Holocaust. Miriam Offer’s meticulous investigation into the anti-childbirth decrees in the Lithuanian ghettos uncovers one of the most harrowing aspects of the Nazi genocidal agenda. Her work contextualises these decrees within the broader framework of Nazi policies aimed at eradicating Jewish life at its inception, offering a sobering insight into the extremes of ideological warfare.

Boaz Cohen’s contribution centres on the systematic targeting of Jewish children as a distinct and deliberate aspect of the Holocaust. Through a detailed examination of bureaucratic and logistical measures, Cohen argues for the recognition of a specific “war against the Jewish child”, underscoring the genocidal intent and the organised nature of these atrocities.

Verena Buser brings a human dimension to these narratives by exploring the experiences of children who survived the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Her work draws on oral histories to reveal how children adapted to the extreme conditions of the camp, often forming networks of solidarity and resilience. Buser’s analy-

2 Martin Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies* (New York: Holt, 1981).

sis highlights the psychological and social mechanisms that enabled survival in one of the Holocaust's most infamous sites.

Agilolf Kesselring broadens the scope with an in-depth analysis of Wehrmacht operations in Yugoslavia and Karelia. His work explores the nexus between anti-partisan warfare and genocidal policies, demonstrating how military operations often served as a pretext for mass atrocities. By examining the contrasting behaviours of the same military unit in different contexts, Kesselring provides a nuanced understanding of the dynamics of ideology, strategy, and circumstance.

Finally, Daniela Ozacky-Stern turns to the narratives of resistance, focusing on the transformation of Jewish victims into active fighters in the forests of Belarus. Through survivor testimonies, she examines the psychological shift from victimhood to empowerment, the challenges of integration into partisan units, and the moral dilemmas faced by those who chose to fight. Her work underscores the resilience and agency of individuals who, against all odds, took up arms to resist their oppressors.

This special issue underscores the importance of bridging military history and Holocaust studies to achieve a fuller understanding of both fields. By examining the intersections of ideology, strategy, and human experience, the articles collectively challenge traditional boundaries between these disciplines.

Sir Martin Gilbert's work serves as a guiding light for this endeavour. Much like the work of his contemporaries, such as Gerhard L. Weinberg, his dedication to integrating Jewish history into the broader narrative of the Second World War has inspired a new generation of scholars to pursue interdisciplinary approaches that honour the complexity of the past. This special issue stands as a testament to Sir Martin's vision and as a call to further explore the interconnected histories of war and genocide.

We hope that the contributions in this issue not only deepen our understanding of the Second World War and the Holocaust but also inspire future research that continues to break down disciplinary boundaries and prioritise the human stories at the heart of history.

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Esther Gilbert

Martin Gilbert – History and the Jews, the Second World War and the Holocaust

<https://www.martingilbert.com/>

Abstract

This article explores the methodology and contributions of Sir Martin Gilbert, one of the few historians of the twentieth century to integrate the Jewish experience into the broader historical narratives of the Second World War and the Holocaust. Gilbert's unique approach, characterised by meticulous research, the extensive use of primary documents, and personal testimonies, sought to highlight the intertwined fates of Jews and the nations embroiled in the war. His work emphasised that the Jewish story, often sidelined in traditional war histories, is an integral part of the larger narrative.

Through examples drawn from Gilbert's seminal works, including *Kristallnacht: Prelude to Destruction* and *The Second World War: A Complete History*, this study examines how he documented the plight of European Jewry alongside the strategic and political challenges faced by leaders like Winston Churchill. Key topics include Gilbert's mapping of synagogue destruction during Kristallnacht, Britain's Kindertransport initiative, Churchill's resistance to anti-Jewish immigration policies, and the Allied Declaration of December 1942.

As Lady Esther Gilbert reflects, Martin Gilbert's portrayal of Jewish resistance and defiance, such as Adolf Liebeskind's doomed attack on German forces in Cracow, ensures that these acts are remembered as more than just "three lines in the history books". By weaving the Jewish experience into the broader context of global conflict, Gilbert reshaped historical discourse, ensuring that the Holocaust was understood not as a separate tragedy, but as a fundamental part of the twentieth-century story.

One of the defining moments of the twentieth century was the Second World War, the reverberations of which resonate well into the twenty-first century, affecting the future, a direct result of the past. The attempt to obliterate the Jews of Europe, their religion, culture, language – their very existence – was intimately bound up with the German attempt to create a new world order based on Nazi ideology. In fact, the Nazi world view could not survive in a world in which Jews lived, as their visions were so diametrically opposed. Yet, most scholarship focuses either on aspects of the war, or on aspects of the Jewish story during the war, such as the Holocaust. To Sir Martin Gilbert, the history of the Jews of Europe during this time is rightfully woven into the general history of the war.

Why did Sir Martin do that? How did he do it, and how does he bring his readers along with him? I believed that Jews were a part of general history and I wanted to learn more. I became one of the many readers of his books.

During the fifty years of his working life, Martin wrote eighty-eight books, among them six of the eight volumes of the official biography of Winston Churchill, and

twelve volumes of documents, with the eleven additional volumes based on his research and methodology. It is called the “official” biography because Martin spent more than twenty years going through fifteen tons of Churchill-related documents, and he created the largest biography ever written.

All that page-turning taught Martin how he wanted to write history – by basing his work on the documents, and then giving a perspective, a flavour for Churchill’s life by quoting those who knew Churchill, those who worked with him, and those who worked against him. This method of using personal testimony – personal perspective – to give a human voice to the documents became Martin’s approach in all of his work. This is most powerful in his writings about the Holocaust, in which Jewish accounts, both contemporary and post-war, give us a window into the dire situation facing Jews at every turn.

Martin wrote three books on the Second World War, and eleven books on different aspects of the Holocaust, from *Kristallnacht* to *Final Journey*. But it was one of his correspondents who made me aware of how Martin viewed the Jewish story and its place in the wide expanse of history.

Martin answered all his correspondence, and when he became ill in 2012 it was left to me to take that on, if only to explain that Sir Martin had been taken ill and could not answer any of the various questions posed to him. One of the letters was from a gentleman in Greece who had read Sir Martin’s *The Second World War: A Complete History* and wondered why it contained so much about Jews.

My first reaction was that this gentleman must not particularly like Jews and did not like their appearance in a book about the history of the war. So, the letter went to the bottom of the pile. But eventually it surfaced again and I felt I had to answer it. This is what I wrote:

[i]n Sir Martin’s writing, he has always tried to weave in the stories of each country and the plight of the common man, whether as soldier, or civilian. From a humanitarian and an economic point of view, the story of the Jews of Europe is an integral part of the history of the war, because Jews lived in each of the countries involved.

It made me realise how Martin has woven the Jewish story into all of his books. And, indeed, his itemised index of his *The Second World War* shows 336 entries for Jews – in a book of 750 pages of text. In what other history of the war does the specific Jewish experience have such a significant presence?

Martin was British and having followed Churchill’s life on practically a day-by-day basis, and having gone through the archives, especially those from Churchill’s time in government, Martin had a grasp of the realities of war from the British perspective in particular, which he had researched so thoroughly. I would like to touch on three areas that he has written about or shown in his maps.

In Martin’s book *Kristallnacht: Prelude to Destruction*, he mapped the towns and cities where synagogues were destroyed: it covers thirteen maps. In his research and map drawing, he found that it was every synagogue in Germany and Austria that was destroyed.

Martin describes the pogrom itself, the lead up to it, and the aftermath. Britain took in more than 40,000 Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria before the war. Most had needed skills or job opportunities in Britain. But the international outcry when the news of Kristallnacht reached Britain led to an extraordinary event. Martin writes:

[o]n December 14 ... Neville Chamberlain’s Cabinet decided to allow a continuing influx of German Jewish children to enter Britain. The only provi-

sion was that the Jewish refugee organisations in Britain would guarantee to maintain them.¹ But then: A snag had arisen. According to British law, children could not be scattered in private homes all over the country unless each of them had a legal guardian. To ensure legality, Parliament passed the Guardianship (Refuge Children) Act in record time.

And Martin observes: “[n]o other country made such an effort to take in Jewish children as Britain”.²

It was only at the onset of war when the borders were sealed that the Kindertransport scheme had to stop. Still, nearly 10,000 children had come to Britain to safety. This evacuation of children from Germany and Austria was something Martin could empathise with. He was himself evacuated four times from his home in London, as were many British children and their families to be safe from German bombing and due to the fear of German invasion. Martin’s farthest evacuation was to Canada, where he spent four years in Toronto, having left as a three-year-old, without his parents, never sure if he would return or whether his family – and his country – would be intact when he did.

These were very real fears for Britain’s survival. From May 1940, when the Germans crushed France, until June 1941, when Germany invaded the Soviet-occupied lands, Britain fought alone. Churchill was able to negotiate help from Roosevelt, and by the end of September 1941 the Arctic convoys began with supplies diverted to the Soviet Union.

These materials sent to the Soviet Union ate into both Britain and America’s essential war needs and nearly starved Britain of much-needed supplies. Yet, despite many ships being lost by German sinkings, the materials kept the Soviet Union in the war. Britain had been unprepared, a country eviscerated by the First World War, a country that could not contemplate another disaster such as that.

In a 1993 speech which Martin gave at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on Churchill and the Holocaust, which was later published, he described the harsh realities Churchill faced during this time when Britain fought alone:

Churchill did understand, in October-November 1940, that if the intense bombing of Britain continued to be as effective as it was then, the public might call for an administration which would demand peace with Hitler almost at the price of annihilation. It was always possible that the bombing would be too severe; that the way forward would not be clear; as he explained on one occasion to President Roosevelt, this could happen:

“Although the present Government and I personally would never fail to send the Fleet across the Atlantic if resistance was beaten down here, a point may be reached in the struggle where the present Ministers no longer have control of affairs and when very easy terms could be obtained for the British Island by their becoming a vassal state of the Hitler Empire. A pro-German Government would certainly be called into being to make peace, and might present to a shattered or a starving nation an almost irresistible case for entire submission to the Nazi will.”³

It was not only the Germans who were making life difficult for Churchill. In the same speech, Martin described what Churchill was up against in his hope to alleviate

1 Martin Gilbert, *Kristallnacht: Prelude to Destruction* (London: HarperCollins, 2006), 186.

2 *Ibid.*, 187.

3 Martin Gilbert, “Churchill and the Holocaust: the Possible and the Impossible”, in *Proceedings of the International Churchill Societies, 1992–1993*, ed. Richard M. Langworth (Concord, NH: International Churchill Society, 1995), 47.

the situation for the Jews of Europe while he had been First Lord of the Admiralty when war broke out in 1939:

Churchill was under the determination of the Conservative Government, of which he had become a part, not to alter any of the legislative acts which that government – which had an enormous parliamentary majority ... had passed before the outbreak of war, in particular with relation to Palestine, the Jewish refuge. It was pointed out to him, correctly from a constitutional point of view, that he was not the leader of the Conservative Party – this position was still held by Neville Chamberlain – and that he had not been brought to power by Conservative desire, but by the Labour Party's refusal to serve under Chamberlain. The Conservatives had their legislation, it had been voted, it was in place, and his duty was to conduct the war, not to carry out a retrospective, even a vindictive, attitude towards the policies he, as a maverick, as an outsider, had opposed.⁴

Among the attitudes Churchill had opposed was that of trying to appease Arab opinion by severely limiting Jewish immigration to Palestine. Martin writes:

Churchill challenged these attitudes. He did so to the increasing annoyance of his colleagues and, while he remained at the Admiralty, in vain. "It seems to me", he told the Cabinet on Christmas Day 1939, "that with the world in flux and the life of every European nation and of Britain hanging in the balance, we ought not to say that the sole fixed immutable fact in the world is that Jewish immigration into Palestine must cease".⁵

Even as Prime Minister, Churchill faced a bureaucratic impasse, as Martin describes it: Britain was ruled, in war as in peace, by a vast bureaucratic apparatus ... the civil servants met together and came, after long deliberations which survive in their archives, to the conclusion that the question of Jewish refugees was not a political, but an administrative one, since the political decision to exclude the Jews had already been taken. Therefore, all that remained to be done was to carry it out administratively. This meant that it need not be the subject of memoranda and reports to politicians. In that way they could get on with it on their own, and no one in the Cabinet need know about it.⁶

In example after example, Martin found requests for help for Jews which never made it to Churchill's desk. However, Churchill was successful in ensuring that any Jew who reached Istanbul would be admitted to Palestine. By 1944, more than 6,000 Jews were able to reach safety with British passports, each passport containing hundreds of Jews listed.

Churchill had challenges not only with the British government but with Britain's allies. He was, however, able to stand his ground with the Allied War Declaration of 17 December 1942. Martin describes Churchill's success:

[i]n the course of my researches, I found that many members of the British government and the United States administration sought to water down this declaration about the nature of the crimes being committed. ... Churchill was emphatic that this should not be a declaration of what was thought to be happening or what might be happening, which is what the State Department wanted to say, but what was actually happening: "this bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination" was the phrase used.⁷

4 Ibid., 44.

5 Ibid., 45.

6 Ibid., 45–46.

7 Ibid., 53–54.

An act of partisan defiance against the “cold-blooded extermination” took place five days later in Cracow. In his *The Second World War*, Martin describes the event, sandwiching it between the fighting in the Caucasus in early December, and the German Field Marshal von Paulus having run out of fuel outside of Stalingrad on 23 December and thus unable to relieve his “besieged Sixth Army”. Martin writes:

[o]n December 22nd, an act of defiance was carried out in the very centre of German-occupied Europe, in the Polish city of Cracow, where six members of the Jewish Fighting Organisation, which had been set up in Poland five months earlier, attacked a cafe frequented by the SS and the Gestapo. Armed only with pistols, their attack was doomed to fail. The aim of the attack, one of them later wrote, was “to save what could be saved, at least of honour”. Their leader, Adolf Liebeskind, was killed by German machine-gun fire. “We are fighting”, he had remarked a few weeks before the attack, “for three lines in the history books”.⁸

Martin told me that whenever he wrote about Liebeskind, he always made sure to give him at least four lines.

These are three of the many aspects of Martin’s work: what he reported and why he understood its importance having himself experienced the tides of history; the chronology and context of what was going on in the background when decisions were taken and acted upon that Churchill had to face; and how, in his quiet and subtle way, Martin Gilbert wrote History, giving the Jewish story the voice, the space to be the integral part that it is.

⁸ Ibid., 388.

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Lady Esther Gilbert is the wife of the late Sir Martin Gilbert. She worked closely with him, travelling to numerous Holocaust and Second World War sites, including Volhynia in Ukraine, where her parents were born and her grandparents were killed. Since Sir Martin's passing, she has dedicated herself to preserving his legacy, ensuring that his books remain accessible to those interested in what he called "true history".

Recently, Lady Gilbert has overseen the publication of new editions of *Atlas of the Holocaust* and *Atlas of Jewish History*, integrating maps from Sir Martin's other works. She also maintains his website, martingilbert.com, and writes monthly newsletters highlighting his contributions to history.

As a second-generation Holocaust survivor, Lady Gilbert has long been committed to Holocaust remembrance, a passion she has pursued since the 1980s. In the early 2000s, she created the *Holocaust Memoir Digest*, a project that uses quotations from published survivor memoirs to explore various aspects of the Shoah. To date, three volumes of the *Digest*, covering twenty-one memoirs, have been published.

Email: esthergilbert36@gmail.com

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Allen Packwood

Churchill, Israel and the Jews

Understanding Their Place in His World View

Abstract

This article examines Winston Churchill's evolving world view through the lens of his relationship with the Jewish people, Zionism, and the establishment of the State of Israel. It contextualises his actions and rhetoric within his broader imperial and strategic priorities, highlighting the interplay between his Western-oriented values, personal aspirations, and British national interests. Churchill's stance on Zionism and Jewish immigration, while grounded in philo-Semitism, was often pragmatic, shaped by geopolitical realities and the constraints of his time.

Drawing on archival materials and key biographical accounts, the article traces Churchill's relationship with Jewish communities, from his early opposition to the Aliens Bill (1905) to his advocacy for a measured Zionist policy during his tenure as Colonial Secretary from 1921 to 1922. It also explores the complex dynamics of his wartime leadership, including his support for the Jewish Brigade and calls to address the Holocaust. Despite his consistent condemnation of antisemitism and his acknowledgment of Jewish contributions to Western civilisation, Churchill's actions were limited by the systemic and political structures in which he operated.

The article argues that Churchill's support for Zionism reflected both his romantic idealism and realpolitik, as he sought to balance imperial priorities with humanitarian concerns. By situating Jewish and Zionist issues within Churchill's broader worldview, the study sheds light on the nuanced and often contradictory nature of his leadership, revealing both the possibilities and limitations of his influence during a transformative era.

A version of this article was first delivered online to the Sir Martin Gilbert International Conference on the Second World War and the Holocaust held by the College of Western Galilee on 13 and 14 March 2024. The author was lucky enough to know Sir Martin Gilbert, whose productivity was immense. Not only was he a leading scholar of Jewish history and the Holocaust, but he was also the official biographer of Sir Winston Churchill.¹

It is not surprising, given his own Jewish background and research interests, that Martin also wrote a book specifically about *Churchill and the Jews*.² In fact, his volume is part of a small and specialist subset of the broader Churchill literature relating specifically to Churchill's relationship with the Jews, Zionism, and Israel. Sir Martin may well have been spurred to take up his pen by an earlier publication, also called *Churchill and the Jews*, written by Professor Michael Cohen, an Israeli scholar, in 1985. Cohen's book reviewed Churchill's actions towards the Jews throughout his long life and career, before concluding rather negatively that during the Jews' two periods of greatest need "during the Holocaust, and the struggle to

1 Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, vols. 3–8 (London: Heinemann, 1971–1988). Sir Martin was a literary assistant to Randolph S. Churchill for volumes 1 and 2.

2 Martin Gilbert, *Churchill and the Jews* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007).

secure diplomatic recognition for the State of Israel – they found Churchill wanting”³

It is a verdict that seems to contrast with that delivered by Norman Rose eight years later, in his essay *Churchill and Zionism* which appeared in a seminal reassessment of Churchill that was edited by Robert Blake and William Roger Louis and published in 1993. Rose’s conclusion was that: ... few Englishmen have a better record on behalf of Zionism ... Churchill has still earned the right to stand in the front rank of the Gentile Zionists of his day.⁴

A similarly positive line can be found in the introduction to Sir Martin’s volume *Churchill and the Jews* published in 2007. Here, Sir Martin quoted Churchill as saying that “[t]he Jewish people know well enough that I am their friend” before going on to make a rare explicit editorial intervention of his own and stating firmly that “[t]his was true: he was both a friend in their hours of need, and a friend in deed”⁵

The same year – 2007 – saw Michael Makovsky publish his book *Churchill’s Promised Land: Zionism and Statecraft*, which argued that Churchill was a strong supporter of the Zionist movement, noting that his

more sentimental interests – including religious, racial, historical, humanitarian, familial, personal, mystical and civilizational – as well as his ideological interests drew him to it. The Zionist movement, which appeared so far-fetched early in his career and became so unpopular in England later in his career, captured his imagination and became integral to his world view.⁶

More recently, these studies have been supplemented by works on Churchill that offer slightly different perspectives on his relationship with the Middle East. Warren Dockter, in his study *Churchill and the Islamic World: Orientalism, Empire and Diplomacy in the Middle East*, published in 2015, has written on Churchill’s complex relationship with the Islamic world. Dockter reminds us that Churchill’s view of Muslims was more nuanced than is often presented, and that Churchill was acutely aware that the British Empire – which he so desperately wanted to preserve – contained the largest Muslim population in the world.⁷ While Richard Toye, in his book *Churchill’s Empire: The World That Made Him and the World He Made*, published in 2010, puts the focus firmly on Churchill’s realpolitik and argues that, in 1922, “Churchill supported Zionism only insofar as it was compatible with British power, and over the coming years the aspiration for Jewish statehood was to conflict increasingly with imperial rule”⁸

Interestingly, these works do not disagree about the fundamental facts of Churchill’s relationship with the Jews, Israel, and Zionism, although they choose to emphasise different aspects and so reach quite different conclusions about the extent to which he was actively – as opposed to intellectually – pro-Jewish and pro-Zionist. To understand these debates, it is necessary to quickly present the broader context of Churchill’s life and career.

3 Michael J. Cohen, *Churchill and the Jews* (London: Frank Cass, 1985), 329.

4 Norman Rose, “Churchill and Zionism”, in *Churchill: A Major New Assessment of His Life in Peace and War*, eds. Robert Blake & William Roger Louis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 166.

5 Gilbert, *Churchill and the Jews*, xvi.

6 Michael Makovsky, *Churchill’s Promised Land: Zionism and Statecraft* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 8.

7 Warren Dockter, *Churchill and the Islamic World: Orientalism, Empire and Diplomacy in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015).

8 Richard Toye, *Churchill’s Empire: The World That Made Him and the World He Made* (London: Macmillan, 2010), 148.

Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill was born into the highest echelons of late Victorian society as the grandson of the seventh Duke of Marlborough, to an American mother and a father, Lord Randolph Churchill. Winston Churchill's father was a leading Conservative politician who had enjoyed a meteoric political rise before throwing away high office with an ill/judged resignation. Winston did not excel academically at school. He seems to have had few close friends, and he was earmarked for a career in the army rather than university. The early death of Lord Randolph in 1895 acted as a catalyst, freeing Winston from his father's shadow and spurring him to prove himself to his father's ghost. Between 1895 and 1900, and the ages of twenty and twenty-five, he embarked on a series of military adventures. What set him apart from other young aristocrats seeking glory in the Empire was his pen: he wrote up his campaigns as newspaper articles and books, using them to generate not only an income but also a public profile, and to get himself elected to parliament as a Conservative member for the Borough of Oldham in 1900.

Churchill's political career was controversial from the beginning. He became a member of a small group of disruptive Conservative MPs called the "Hughligans" (named for one of their number, Lord Hugh Cecil) before breaking with the Conservative Party over opposition to the introduction of tariffs. Churchill's vocal support for free trade led to his defection to the Liberal Party in 1904. His timing was opportune as the political pendulum was clearly swinging towards the Liberals, who won the general election of 1906. This necessitated a change of constituency, and Churchill moved down the road from Oldham to represent Manchester North-West. It brought him into contact with Manchester's substantial Jewish population, and it is perhaps no coincidence that it was at this time that he won considerable Jewish support for his opposition to the Aliens Bill, which had been designed to restrict Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe. His switch to the Liberals brought him into government as undersecretary of state at the Colonial Office. From 1908, Churchill enjoyed the patronage of Prime Minister Herbert Asquith and established a close working relationship with the Welsh politician David Lloyd George. Churchill entered the British Cabinet at the age of just thirty-three and served as president of the Board of Trade (1908–1910), home secretary (1910–1911), and first lord of the admiralty (1911–1915), helping to introduce reforms to working conditions, prisons, and the navy. Yet, there were always limits to Churchill's radicalism, and he remained at heart a Victorian paternalist. The tensions between his support for the liberal agenda, his imperialism, and his belief in the established order are recurring and important elements of his world view. As early as April 1897, while still serving in the army, he had written a letter to his mother in which he set out his early political philosophy. Describing himself as a "Liberal in all but name", he summarised his world view as follows:

1. Reform at home. Extension of the Franchise to every male. Universal Education. Equal Establishment of all religions. Wide measures of local self government. Eight hours. Payment of Members (on request). A progressive Income Tax ... I will vote for them all.
2. Imperialism abroad.
East of Suez Democratic reins are impossible. India must be governed on old principles.⁹

⁹ Letter from Winston Churchill to his mother, 6 April 1897, Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Churchill Papers, CHAR 28/23/31-33A.

The commitment to religious freedom is noticeable, as is the contrast between the need for liberalism and reform at home and imperialism on old principles – meaning less democratic ones – overseas. Churchill inherited many of the racial, cultural, and historical views of his age and class, but he also believed in progress and tended to see the struggles of the age in terms of civilisation versus barbarism.

The First World War was a defining experience for Churchill, one that nearly destroyed his political career and which challenged many of his pre-war assumptions about British power and progress. Desperate to see the British navy play a more prominent role, he was the leading advocate in Cabinet for the disastrous attempt to force the Dardanelles Straits, besiege Constantinople, and knock Turkey out of the war. Though originally intended as a purely naval operation, events escalated when the fleet failed to force its way into the Sea of Marmara, leading to the disastrous Gallipoli landings. Defeat heaped pressure on Asquith to restructure his government and bring in the Conservative opposition. Their price for coalition was Churchill's removal from the Admiralty. Clementine Churchill feared her husband would die of grief. He served briefly as chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, an office without any real power, before resigning from government and taking up a military commission on the Western Front, where he commanded a battalion of the Royal Scots Fusiliers in 1916. It was at this low ebb that he also discovered a passion for painting, a preoccupation that was to become much more than a simple hobby.

The events of 1914 to 1918 changed his world view. The devastating conflict in the European theatre was aptly described by Churchill as *The World Crisis* because it fundamentally weakened the old order.¹⁰ The nation states of Europe had failed to maintain the balance of power and were left in ruins. The new world in the form of the United States had been seen as coming to the rescue of Britain and her allies. The dynamic of Empire had been altered: Britain was left struggling to meet the cost of direct rule in her colonies, while the Dominions had gained in independence. The naval race with Germany in the years leading up to 1914, in which Churchill had played a key role as First Lord of the Admiralty, had undermined Britain's naval supremacy. The arrival of the Dreadnought, the submarine, the aeroplane, and the move from coal to oil, had created a new playing field on which British dominance could no longer be guaranteed. Revolution had brought the Bolshevik communists to power in Russia, while Russian and British weakness in the Pacific had strengthened the hand of Japan. Churchill's post-war approach to the Middle East was one that was governed by British weakness, not strength.

By 1918, Churchill was back in government as minister for munitions (1917–1919) and then as secretary of state for war and air (1919–1921) and secretary of state for the colonies (1921–1922). It was a period that saw him involved in dealing with the aftermath of the global conflict, in Ireland, in the Middle East, and in his visceral response to the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. He chaired the Cairo Conference which created the boundaries of modern-day Iraq and Trans-Jordan and which advocated a policy of managed Jewish immigration into the British mandate of Palestine, based on the principle of the country's economic capacity to absorb increased numbers. The defeat of Lloyd George's coalition government in 1922, after an election campaign during which Churchill was struck down by illness, famously left Churchill "without an office, without a seat, without a party, and without an appendix".¹¹

¹⁰ Winston Churchill, *The World Crisis*, 6 vols. (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1923–1931).

¹¹ Winston Churchill, "Election Memories", in *Thoughts and Adventures* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1932), 213.

It took him just over two years to get back into parliament and, shortly thereafter, in response to the rise of socialism at home and communism abroad, he rejoined the Conservative Party. To Churchill's surprise, he was amply rewarded for this second defection when Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin made him chancellor of the exchequer. Churchill's time in that office between 1924 and 1929 is often dismissed as a failure, with his decision to return the country to the gold standard widely seen as contributing to the subsequent Great Depression. The beginning of the 1930s saw him relegated to the Conservative backbenches and the political wilderness, out of office and campaigning against the Conservative-dominated governments of Baldwin and then Neville Chamberlain, initially opposing greater independence for India, and later promoting British rearmament and condemning the appeasement of Hitler's Germany. To many, he now seemed a warmonger, a reactionary, and a dinosaur, yet as the risk of a new war grew, so did his reputation – fuelled by his oratory and writings.

It was the outbreak of war that brought Churchill back to the political front rank, returning to the office of first lord of the admiralty that he had held at the commencement of the First World War. Then came his premiership. Churchill was not elected prime minister. He led a national coalition government for five years. It was during these years, and especially in 1940 and 1941, that his reputation as the "greatest Briton" was formed. He is widely credited with leading from the front and is often praised and sometimes criticised for his bellicosity. The Anglo-American alliance was certainly central to his thinking and world view, but he also had to manage the relationships with the Soviet Union, the Empire, and other allies. He was often fighting from a position of weakness, not strength. The later stages of the war found both Britain and Churchill struggling to cope with their declining world role. Churchill warned of the dangers of Soviet expansionism in southern and eastern Europe but failed to recognise the swinging political pendulum on the domestic front.

The Conservative Party was comprehensively defeated in the 1945 general election, but Churchill refused to retire and stayed on as leader of the opposition. He wrote and published his multi-volume war memoirs and embarked on new political campaigns. In the face of Soviet domination of Eastern Europe and the developing Cold War, he sought to maintain and strengthen the alliance with the United States while also promoting greater unity between the countries of Western Europe.

Churchill had stated in 1942 that he had not become the king's first minister to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire. However, out of power from 1945, he could only watch as India was partitioned and the Labour government abandoned the mandate in Palestine.¹² What is uncertain is whether, had he still been in office, he would have been able to ensure that events turned out differently. His response to the Cold War was to look to create bulwarks against Soviet expansionism by backing the American alliance, the reconciliation of Western Europe, and the creation of Israel. Back in 10 Downing Street as elected prime minister between 1951 and 1955, Churchill's room for manoeuvre on the domestic and international fronts was limited, while his health was failing. His last great political campaign was an attempt to seek a summit meeting with the Soviets, in which he was ultimately frustrated by President Eisenhower. The failure of his remaining political ambitions was obscured by his international celebrity. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature and made a Knight of the Garter by Queen Elizabeth II in 1953.

¹² Robert Rhodes James, *Winston Churchill: His Complete Speeches*, vol. 6 (New York: Chelsea House, 1974), 6695.

On leaving office in 1955, Churchill dedicated himself to finishing and publishing his last multi-volume work, a *History of the English-Speaking Peoples*.¹³ He did not intervene publicly in politics but remained a major international figure. After his death on 24 January 1965, seventy years to the day after the death of his father, he was given a state funeral and was buried in Bladon churchyard, within sight of his birthplace at Blenheim Palace.

That has been a gallop through Churchill's life – one which has condensed the eight volumes and twenty-three companion volumes of his official biography into just a few lines. Inevitably, it has not been comprehensive but, hopefully, in giving the reader the broad sweep of Churchill's long and often controversial life, it has highlighted the fact that the Jews and Israel were never the sole and rarely the main focus of Churchill's concerns.

Churchill had a long political career. If there is a common strand influencing and shaping his thoughts and actions, then it surely sits at the intersection between his Western world view, British national interests, and his personal aspirations and ambitions. To a man who believed in destiny and felt himself a “glow-worm”, these three often seemed the same thing, but they were also always changing.¹⁴ There were key moments when Jewish concerns were centre stage, such as: Churchill's opposition to the Aliens Bill of 1905 which sought to restrict Jewish immigration to Britain; his defence of the Balfour Declaration during his visit to Palestine in 1921; or his opposition to the Government White Paper of 1939 which sought to restrict Jewish immigration to Palestine. In general terms, however, the Jews and Israel were part of a bigger picture – a world view – in which Churchill's level of interest and support for the Jews and Zionism waxed and waned according to their alignment with his perception of the broader interests of Britain and her empire, and the role they might play in supporting or opposing threats from communism and fascism.

I think there is also a danger of the conflation of different questions. Was Churchill philo-Semitic? If so, is that the same thing as being actively pro-Jewish? If so, is that the same thing as supporting Zionism, and were their differences between his views and his actions? What was Churchill actually able to achieve?

The consensus in the existing literature is that Churchill was philo-Semitic and not antisemitic. There is no doubt that he was greatly influenced by his father's views, and his father was a great admirer of Benjamin Disraeli. Lord and Lady Randolph Churchill played a pivotal role in the foundation of the Primrose League (named for Disraeli's favourite flower). Lord Randolph's friends also included prominent figures like Nathaniel Rothschild and Ernest Cassel, and Churchill deliberately (and perhaps not surprisingly) maintained and cultivated these friendships after his father's death. As a young MP in Manchester, he became friendly with Chaim Weizmann. From the end of the First World War, he counted Bernard Baruch as a close friend. These personal contacts should not be underestimated. They ensured that he had informal access to the views of the Jewish community and was exposed to Jewish viewpoints and interests, including Zionism. The combination of Jewish support for him and his family, the philanthropic Jewish community spirit that he first observed in Manchester, and his admiration for Jewish hard work, entrepreneurship, and self-sufficiency, predisposed him towards a generally pro-Jewish outlook. But his personal experiences also have to be set within the framework of his views on racial and cultural hierarchies.

13 Winston Churchill, *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, 4 vols. (London: Cassell & Co. Ltd, 1956–1958).

14 Violet Bonham Carter, *Winston Churchill as I Knew Him* (London: Eyre, Spottiswoode & Collins, 1965), 16.

Churchill was not particularly religious himself, but he believed in the freedom of religious worship, that Western civilisation was founded on a system of Judeo-Christian ethics, and that monotheism had marked a great leap forward for humankind. As result, the Jewish people ranked very high in this personal pantheon of races. In February 1920, he wrote in an article called “Zionism versus Bolshevism” that:

We owe to the Jews in the Christian revelation a system of ethics which, even if it were entirely separated from the supernatural, would be incomparably the most precious possession of mankind, worth in fact the fruits of all other wisdom and learning put together.¹⁵

You certainly do not find Churchill using antisemitic language in public or in private. This did not mean that he was not capable of stereotyping. His writings often veer towards characterising the Jews collectively as being enterprising, different, and separate, and in the same article from 1920 he writes: “In a people of peculiar genius like the Jews, contrasts are more vivid, the extremes are more widely separated, the resulting consequences are more decisive.”¹⁶

In 2007, the academic Richard Toye caused a controversy in the press when he publicised an unpublished newspaper article from 1937, found in the Churchill Papers collection, entitled “How the Jews Can Combat Persecution”. The text discussed the danger of separateness and urged Jews towards greater assimilation. In fact, the article had been written for Churchill by a literary assistant and was never published, but it had been worked up to his design. Though the words were not his, the article reflected a consistent strand in Churchill’s thinking – namely, his support for those Jews who embraced British liberal society, but not for those who challenged it.¹⁷

When he wrote his 1920 article, Churchill was acutely aware that many of the communist revolutionary leaders were Jewish. In it, he had therefore deliberately sought to draw a distinction between national Jews who were loyal to Britain and international Jews, by which he meant communists, who were not, writing that:

[i]t may well be that the same astounding race may at the present time be in the actual process of producing another system of morals and philosophy, as malevolent as Christianity was benevolent ...

His use of dramatic language was characteristic and deliberate, because it allowed him to highlight his solution, which was support for Zionism. In his words, “[t]he struggle which is now beginning between the Zionist and Bolshevik Jews is little less than a struggle for the soul of the Jewish people”, and he described a “Jewish national centre in Palestine” as “not only a refuge from the unhappy lands of Central Europe”, but also as a symbol of “Jewish unity and the temple of Jewish glory”.¹⁸

Makovsky is surely right to state that Zionism appealed to Churchill’s romanticism, the idea of the exile’s return after centuries of persecution. Yet, Churchill also embraced it in the 1920s as an alternative ideal to communism for poorer Jews displaced from central Europe, and he urged the wealthier national Jews of the Western

15 Typescript for article by Winston Churchill, “Zionism versus Bolshevism”, 8 February 1920, CAC, Churchill Papers, CHAR 8/36/84.

16 Churchill, “Zionism versus Bolshevism”, CAC, Churchill Papers, CHAR 8/36/85.

17 Annotated draft and typescript for article by Winston Churchill, “How the Jews can combat persecution”, 1937. CAC, Churchill Papers, CHAR 8/573/3-32. See also University of Cambridge, “Uncovered: The ‘Lost’ Paper Churchill Kept from Publication”, University of Cambridge, 8 March 2007, <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/uncovered-the-lost-paper-churchill-kept-from-publication>, and Martin Gilbert, “Myth and Reality – What Did Churchill Really Think About the Jews?”, International Churchill Society, 29 June 2013, <https://winstonchurchill.org/publications/finest-hour/finest-hour-135/myth-and-reality-what-did-churchill-really-think-about-the-jews/>.

18 Churchill, “Zionism versus Bolshevism”, CAC, Churchill Papers, CHAR 8/36/90-91.

nations to support it. Of course, there was also a strong element of realpolitik, of British Imperial self-interest, because Britain had taken on the League of Nations mandate for Palestine. As secretary of state for war in 1919 and 1921, and then for the colonies from 1921 to 1922, Churchill knew that Britain had little money for the defence and development of its Middle Eastern territories. He was charged with cutting costs and withdrawing the troops. Honouring the Balfour Declaration by creating a Jewish national presence within Palestine allowed Churchill to use Jewish money and Jewish settlers to bring investment and (as he hoped, stability) to the region. It was also in keeping with his view of promoting civilisation.

On 31 March 1921, Churchill was at Government House in Jerusalem, where he told a Jewish delegation:

I am convinced that the Zionist cause will bring good to the whole world, and will bring welfare and advancement to the Arabs of this country. The success of Zionism will depend upon the good it will bestow upon the whole country. The Arabs have expressed alarm at the Bolshevist character of some of the Jewish immigrants. Whatever we believe of this, your duty is to dispel these fears by a good and friendly attitude, and propagate peace between all. You must use patience and prudence, and allay alarm.¹⁹

So, was Churchill pro-Jewish? He was certainly, throughout his life, a consistent opponent of the persecution of the Jews, whether in Russia, central Europe, or Nazi Germany (and he also wrote critically of the persecution of the Jews in British history), but this did not mean he supported all shades of Jewish opinion. He supported those Jews who fitted with his world view – who supported the development of Western liberal ideals. His support for Zionism was similarly caveated. Prior to the Second World War, he did not support the whole of Palestine becoming a Jewish homeland. In 1920, he envisaged a Jewish national centre of some three to four million people within the mandate. In his subsequent 1922 White Paper, he advocated a Jewish homeland with immigration set at a level sustainable by the local economy. In 1939, he resisted Chamberlain's attempts to further reduce Jewish immigration but, on becoming prime minister, he still envisaged a controlled development and did not seek to lift all restrictions. His advocacy of patience and slow change was always going to run into opposition from frustrated Jewish and Zionist groups. There were certainly times between 1920 and 1948 (most notably the assassination of Lord Moyne, the British secretary of state in the Middle East, in November 1944) when Arab and Jewish violence led him to consider abandoning Palestine altogether, but overall you can see him consistently supporting a measured Zionist policy – often in the face of opposition from strong pro-Arab elements within Palestine and the British Foreign Office.

Which brings me to my final point. Could Churchill have done more to help the Jews during the Second World War, and particularly after 1942 and the beginning of the Holocaust? The evidence here has been pored over by many scholars, and the basic facts are known. Churchill did make some significant interventions to help the Jews. He wanted to give them the chance to fight back against the Germans and ultimately achieved the creation of the Jewish Brigade, but not until 1944. He overturned the decision to deport from Palestine the survivors of the *Patria* disaster. He consistently wrote and spoke out against persecution and supported the Allied Declaration of December 1942 condemning the Holocaust, and in private he insisted that those responsible be hunted down after the war. He unsuccessfully urged Stalin to use

¹⁹ Rhodes James, *Winston Churchill*, vol. 3, 3085.

Soviet forces to relieve the slaughter in the Warsaw ghetto, and he gave his personal backing to calls to bomb the railway lines to Auschwitz, even though this operation was subsequently not carried out.²⁰

In doing more, he was constrained. First, by the system he was working within. Churchill's public profile and iconic status is now such that we tend to think of him as an all-powerful leader. That is partly due to the image that he was able to project, but the reality was that he was working within a coalition structure and within an enormous bureaucracy. When he became prime minister in May 1940, his war cabinet initially consisted of his predecessor, Neville Chamberlain, his main rival within the Conservative Party, Lord Halifax, and the leaders of a Labour opposition party that he had spent much of the 1930s attacking. While the new wartime structures gave Churchill more power than his immediate predecessor, he was still heavily constrained: he was dependent on the support of his war cabinet and ultimately of parliament for the continuation of his coalition, and reliant on others to run the domestic and economic aspects of the war while he focussed on the high-level political and military issues.²¹ The British and imperial state was a huge bureaucracy. General John Kennedy, who became assistant chief of the imperial general staff, described it as "essentially a government of committees ... Winston is of course the dominating personality ... Yet Winston's views do not often prevail if they are contrary to the general trend of opinion among the service staffs".²² Churchill was presiding over a complex web of personalities, parties, departments, committees, and interests. His success in navigating and influencing them was constantly shifting and his power inevitably waxed and waned as the war progressed. With regard to Palestine, his pro-Jewish views put him at odds with much of the British military and civilian establishment and with large elements of the Foreign Office. He could not make policy unilaterally, though he could bring considerable pressure to bear.

But his immediate priorities were to mount a successful defence of Britain and the Empire. Churchill's achievement in 1940 and 1941 was to keep alive the hope of the liberation of Europe, but the focus was on national and imperial survival, with British forces stretched to the limit. Defeated in Norway, France, Greece, and then in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Burma, it was not until 1942 – with the Russians advancing on the Eastern Front and the Americans arriving in the European theatre after Pearl Harbor – that the Allies could think of taking the offensive. Even then, it was clear that it was going to take time to build up, train, and battle harden the forces for an invasion of continental Europe. In the second half of the war, Churchill's own health was failing – he came close to death in North Africa in late 1943 – and the war was being increasingly led from Moscow and Washington. The problems of the post-war settlement were looming and divisions were emerging between the "Big Three", with Stalin wanting a buffer in eastern Europe, Roosevelt keen to establish the new United Nations organisation, and Churchill desperate not to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire. In a world of barbarity, the quickest way to save civilisation was to end the war, but British weakness remained (if not intensified). By 1946, Churchill – now out of office – was left still pondering how the pledge to deliver a Jewish homeland could be realised. In an unsent passage to his successor, the Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee, he wondered whether the

20 For details of Churchill's actions, see Gilbert, *Churchill and the Jews*, Cohen, *Churchill and the Jews*.

21 See Allen Packwood, *How Churchill Waged War: The Most Challenging Decisions of the Second World War* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2018), 11–20.

22 Cited in Michael Hastings, *Finest Years: Churchill as Warlord 1940–1945* (London: Harper Press, 2009), xx.

only solutions were to ask the Americans to share the British burden in Palestine or to abandon the mandate.²³

Churchill's world view centred around Britain and the Empire and around preserving the British position on the world stage. In 1930, he wrote an article called "The United States of Europe". In it, he argued that Britain was not just a European power. Britain derived its unique position and power in the world from its global role and from sitting at the intersection of the British Empire and the Commonwealth, Europe, and the wider English-speaking world, by which he increasingly came to mean the United States.²⁴ The image of Britain being at the focal point of these three spheres of influence was one he would return to repeatedly. But those circles changed in size over time. In the world prior to 1914, the Empire had been dominant. By 1945, his world view was now more pessimistic: Britain and her Empire were diminished, Europe was in ruins, half dominated by the Soviet Union, and hope lay increasingly with the United States. Where did the Jews fit within this conception? Initially, they had been a proxy for a declining empire – a way of bolstering the British presence and advancing Western civilisation and interests in the Middle East. But by 1945, they were needed as a bulwark against the Soviet Union, while the resolution of the Jewish position in Palestine was passing to others – to the United States and to the Jews themselves. Churchill would continue to support the process and to claim some of the credit for it.

23 Draft of letter from Churchill to Clement Attlee, 1 May 1946, CAC, Churchill Papers, Churchill Papers, CHUR 2/42/54-56.

24 Winston Churchill, "The United States of Europe", *Saturday Evening Post*, 15 February 1930, CAC, Churchill Papers, CHAR 8/591/47, reproduced in *The Collected Essays of Winston Churchill, vol. 2: Churchill and Politics*, ed. Michael Wolff (London: Library of Imperial History, 1976), 176–186.

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Allen Packwood (BA, MPhil (Cantab)) is a Fellow of Churchill College at the University of Cambridge, the Director of the Churchill Archives Centre, and a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society. He was awarded an OBE for services to archives and scholarship in the 2016 Queen's Birthday Honours. His book, *How Churchill Waged War*, was published by Pen & Sword in 2018. He has recently edited the Cambridge University Press Companion to Winston Churchill and co-edited *Letters for the Ages: The Private and Personal Letters of Sir Winston Churchill*. In June 2024, he published a book about Churchill's D-Day, co-authored with General Lord Dannatt.

The Churchill Archives Centre is located on the grounds of Churchill College, and it is home to the papers of Sir Winston Churchill, Baroness Thatcher, Sir John Major, and over six hundred of their contemporaries: politicians, diplomats, civil servants, military leaders, and scientists of the modern era. It is still collecting. Allen is responsible for the overall management of the team and collections.

Email: director.archives@chu.cam.ac.uk

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Boaz Cohen

Were the Nazis Conducting a “War Against the Jewish Child”?

Abstract

This article investigates the concept of a distinct “war against the Jewish child” during the Holocaust, exploring child-targeted policies, actions, and systemic atrocities. The deliberate, bureaucratic organisation of these atrocities, and the discussions at multiple levels on the murder of Jewish children, reflect a military-like campaign against them, setting the Nazi treatment of Jewish children apart from historical and contemporary norms of war. The article argues that the examination of pre-war and wartime policies, along with the organised logistics of extermination, validates the concept of a “war against the Jewish child”.

Emanuel Ringelblum, a Jewish historian and chronicler of the Warsaw Ghetto, wrote from there in June 1942 – as news of the Germans’ destruction of outlying Jewish communities was filtering in and before the extermination of the ghetto – that

[n]ew reports are continually arriving about the murder of Jewish children and old people ... Apart from Pharaoh ... this is unprecedented in Jewish history ... On the contrary: In the past, whatever was done with the grownups, the children were always permitted to live – so that they might be converted to the Christian faith. Even in the most barbaric times, a human spark glowed in the rudest heart, and children were spared. But the Hitlerian beast is quite different. It would devour the dearest of us, those who arouse the greatest compassion – our innocent children.¹

The systematic murder of Jewish children was indeed unprecedented. Throughout history, children have suffered – and continue to suffer – in wars. Often, due to their vulnerability and dependence, they bear the brunt of war even more acutely than adults. Yet, this was a unique phenomenon: Jewish children were specifically targeted for death, with their extermination requiring distinct decisions, logistical planning, and actions – typical of a military campaign. Typically, children were killed alongside their families and communities, but the German genocide included numerous child-oriented and child-targeting measures, many of them obviously lethal. This emphasis on annihilating Jewish children gave rise to the wartime and post-war Jewish concept of “the war against the Jewish child”.²

The murderous policies of the Nazis vis-à-vis Jewish children explain the very low rate of survival for Jewish children. Deborah Dwork has shown that the survival ratio of Jewish children in Europe was the lowest out of all of the Jewish population: only eleven per cent of Jewish children survived the Holocaust compared to about 30

1 Emanuel Ringelblum, Jacob Sloan, ed. and trans., *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto: The Journal of Emmanuel Ringelblum*, ed. and trans. Jacob Sloan (New York: Schocken Books, 1974).

2 See, for example, Moshe Prager, “The Special German War Against the Jewish Children”, in *Miparashat Hashoah: Shoat Yaldei Hayehudim B’Eiropa* [From the Annals of the Shoah: The Holocaust of Jewish Children in Europe] (Jerusalem: Reuven Mas, 1946), 10.

per cent of the adult population.³ This is the average survival rate; in some countries, the percentage of surviving children was much lower. In Poland specifically, where there were about a million Jewish children before the war, only about three per cent of the children survived, and in Belgium it was two to four per cent.⁴ Yet, do these statistics prove that there was a war against Jewish children?

This article examines the validity of the concept of a war against the Jewish child. Some introduction is necessary.

World War Two was a global conflict waged between nations, with armies doing the fighting, but civilians – women, men, and children – suffering the consequences. Civilians were sometimes targeted directly, as in the bombing of cities, and sometimes became “collateral damage” in acts of war directed against enemy combatants or installations.

However, the Jewish victims of this war were not killed as a mere by-product of the conflict. The Nazis and their allies waged an all-out war against the Jews, aiming for the complete destruction and obliteration of an entire people – a vision of “a world without Jews”.⁵

Wars are not only an armed confrontation between soldiers, the exchange of fire between troops, and the overcoming of one side by another. The confrontation, the actual battles and campaigns, the face-to-face or tank-to-tank actions, are a culmination of discussion and planning, training and exercises, administration and logistics. Likewise, the actual killing of the Jews, be it in *Aktionen* (*Murder operations*), the Holocaust by bullets, or in the death camps, were enabled by policy decisions, staff work, and logistics.

Jewish children, like all Jews – men, women, young, and old – were marked for death. Why, then, do we claim that there was a distinct “war against the Jewish child”?

In my view, the claim that there was a distinct war against Jewish children suggests that the Nazis enacted specific policies and acts of war directed at the children. These policies included expulsions from schools, banning education altogether, cutting food rations, and obstructing child rescue efforts. However, as will be shown here, these measures were also evident in decisions and actions aimed at the mass killing of Jewish children. Jewish children were seen as enemies of the Third Reich and as such had to be eliminated.

The organised murder of Jewish children began with policy decisions at higher levels, where the issue of targeting specific groups of children was discussed, leading to a decision to kill them. Sometimes, as will be shown, the result was in the diplomatic, administrative, or logistic fields, yet there were also cases in which the decision had military outcomes. Once the decision was made, plans were drawn up to assign a unit – a platoon, company, troop, or battalion – to carry out the killings. Commanders of the designated unit were briefed on the mission and needed to discuss various aspects of the operation with their staff. Logistical questions were also addressed. Would transport be required for both the children and the soldiers? Who would allocate the transport and fuel? Ammunition and food for the soldiers also needed to be provided. Was there an available killing site, or would pits need to be

3 Deborah Dwork, *Children with a Star: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 274–275 n. 27.

4 Nachum Bogner, *At the Mercy of Strangers: The Rescue of Jewish Children with Assumed Identities in Poland*, trans. Ralph Mandel (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2009), 15.

5 Alon Confino, *A World Without Jews: The Nazi Imagination from Persecution to Genocide* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2014).

dug? If so, who would dig them – the Jewish victims, army engineers, or perhaps the local non-Jewish population? If locals were involved, how would they be compelled to participate – through force or incentives?

These logistical considerations applied to all organised killing actions against Jews and others, but my argument is that when the military or quasi-military apparatus was mobilised specifically to kill Jewish children, it constituted a war against the Jewish child.

These and other military-like operations contrast sharply with actions directed at non-Jewish children, such as the forced Germanisation of “racially fit” children from occupied countries, or the conscription of Soviet children for forced labour. While they suffered hunger, torture, and forced labour, the overall aim was to keep non-Jewish children alive, to utilise them not to kill them.⁶ Military actions against Jewish children, however, were aimed at their death.

Notably, Jewish children had been targets of Nazi policies long before the extermination campaigns began.

Anti-Jewish-Child Policy in Pre-War Nazi Germany and Beyond

The Nazi obsession with Jewish children can be seen in the legislation and regulations pertaining to Jewish children and their education from the Nazi ascendancy to power. One of the early laws enacted by the Nazis was the statute to combat overcrowding in German schools and universities of 25 April 1933. It stipulated that the number of “non-Aryan” students in high schools and universities should not exceed five per cent of the student body and, in the case of new admissions, the percentage allowed was just 1.5 per cent, resulting in mass expulsions of Jewish students. “For the Jewish child it was the beginning of a veritable *via dolorosa*”, claimed Samuel Colodner, “heaping on him humiliation, ostracism, degradation and even self-hatred.”⁷ Those who were allowed to stay in schools, such as the offspring of war veterans, or those who had no other choice of schooling, suffered exclusion and ostracisation, as shown by Marion Kaplan. They bore the brunt of a virile anti-Jewish sentiment that permeated the atmosphere in the schools and in the streets.⁸

The wholesale expulsion of the remaining Jewish children in the German educational system was ordered by the German Ministry of Science and Education already on 10 September 1935.⁹ This was obviously not adhered to by all schools, as on 15 November 1938, following the Kristallnacht pogrom that took place a week before, the ministry reiterated that “there remains a number of Jewish children in German schools, who can no longer be permitted to attend school together with German boys and girls”. The order explained that “it is unacceptable to expect that any German teacher provide instruction to Jewish schoolchildren. It should also be self-evident that it is intolerable for German schoolchildren to sit in a classroom shared with

6 See Dieter Steinert, *Deportation und Zwangsarbeit. Polnische und sowjetische Kinder im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland und im besetzten Osteuropa 1939–1945* (Essen: Klartext 2013), and Machteld Venken, “Child Forced Labour: An Analysis of Ego Documents Throughout Time”, *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire* 22, no. 2 (2015): 368–388.

7 Samuel Colodner, “Jewish Education under National Socialism”, *Yad Vashem Studies* 3 (1959): 161–185, 165.

8 Marion A. Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 96–97. Marion Kaplan, “The School Lives of Jewish Children and Youth in the Third Reich”, *Jewish History*, 11, no. 2 (1997), 41–52.

9 Colodner, “Jewish Education under National Socialism”, 162.

Jews”.¹⁰ On 8 December 1938, the few remaining Jewish students were expelled from universities. The Nazi authorities were still bothered by the issue of mixed-race children, the *Mischlinge*, in the school system: the *Mischlinge* were targeted with the directive of 20 July 1942, which stipulated that *Mischlinge* of the first degree could not be accepted into German schools. *Mischlinge* of the second degree could be accepted only if and when space permitted, and those of the first degree could be accepted into vocational and trade schools.¹¹

This statute on the exclusion of Jewish children from schools was interpreted by the Nazi minister of education,¹² Bernhard Rust, as referring to high schools but not to primary schools, since primary schooling was mandatory. Jewish children could be excluded from German schools only when they had an alternative option. This allowed for the opening of Jewish primary schools and high schools, and these were indeed opened wherever possible, with some financial support from the Ministry of Education. The schools’ organisation and curriculum were under the oversight of the ministry. Jewish schools and school children continued to draw the interest of officials and policy makers. On 1 June 1938, Jewish schools were denied the option of tax exemptions and, on 17 December that year, all funding to Jewish schools was stopped by a decree of the minister of education. The *Directive for the Implementation of Article II of the Tenth Decree*, of 14 August 1939, set down the organisational and educational guidelines for Jewish schools. Under the heading “The Jewish School System”, and twenty-five sections and explanatory causes, the directive addressed numerous issues, such as the schools’ legal status, oversight, the teaching staff’s legal status, teacher training, the curriculum, vocational training, and more.¹³ At that point, there were only 10,000 Jewish school-age children in Germany. The elaborate directive regulating their education shows how much Jewish children were a sore point for Nazi leadership.

After the commencement of deportations to occupied territories in the east and the prohibition on emigration issued in connection therewith in the fall of 1941, the last remaining Jewish schools were shut down by a directive of the Reich minister of interior on 20 June 1942. It specified that all Jewish schools must shut down by 30 June 1942.¹⁴ Jewish children were now forbidden from receiving instruction from any “paid or unpaid” teachers. As a result, the few Jewish children still alive in Germany were denied any schooling whatsoever.¹⁵

Following the precedent in Germany, legislation discriminating against Jewish children appeared all over Nazi-occupied Europe and prohibited their schooling. Apart from closing schools, Nazi officials also banned Jewish children from playgrounds: the playground issue evidently loomed large in the minds of Nazi officials. By November 1934, Jewish children were banned from playgrounds used by Aryans in Germany. In 1941, excursions by Jewish children into forests were also forbidden.¹⁶ All over occupied Europe, there was a “flurry of decrees placing all parks, playgrounds, swimming pools, and other recreational and cultural institutions off limits for the Jewish community”.¹⁷ On 1 November 1941, writes Deborah Dwork, “Jewish

10 *Amtsblatt des Reichsministeriums für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung und der Unterrichtsverwaltungen der Länder* 4 (1938), 520.

11 Colodner, “Jewish Education under National Socialism”, 163.

12 The full name of the ministry was “the Ministry of Education, Science and Public Instruction”.

13 Colodner, “Jewish Education under National Socialism”, 180–183.

14 *Ibid.*, 163.

15 <https://www.jmberlin.de/en/exclusion-of-jewish-children-from-public-schools-1938>.

16 *Ibid.*

17 George Eisen, *Children and Play in the Holocaust: Games among the Shadows* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 30.

children were thrown out of all playgrounds in Amsterdam-Zuid, a neighbourhood where some seventeen thousand Jews lived. At the order of the authorities, one of these playgrounds became a Jewish market; the rest were reserved for use by Gentile children alone.¹⁸ The playground ban was also implemented in occupied Eastern Europe and the ghettos established there. Even before the sealing down of the Warsaw Ghetto, Haim Kaplan, a Warsaw educator and diarist, wrote on 29 July 1940 that Ludwig Leist, the city governor of occupied Warsaw, “has issued an order forbidding the Jews to enter the city parks or the municipal promenades”.¹⁹ Two years later, on 17 June 1942, Kaplan wrote:

[i]t has already been three years since we last saw a blade of grass or a flower. Even before we were forced into the Ghetto, we were barred from the city’s parks and gardens. These spaces were airy and spacious, yet only a few Aryan children played there. Jewish children – wonderful children, whether from working-class families ... or the well-to-do – were left to play beyond the park fences, on the sidewalks and streets of the dusty, bustling town. When we were crowded into the Ghetto, we were pushed even further, beyond the “beyond the fence”. Within the Ghetto’s boundaries, there is not a single garden. We have been robbed of every tree and flower.²⁰

It was, writes Eisen, a deliberate policy of “psychological humiliation and physical repression”.²¹ Given that most of the children Kaplan worried about, along with Kaplan himself, were ultimately murdered by the Nazis, the issue of schooling – and certainly of playgrounds – may seem trivial. Yet, it underscores the Nazi administrators’ and policymakers’ obsessive fixation on Jewish children, a fixation that, within an exterminationist framework, proved fatal.

A War of Extermination

The killing of Jewish children was a fundamental aspect of the Final Solution. Children were murdered alongside Jewish adults, but they were also specifically targeted in operations known as *Kinderaktionen* (children’s actions). In his harrowing chapter titled “Murdering Jewish Children”, Steven T. Katz provides a detailed and vivid account of the murder of Jewish children under Nazi rule. Katz underscores the extreme cruelty and atrocities that characterised these killings.²²

But the cruel and sadistic child murders perpetrated by Germans or their auxiliaries in the towns, fields, or camps of Europe were the end result of a decision-making process in which the Nazi bureaucracy across Europe and army staff were involved, as they discussed the murder of Jewish children and reported on it. Four examples are indicative of this:

1. *The Deportation of Jewish Children from France to Auschwitz*

The deportation of Jews from France to Auschwitz started on 27 March 1942. The local German authorities in France had a problem filling the trains and cancelled a

18 Deborah Dwork, “The Netherlands”, in *The World Reacts to the Holocaust*, eds. Charles H. Rosenzweig, and David S. Wayman (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 74.

19 *The Diary of Chaim A. Kaplan*, quoted in George Eisen, *Children and Play*, 30. After comparing different translations of this part of the diary, I am using here my translation of Kaplan.

20 *Ibid.*

21 Eisen, *Children and Play in the Holocaust*, 30.

22 Steven T. Katz, *The Holocaust and New World Slavery: A Comparative History* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 630–682.

14 July train that was supposed to deport 1,000 Jews. Records show that Adolf Eichmann was scathing in a phone call with Heinz Röthke, who at the time was the deputy head of the Department of Jewish Affairs in charge of the deportations from France – with Eichmann admonishing Röthke for the delay.²³ Röthke indeed made sure to start sending full trains from France to Auschwitz. To fill the trains, children had to be deported too. On 11 August 1942 an urgent telegram was sent to the RSHA IV B4 (Eichmann)²⁴ by Horst Ahnerst, in which he asked for permission to send children because not enough adults were rounded up: “[s]ince there is a temporary hold-up in the arrest of Jews, I intend to have the children currently housed in the Pithiviers and Beaune-la-Rolande camps deported starting on August 17, 1942.”²⁵ The permission was granted, but initially only for dispersing the children in trains with adults, and not for sending dedicated children’s transports.²⁶

The issue of deporting children was actually discussed before the first train set out. On 6 July Theodor Dannecker, then head of the Department of Jewish Affairs, wrote to Eichmann that Premier Laval has proposed that, in the process of deporting Jewish families from the unoccupied territory, children under 16 years of age should be included. The question of Jewish children remaining in the occupied zone does not interest him. I therefore request that an urgent decision be made by telegram whether, perhaps beginning with the 15th transport from France, children under 16 should also be deported.²⁷

Dannecker pressed the point until he was authorised by Eichmann to send children too.

As can be seen, the Germans were not the only ones interested in deporting Jewish children to the east: in France, the Germans were under pressure to do so by the Vichy government. As Michael R. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton shows in *Vichy France and the Jews*, since adults were deported first, “[t]he separation of children from their parents had become, in fact, an acute political embarrassment for the Vichy regime”. The option of caring for these orphaned children was not acceptable to the Vichy regime either, since they would be too big of a burden on public assistance organisations. The Germans, naturally, concurred. In August, the French police, who oversaw the filling of the deportation trains, allocated four trains of children to be sent to Auschwitz.²⁸

Of the 11,400 children deported from France, 6,000 were deported during the summer of 1942. 2,000 of them were less than six years old.

2. Blocking Rescue Attempts of Jewish Children in Southeast Europe

The Nazi view of the Jewish child as an enemy extended beyond extermination to the active obstruction of rescue efforts that developed in regions controlled by Germany’s allies. The focus was on southeast Europe. By 1943, allies such as Hungary,

23 In July, Röthke was the deputy of Theo Dannecker, who had since 1940 been the head of the department. By the end of the month, Dannecker was moved to Bulgaria, and Röthke headed the department and the deportations of Jews to Auschwitz.

24 The RSHA (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*) was the Reich Central Security Office, Himmler’s staff. It combined the Gestapo, Criminal Police, and SD of the SS and the Nazi state. Department IV B4 was Adolf Eichmann’s department – the *Judenamt*.

25 Yad Vashem Archive (YVA), 3651819.

26 YVA, 3657322, Rolf Guenther, Eichmann’s deputy to Helmut Knochen head of the security police in France, 13 August 1942.

27 Joseph Billig, *Le Commissariat Général aux Questions Juives (1941–1944)*, vol. 1 (Éditions du Centre, 1955), <https://www.70voices.org.uk/content/day41>.

28 Michael R. Marrus, Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, 2nd ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1995), 200–203 (transports of 19, 21, 24 and 26 August 1942).

Romania, and Bulgaria were not so confident of a German victory and were open to initiatives allowing some Jews to escape the Nazi net.²⁹ The Germans, on their side, specifically the Foreign Office and the SS, not only sought to ensure the destruction of Jewish children, but also laboured to thwart initiatives aimed at their rescue.

During World War Two, Romania, a German ally between 1940 and 1944, implemented violent anti-Jewish policies under the leadership of Ion Antonescu. These included pogroms in Iași and Odessa, and mass murders in Bessarabia and Bukovina, with assistance from the SS Einsatzgruppe D and local collaborators, as well as the deportation of tens of thousands of Jews to Transnistria, where many perished due to direct killings, starvation, and exhaustion.³⁰ By 1942, plans to deport Romania's Jews to Nazi extermination camps were ultimately abandoned, partly due to Antonescu's disillusionment with Germany and the advocacy efforts of Romania's Jewish leaders, as well as Queen Mother Helena, Archbishop Andrea Cassulo, and the Swiss diplomat René de Weck. Their interventions successfully halted deportations and secured some protection for Romania's remaining Jewish population. It was on the issue of the rescue and repatriation of Jewish children that local German officials, the German Foreign Office, and the SS focused their attention.³¹

Thus, on 3 March 1943, Adolf Eichmann wrote to Fritz Gebhardt Von Hann, of the *Referat D III of Abteilung Deutschland*³² in the German Foreign Office, about a Jewish initiative to transfer 1,000 Jewish children from Romania to Mandatory Palestine via Bulgaria and Turkey:

[a]ccording to reliable information which must be kept secret negotiations which might prove successful are being conducted between Jewish leaders in Rumania . . . and Turkey, for the granting of transit visas for one thousand Jewish children and one hundred Jewish adults who will accompany them on their trip via Bulgaria and Turkey to Palestine. We request every effort to prevent this emigration.³³

Likewise, on 14 May 1943, Eberhard von Thadden, the head of the *Inland IIA* department of the German Foreign Office, reported on a conversation with Eichmann on "the Allies' desire to evacuate Jewish children from Romania and the occupied eastern territories" – specifically, on a scheme to allow the transfer of 5,000 Jewish children. Eichmann relayed to him Himmler's position on the matter. Generally, Eichmann stated that "[t]he emigration of Jewish children should be rejected in principle". Yet, if this scheme were to materialise, it would be approved only if four interned Germans were repatriated to the Reich for each child, in all 20,000 Germans. Eichmann further stipulated that these will have to be "not 20,000 old people but rather Germans under 40 years of age who were still able to reproduce", something he could be sure of that the Allies would not agree to. He further explained that "[i]f the departure of Jewish children from Romania or other Balkan cities has

29 Christopher Browning, *The Final Solution and the German Foreign Office* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1978), 170–177.

30 See Howard T. Grant, *Romania's Holy War: Soldiers, Motivation, and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021).

31 On these attempts, see Tuvia Friling, *Arrows in the Dark: David Ben-Gurion, the Yishuv Leadership and Rescue Attempts During the Holocaust* (Madison Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 143–194.

32 *Abteilung Deutschland* was the Foreign Office department dealing with Jewish matters, and *Referat DIII* dealt with many anti-Jewish policy issues. It was headed by Franz Rademacher and, from March 1943, by Von Hann. This was short lived since the department was dissolved in March 1943 and its functions taken over by the *Inland IIA* department, headed by von Thadden.

33 YVA, 3655644.

to be approved at all [in spite of the general rejection of such an idea, B.C.], it is important that this does not take place without compensation [but on the condition mentioned above, B.C.]. It is worth noting that, in the conversation, Eichmann refers openly to the ongoing extermination of Jewish children: “[i]n any case, negotiations must be conducted quickly, as the time is approaching when, due to the implementation of our measures against the Jews, the departure of 5,000 Jewish children from the eastern territories will no longer be technically feasible.”³⁴ Although a trickle of young Jews managed to leave the Balkan countries, the big rescue plans did not materialise.

It must be stressed that there were other forces at play here that worked to block attempts to rescue Jewish children. One was the leader of the national Arab movement in British Mandatory Palestine, the Mufti Haj Amin el Husseini. The mufti found refuge in Berlin during the war and threw himself wholeheartedly into the German war effort by broadcasting German-Islamist propaganda to the Middle East and by helping the recruitment of Muslims soldiers into Muslim German army units.³⁵ He also worked diligently to convince the Nazi leadership of the coalignment of Nazi and Arab interests in the Middle East and Mandatory Palestine. When he heard that rescue attempts of Jews were discussed, he entered into a flurry of activity, directly approaching the foreign ministers of Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania, the Italian embassy in Berlin, and of course many leaders and agencies in Berlin. He suggested that Jewish children or adults should not be allowed to reach Mandatory Palestine, but rather that they should be sent to Poland – where he knew that the Final Solution was already taking place.

Wilhelm Melchers, of the Near East Desk of the Political Division of the German Foreign Office reported that:

[t]he Mufti kept cropping up all over the place and lodging protests: in the Minister’s office, in the Undersecretary of State’s waiting room and in other government departments: for example, the Home Office, the Press Office, the broadcasting service, and also the SS ... At the Foreign office it was a foregone conclusion that steps would be taken – specifically by the Mufti – in protest of any activity concerning the Balkan Jews (“Balkanjudenaktionen”). No doubt, his intervention was welcomed in the one case or the other ... The Mufti was a sworn enemy of the Jews and made no secret of the fact that he would rather see them all killed. He demanded “the absolute rejection of such plans”.³⁶

It is difficult to determine the extent of Mufti Haj Amin el Husseini’s influence in this matter. However, it is evident that the Germans leveraged their success in obstructing the efforts to rescue Jewish children in order to emphasise their commitment to the Arab cause and their “irreproachable German policy towards the Arabs in the Jewish Question”. Himmler himself stressed to the Foreign Office that he did not condone that “such a noble and courageous people as the Arabs be ousted by the Jews from their homeland Palestine”. Klaus Geiske, summarising this sordid tale, sees the mufti as one of those responsible for blocking the rescue attempts: “[t]he emigration of the Jewish children was rendered impossible by the

34 YVA, 3685588.

35 See Jeffrey Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2009), and David Mutadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany’s War* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

36 Klaus Gensicke, *The Mufti of Jerusalem and the Nazis: The Berlin Years*, trans. Alexander Fraser Gunn (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2011), 122.

joint efforts of Eichmann, Himmler, Ribbentrop and the Mufti”.³⁷ This, in turn, reveals how prominently Jewish children figured in the minds of the Nazi leadership.³⁸

3. *Hunting Children in Izieu*

On 6 April 1944, Klaus Barbie, the chief of the Gestapo in Lyon, allocated three trucks and the relevant manpower for a raid on a Jewish children’s home operating clandestinely in the village of Izieu in the area of Ain. Forty-five children and a small staff of adults, headed by Sabine and Miron Zlatin, had been hiding there since May 1943. The raid was successful, with Barbie reporting to his superiors that

[t]his morning, the activities of a Jewish Children’s Home in Izieu-Ain have been ended. Forty-one children ranging in age from three to thirteen years old and five adults have been arrested. No cash or other objects of value were found. Their transport to Drancy will take place on April 7, 1944.³⁹

After having been first taken to the camp of Drancy, forty-two children and seven educators were then sent to Auschwitz. Most of them were killed upon arrival, except for the educator Léa Feldblum, and two teenagers and the home’s director, Miron Zlatin, who were killed in Reval in Estonia.

The raid on the Izieu children’s home and the murder of the children and staff was not a major chapter in the Final Solution – but it is nonetheless indicative. It took place at a time when the German authorities in France were bracing for the imminent Allied invasion, which occurred two months later. Even as they focused their resources on fortifications and the eradication of the French Resistance, they remained committed to the continued persecution and murder of Jewish children.

Saul Friedländer wrote of the Izieu raid that

the murder of Izieu was but a minute event in the routine of German mass extermination, but it demonstrated, as the war entered its last year, that despite the rapidly deteriorating situation of the Reich, no effort would be spared, no roundup deemed too insignificant in the final drive toward the complete extermination of the European Jews.⁴⁰

Indeed, this was not solely about the Final Solution targeting European Jews – it should also be understood as an act of war against a small group of Jewish children, with the intent of ensuring that no Jewish child would survive.

4. *Massacring Children in Byelaya Tserkov*

The massacre of approximately ninety Jewish children in Byelaya Tserkov in Ukraine offers us, through extensive documentation, an insight into how the murder of Jewish children became a military task – discussed, planned, and executed by the

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Friling argues that, while the British were undoubtedly dragging their feet and hesitant to honor their promises, it was the German opposition that ultimately prevented the plans from materialising: “[w]ere it not for this relentless position, the British would have found themselves during that spring and summer of 1943 facing a series of promissory notes that they themselves had handed out and that they would very probably have had to pay off. They were saved from this ‘embarrassing’ situation by the Nazis.” Friling, *Arrows in the Dark*, 168.

³⁹ For the long-term impact of this telegram, see Ulrike Lühe and Romain Ledauphin, “From the Forerunners of Document Collection to the Trial of Klaus Barbie and Beyond: The Transitional Justice Journey of the Izieu Telegram”, *The International Journal of Human Rights* 25, no. 3 (2020): 440–466, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2020.1794842>.

⁴⁰ Saul Friedländer, *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews 1939–1945* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008), 601.

German military system.⁴¹ The town, seventy miles from Kiev, was captured by German forces on 16 July 1941. In August, the *Feldkommandant* (military sub-area commander) of the town asked for the SS to exterminate the town's Jewish population.⁴² Indeed, between 8 and 19 August, a detachment of *Sonderkommando 4a*, commanded by August Hafner and supported by the Ukrainian People's Militia and a platoon of Waffen SS troops, executed several hundreds of the town's Jews.⁴³ The children of the victims were not killed with the adults. On the night of 19 August, three lorry loads of children were murdered, and ninety Jewish children were left alive in appalling conditions in a house on the outskirts of the town. The military deliberations about these children and their subsequent murder are indicative of the concept of a "war against the Jewish children".

The children's fate became a military issue following a visit to the aforementioned house by two military chaplains from the 4/607 Military Hospital unit, Ernest Tewes and Gerhard Wilczek, who were interrupted while having lunch by an agitated non-commissioned officer asking them to see the place and take "remedial action". They visited the house and saw that the children were being held in terrible physical and sanitary conditions, starved with no food or water. The "frightful conditions" of the children made the soldiers uneasy. Since this was happening under the German Wehrmacht, it could "ruin its reputation". Not being able to speak with the field commander, Tewes and Wilczek approached the divisional chaplains of the 295th Infantry Division and asked them to intervene. That day at 16:00, the latter chaplains approached Lieutenant Colonel Helmuth Groscurth, the first staff officer of the 259th Brigade, and asked him to intervene. This unleashed a wave of discussions, orders, and counter-orders which involved many central figures in the division and the army. Groscurth took with him Dr Joseph Maria Reuss, the divisional chaplain, the brigade ordinance officer, and an interpreter, and went to check for himself. When in the house, he met *Oberscharführer* Jager from the SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*, security police) who informed him that the children "also had to be eliminated". Groscurth went to the *Ortskommandantur* (town commander) who explained that he could not challenge orders given by the SD. He suggested approaching the *Feldkommandant*, Lieutenant Colonel Riedl. The latter informed Groscurth that he had been notified by the *Sonderkommando* about the planned killing but had no power to change the orders and, anyway, "he was convinced of the correctness and necessity of this order".⁴⁴ Groscurth instructed the *Feldkommandant* to seal off the area of the house and to ensure inconspicuous transport to the execution. But he suggested checking again with the Army Group⁴⁵ whether the "execution of the remaining children should proceed or not". In the meantime, he instructed the *Feldkommandant* to inform the head of the *Sonderkommando* that he would have to postpone action until a decision had been taken by the Army Group.⁴⁶

Groscurth contacted the operations officer of the Army Group, but the latter stipulated that the decision had to be made by the Sixth Army's headquarters. It took

41 The documents pertaining to this massacre are published in Ernst Klee, Willi Dressen, and Volker Riess, *The Good Old Days: The Holocaust as Seen by Its Perpetrators and Bystanders* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 137–154.

42 *Ibid.*, 138.

43 SK 4a, a sub-unit of Einsatzgruppen C, was commanded by Paul Blobel.

44 Groscurth, *ibid.*, 146.

45 The units involved in this story all belonged to the Sixth Army commanded by Von Reichenau. The Sixth Army was one of the armies in Army Group South. The German forces invading the USSR were organised into three army groups: South, Centre, and North.

46 On the chaplains, see Doris L. Bergen, *Between God and Hitler: Military Chaplains in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 2–7.

Groscurth some time get hold of the operations officer there, only to be told that he would not receive a decision from the commander-in-chief, Field Marshal von Reichenau, until the evening. Hafner, the head of the Sonderkommando, inquired with Groscurth about the postponement of the order and was told that he would have to wait since “I had to demand that the measures be carried out appropriately, in the interest of maintaining the military discipline of the troops. We would have to wait for the army’s decision.” At 19:00, the divisional commander was notified of all the measures taken and he approved them. At 20:00, the army ordered that the extermination be postponed. One truck already loaded with children had to be unloaded, and the Feldkommandant organised a supply of bread and water for the children.

In the morning, Captain Luley, the *Abwehr Offizier AOK 6* (Sixth Army intelligence officer), Standartenführer Blobel, and Obersturmführer Hafner arrived at Byelaya Tserkov for a meeting at the Feldkommandant’s office. It was obvious, reported Groscurth, that they saw the chaplains’ letter as a matter of “stirring up trouble” and that the chaplains had overstepped their purview. Both Luley of the army and Blobel of the SS stated that the postponement was unfortunate and relayed that the commander in chief, Von Reichenau, “recognised the necessity of eliminating the children”.⁴⁷ “Then we settled the details of how the executions were to be carried out.” Hafner’s testimony sheds light on these deliberations: the question was who would do the shooting and Blobel suggested that it be the Waffen SS, to which Hafner replied that

[t]hey are all young men. How are we going to answer to them if we make them shoot small children?’ To this he said, “Then use your men.” I then said, “How can they do that? They have small children as well.” This tug of war lasted amount ten minutes. I [Hafner, B.C.] suggested that the Ukrainian militia of the Feldkommandant should shoot the children. There were no objections from either side to this suggestion.⁴⁸

And so, with all of the matters cleared between the army and the SS, all that was left was to murder the children. That was done on the afternoon of 22 August. A grave was dug by the army, which also took care of transporting the children to the killing site, with the shooting of the children being done by the Ukrainian militiamen.⁴⁹

There was a postscript to this massacre underlining the involvement of Field Marshal Von Reichenau in the killing. Groscurth submitted to von Reichenau a detailed report of the event explaining his actions and need to intervene. He put the blame on the SS and the Feldkommandant, who should have ensured that “both infants and children should have been eliminated immediately in order for this inhuman agony to have been avoided”. He added, that in any case, “[i]n the interest of maintaining military discipline”, these actions should be conducted away from the troops and not in public. He explained that the agitation of the troops was due to the fact that “measures against women and children were undertaken which in no way differ from the atrocities carried out by enemy which the troops are continually being informed about”.⁵⁰ Reichenau sent a scathing reply, reprimanding the division and Groscurth for interrupting the execution of the children. He also referred to Groscurth’s statements about the atrocities: “I have to describe this assessment as incorrect, inappropriate and impertinent in the extreme. Moreover, this comment was written in an

47 Ernst Klee, Willi Dressen, and Volker Riess, *The Good Old Days*, 148.

48 *Ibid.*, 153.

49 Hafner, *Ibid.*, 154.

50 *Ibid.*, 150.

open communication which passes through many hands. It would have been far better if the report had not been written at all.”⁵¹ Luckily, the report was written and survived the war, allowing us to see how the murder of Jewish children became a military operation conducted in a military manner. The German Sixth Army, the 259th Infantry Brigade, as well as the local German occupation administration and its Ukrainian militia, in cooperation with the SS, waged war against ninety Jewish orphans in Byelaya Tserkov.

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this study underscores the validity of the concept of a distinct war against Jewish children during the Holocaust. Unlike civilian suffering that occurs as a consequence of broader military conflicts, the Nazi campaign against Jewish children was deliberate, ideologically driven, and systematic. Jewish children were not merely caught in the crossfire of war but were specifically targeted as part of the Final Solution. This war against Jewish children was manifested not only in their physical annihilation, but also through a range of discriminatory and dehumanising policies, including the exclusion of Jewish children from education and a deprivation of their basic rights, as seen through their expulsion from schools and playgrounds.

The Nazis’ ideological framework cast Jewish children as existential threats to their envisioned racial order, necessitating their eradication. As Marrus and Paxton argue, “[i]n the Nazis’ biological perspective, Jewish children threatened their new order as much as their parents”.⁵² This was not only because they carried Jewish values and traits, but also because they were perceived as harbingers of a future Jewish “revenge”. As a result, even infants were marked for death.

The Nazis, while unwavering in their commitment to annihilate Jewish children, were aware that such actions contradicted the cultural and human mores to which many Germans adhered. Heinrich Himmler, in a well-documented speech to Wehrmacht generals attending an ideological and political training meeting in Sonthofen on 5 May 1944, felt compelled to justify the murder of Jewish children to his audience:

[i]f you say: “we can understand as far as the men are concerned but not about the children” ... In this confrontation with Asia we must get used to condemning to oblivion those rules and customs of past wars which we have got used to and prefer. In my view, we as Germans, however deeply we may feel in our hearts, are not entitled to allow a generation of avengers filled with hatred to grow up with whom our children and grandchildren will have to deal because we, too weak and cowardly, left it to them.⁵³

This statement, couching Jewish children as potential avengers, is disingenuous. This “threat” may have existed after the extermination of Jewish parents, yet the extermination of Jewish children was not a secondary consideration but an essential component of Nazi policy. From their exclusion from education and public life to the

⁵¹ Ibid., 153.

⁵² Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, 200.

⁵³ A similar speech was made by Himmler to Gau and Reich chiefs of the party in Posen on 6 October 1943. There he explained that “[t]he difficult decision must be made to have this people disappear from the face of this earth”. Several translations exist of the two speeches, but I am quoting from the version in Peter Heinz Longrich, “Hitler’s Role in the Persecution of the Jews by the Nazi Regime”, <https://www.hdot.org/longrole/>.

logistical precision of Kinderaktionen and other mass killings, and the severing of opportunities for rescue, the war against Jewish children was carried out with military-like planning and commitment.

Such policies illustrate the extreme lengths to which the Nazi regime went to ensure that no Jewish child would survive. Case studies, such as the deportations of children from France, the massacre at Byelaya Tserkov, and the raid on the Izieu children's home, demonstrate the chilling efficiency with which the Nazi machine operated and the ideological conviction that drove its leaders to view even the murder of infants as necessary.

These actions stand in stark contrast to Nazi policies towards non-Jewish children, such as the forced Germanisation of "racially fit" children or the exploitation of children for forced labour, where survival, however grim, was often the intended outcome. The explicit targeting of Jewish children for death reveals the ideological consistency of the Nazi worldview, in which the destruction of future generations was as crucial as the annihilation of the present one.

The opposition to the rescue of Jewish children further highlights the Nazis' commitment to this war. Efforts by Jewish leaders, foreign diplomats, and humanitarian organisations to save children from occupied territories were systematically obstructed by Nazi officials, who treated Jewish children not as innocents to be spared, but as adversaries to be eliminated. Even in the face of military setbacks, the Nazi regime prioritised the extermination of Jewish children, as evidenced by their continued targeting of children in the war's final years.

In understanding this war against Jewish children, it becomes clear that their murder was not an incidental byproduct of the Holocaust but a core component of Nazi genocidal policy. The logistical planning and military-style deliberations required to execute these policies further underline the intentionality of this war, reflecting not only the scale of Nazi atrocities, but also their fixation on eradicating the Jewish future. There was indeed a war on the Jewish child.

Ultimately, the war against Jewish children was a war against Jewish continuity – a campaign designed to ensure the permanent obliteration of Jewish life and, through, this of Jewish influence on Europe and the world. By exploring the mechanisms and ideologies that underpinned this war, this article has provided a deeper understanding of how genocidal regimes can mobilise vast resources to target even the most vulnerable members of a population. The historical record compels us to examine not only the atrocities committed, but also the processes that enabled them and the ideologies that fuelled them, and it offers critical insights for recognising genocides and understanding their ideology and structures in the past and today.

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Boaz Cohen is the head of the Holocaust Studies program at Western Galilee College in Akko, Israel, and teaches history at Shaanan College in Haifa. He is also an affiliated research fellow at the Centre for Collective Violence, Holocaust and Genocide Studies at the UCL Institute for Advanced Studies. Cohen's work focuses on the post-war Jewish world, the development of Holocaust historiography and memory in social and cultural contexts, the agency of Holocaust survivors and their early testimonies, and the rehabilitation and early testimonies of child Holocaust survivors. He is co-founder of the "Children of War, Holocaust and Genocide" project with Verena Buser.
Email: boazc@wgalil.ac.il

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Agilolf Kesselring

Continuity and Change in Wehrmacht Anti-Partisan Warfare

The Example of the XVIII Mountain Corps in Yugoslavia and on the Arctic Karelian Front

Abstract

Based on the archival finding of a German suggestion for the deportation of the Karelian inhabitants of Finnish occupied Russian Karelia to concentration camps, this article discusses how the anti-partisan warfare policies of a mountain corps changed while being deployed in the Balkans and the Arctic Circle. This finding is contextualised with the different forms of cooperation and collaboration with the national socialist Third Reich and its genocidal agenda in Serbia and Finland vis-à-vis military circumstances. While highlighting the nexus between anti-partisan warfare and the Holocaust, the finding is that where there has been no automatic road from anti-partisan warfare to genocide, like in Finland, anti-partisan warfare could still have served as a cover and facilitator for the Holocaust – but, even under political pressure, that did not happen. By focusing on the operative level in one special case, the article again opens the field of the history of warfare to questions related to genocide and Holocaust studies in order to get a deeper understanding of the mechanisms and (in)human decisions which have led to mass murder under conditions of war.

This article focuses on the question of change and continuity in anti-partisan warfare during the Second World War, using the example of the XVIII Mountain Corps in Serbia and Russian Karelia. It deals with the relevance of choices in the history of the Second World War and the impact of circumstances. This is relevant for a deeper understanding of the interlinkage of partisan warfare and the Holocaust on one hand, as well as of the stereotypes of the Wehrmacht and SS on the other hand. Using the example of one specific army corps – the XVIII Mountain Corps – and thereby concentrating on the military operational level, the question follows as to why “the same” military organisation acted genocidally in one theatre of operations and non-genocidally in another one. The example of the XVIII Mountain Corps is of special usefulness, as it is one of the few cases of an army corps in which changes cannot be attributed to the personal factor, as the commanding general and his staff was the same in Serbia and in Russian Karelia. In this article, it is thus argued that it did not only matter if the commanding general could be considered a national socialist or not, but that a deeper examination of the military, political, and cultural circumstances needs to be made. Even though the principle of command responsibility is a good tool for dealing with war crimes¹ – also genocidal war crimes under circumstances of ideologically motivated genocidal policies – in juridical terms, in

1 Agilolf Kesselring, “Die historische Analyse paramilitärischer Verbände als Herausforderung für die Neueste Militärgeschichte am Beispiel der Kommandoverantwortung im zerfallenden Jugoslawien”, *Militärgeschichtliche Zeitschrift* 77, no. 2 (2018): 415–457.

the historiographical sense of understanding the driving forces of past genocidal war crimes, a broader approach is needed. In terms of research ethics, this article is based on the assumption that a better understanding of the driving forces leading to criminal mass murder under the umbrella of warfare might be useful in order to avoid or minimise such developments in the future.

During Second World War, the German 20th Mountain Army fought – under different names and with changing troops – in Finnish Lapland on the very left side of the outer northern flank of the Eastern Front, with the never reached goal of taking the crucial railroad connection between the harbour of Murmansk in the Arctic Ocean and Leningrad. While researching the archival sources concerning this German Arctic army for the purpose of a biographical project on German generals in Finland during the Finnish Continuation War from 1941 to 1944 – when the Republic of Finland fought as a co-belligerent side by side with Adolf Hitler's Third Reich against Josef Stalin's Soviet Union, which had attacked Finland on 30 November 1939 beginning the Winter War – the author's attention was caught by a so far unknown document.² This short document, a small dossier of seven pages in a file of the XVIII Mountain Corps' Third General Staff officer (the intelligence officer, commonly known under the abbreviation as "Ic") contains a proposal of the commanding general for concentrating all of the Karelian inhabitants of Finnish-occupied East Karelia into Finnish camps. It consists of two letters from the XVIII Mountain Corps to its superior level (the command of the 20th Mountain Army under Colonel General Eduard Dietl)³, and the protocol of a meeting of the Chief of Staff of XVIII Mountain Corps with Finnish Lieutenant Colonel Olli Paloheimo, the chief of staff of the East Karelian military government. The protocol is dated 24 July 1942.

As we know, there has not been something like a deportation of all of the Karelian inhabitants of Finnish-occupied East Karelia to concentration camps. So, why should this issue be dealt with when it seems to be a counterfactual, alternative path for history? The German proposal is, however, still noteworthy. It has not been mentioned by any other scholar, even though the nature of the German-Finnish *Waffenbrüderschaft* (brotherhood-in-arms) has been debated and researched for eighty years. And even though it may not have been realised, a military plan still has to be taken seriously. This plan had for a short time been the policy of a mountain corps, it had been communicated to its army command, and there was an attempt to put it into practice in (failed) cooperation with the highest regional occupational administration. This occupational administration, though, was not German, but it was part of the host country, co-belligerent Finland. The dossier gives an idea of the nature of this co-belligerency during the summer of 1942. But the dossier is also relevant for other reasons, as will be shown.

2 Bundesarchiv (BArch), RH-24-18/ 173b, map, Feindmeldungen vom 25.-29.7.42, 33; Generalkommando XVIII. (Geb.)A.K., Abt. Ic, Betr. Kareliche Bevölkerung ostwärts der alten finnischen Grenze, 26. 7. 1942, 37–38; Generalkommando XVIII. (Geb.)A.K., Abt. Ic, Nr. 1449/ 42 geheim, Betr. Abschiebung der sowjetrussischen Zivilbevölkerung ostwärts der alten finnischen Grenze, 20. 7. 1942, 39–40; Aktennotiz über die Besprechung mit Obstlt. Paloheimo, dem Leiter der Ostkarelischen Militärverwaltung in Kuusamo am 24. 7. 1942. For an account of partisan warfare in the rear area of the XVIII Mountain Corps, see Aktenvermerk über das Auftreten von Partisanen bis 7. 7. 1942, 61–62.

3 For obvious reasons, research and literature on Dietl is most advanced in Finland and Germany. See Kurt Herrmann, *Dietl – napapiirin kenraali* (Loviisan uusi kirjapaino, Loviisa 1957); Kalevi Mikkonen, *Dietl. Lapin kenraali jatkosodan aikana* (Väyläkirjat, Rovaniemi 2023); Winfried Heinemann, "Eduard Dietl. Lieblingsgeneral des 'Führers'", in *Die Militärelite des Dritten Reiches. 27 biographische Skizzen*, eds. Ronald Smelser and Enrico Syring (Berlin: Ulstein, 1995), 99–112; Roland Kaltenecker, *Generaloberst Eduard Dietl. Teil 1: Die Symbolfigur der deutschen Gebirgstruppe 1890–1933 und ihre Zeit* (Würzburg: Flechsig Verlag, 2012); Roland Kaltenecker, *Generaloberst Eduard Dietl. Teil 2: Der Held von Narvik 1933–1944* (Würzburg: Flechsig Verlag, 2012).

The Political and Military Setting at the Arctic Karelian Front in 1942

The above-mentioned protocol is dated 24 July 1942. Hitler had just paid a visit at very short notice for the Finnish Commander-in-Chief Marshal Mannerheim's seventy-fifth birthday on 4 June 1942.⁴ This was when the Finnish government awarded Mannerheim the unique title of Marshal of Finland. According to Finnish military historian Martti Turtola, this was the climax of Mannerheim's popularity and, with that, also of his political power.⁵ On this occasion, Hitler also promoted Eduard Dietl to colonel general. Hitler's courtesy visit was clearly supposed to strengthen the German-Finnish ties of *Waffenbrüderschaft* in a military situation, after the German Wehrmacht had lost its nimbus of invincibility during the winter of 1941.⁶ In January 1942, Finnish president Risto Ryti emphasised to his envoy in Berlin, former prime minister Toivo Mikael Kivimäki, that Finland's status as a co-belligerent but non-allied country should be defended.⁷ Already during the spring of 1942, a re-grouping had started on the Finnish front. Before that, one of the three army corps under the command of the 20th Mountain Army had been the III Finnish Army Corps under Lieutenant General Hjalmar Siilasvuo – the already legendary hero of the Battle of Suomussalmi during the Winter War. The bi-national integration had gone even further: the army corps consisted of two divisions. One of two divisions under Siilasvuo's command was the German 163rd Infantry Division, and in return the 6th Finnish Division stood under the command of the German XXXVI Mountain Corps. After the spring of 1942, Mannerheim disengaged the Finnish troops from the German ones – a first step towards a clearer distinction in the policy of being co-belligerents against a common enemy – but not allied on all fronts. As a result, the 20th Mountain Army had to get a third mountain corps with two new mountain divisions in order to replace Siilasvuo's III Finnish Army Corps in the Finnish theatre of war. The only dispensable mountain corps was the XVIII Mountain Corps, which was transferred from Belgrade via Salzburg to the most southern wing of the Arctic Front against the Red Army at Loukhi (or *Louhi* in Karelian and Finnish) starting in April 1942.⁸ The change of troops from Siilasvuo's Finnish III Army Corps to General der Gebirgstruppe Franz Böhme's XVIII Mountain Corps at Uhtua took place shortly after Hitler's visit.⁹

4 For a detailed account of the preparations of the visit, the visit itself, and the background to it, see General der Infanterie Waldemar Erfurth's war diary, which has been published only in Finnish: *Waldemar Erfurth. Sotapäiväkirja 1942–1943*, ed. Pekka Visuri (Jyväskylä: Docendo, 2018), 153–178.

5 Martti Turtola, *Mannerheim* (Helsinki: Tammi, 2016), 269–262. For a critical discussion on Mannerheim's art of warfare, see Mikko Karjalainen and Toni Mononen, *Mannerheimin sotataito* (Helsinki: Ottava, 2022).

6 For the German political, diplomatic, and military context, see Bernd Wegner, "Der Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion", in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, vol. 6: *Der globale Krieg. Die Ausweitung zum Weltkrieg und der Wechsel der Initiative 1941–1943*, ed. Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1990), 828–834.

7 For the political context of the military dislocation, see Martti Häikiö, "Jatkosodan ulkopoliittikka: asemasotavaihe", in *Jatkosodan pikkujättiläinen*, eds. Jari Leskinen and Antti Juutilainen (Helsinki: Werner Söderström, 2006), 353–354.

8 BArch, RH-24-18/ 171.

9 *Waldemar Erfurth. Sotapäiväkirja 1942–1943*, ed. Pekka Visuri (Jyväskylä: Docendo, 2018), 176. The often-forgotten short courtesy visit by Mannerheim took place on 27 and 28 June 1942 as a visit to Hitler in his *Wolfsschanze* (Wolf's Lair) military headquarters in Rastenburg, to Mauerberg, as well as to Göring in Rominten in Eastern Prussia all in one day, with the return flight on 28 June.

The Probable Connection with Himmler's Finnish "Vacation"

The protocol's date, 24 July 1942, might also be relevant in the context of the Holocaust. One day later, the German Wehrmacht's liaison officer for the Finnish headquarters, Erfurth, wrote in his war diary that Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler would come to Finland on 30 July, and that he wanted to meet Mannerheim and proceed to Rovaniemi, where Dietl's headquarters of the 20th Mountain Army was situated.¹⁰ Erfurth's diary tells little about Himmler's visit to Mannerheim. The purpose of the visit remains unclear. Himmler and his entourage, including Chief of Personal Staff Reichsführer-SS SS-Obergruppenführer Karl Wolff, left the following day from the Helsinki-Malmi airfield.¹¹ In his book *Finland and the Holocaust: The Rescue of Finland's Jews*, Finnish historian Hannu Rautkallio deals with Himmler's visit to Finland in relation to the issue of whether or not Himmler then demanded, proposed, or requested the deportation of Jewish refugees in Finland or even the extradition of Finnish Jews.¹² Rautkallio shoots down the narrative established by Himmler's masseur Felix Kersten, who had Finnish citizenship, that Kersten would have helped the Finnish government to postpone a decision on extradition until the fall of 1942 during Himmler's visit to Finland. In fact, Kersten's credibility in respect to his own role seems to be exaggerated, at least.¹³ Rautkallio's critical arguments for doubting Kersten's strong role in "rescuing" the Finnish Jews should be taken seriously. Rautkallio does unfortunately not apply the same level of source criticism when dealing with Finnish Prime Minister Johan Wilhelm Rangell's famous quotation made during a car drive on 4 August 1942:

Himmler asked, 'how is the situation with the Jews of Finland?' I said to him that in Finland there are roughly a couple of thousand Jews, decent families and individuals whose sons are fighting in our army like the rest of the Finns and who are as respected citizens as all the rest. I concluded the statement with the words, "*Wir haben keine Judenfrage*" [We don't have a Jewish question A.K.], and I said it with such clarity that the discussion of the matter ended then and there. The Jewish question was not discussed with Himmler at any other time.¹⁴

There is no other independent source existing for that quotation, and Rangell may have also exaggerated his own role. Nevertheless, it is a historical fact that, besides the eight known extradited non-Finnish Jews,¹⁵ as well as a number of between 39 and probably 74 Jewish out of 520 Soviet prisoners-of-war, who were extradited to the Germans, there is no known extradition of any Finnish Jew to Germany.¹⁶ The

10 Waldemar Erfurth, 215.

11 Ibid., 218–219.

12 Hannu Rautkallio, *Finland and the Holocaust: The Rescue of Finland's Jews* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1987), 159–179.

13 *The Memoirs of Doctor Felix Kersten*, ed. Herma Briffault (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1947/Kessinger Legacy Reprints), 123–132.

14 J.W. Rangell's interview, 3 November 1961, cited in Rautkallio, *Finland and the Holocaust*, 168. The quotation is in fact from an interview that Finnish historian Mauno Jokipii conducted with Johan Wilhelm Rangell in 1961, and which is cited in an article on Himmler's visit to Finland. Mauno Jokipii, "Himmlerin Suomen matka v. 1942", in *Juhlajulkaisu Einar W. Juwan kunniaksi hänen täyttäässään 70 vuotta 7.1.1962* (Helsinki: SHS, 1962), 430–431.

15 For a list from the Finnish state police, dated 6 November 1942, of the twenty-seven persons extradited, of whom eight were Jews – seven of whom were murdered in Auschwitz, while one survived – see Rautkallio, *Finland and the Holocaust*, 261–262.

16 For the findings of the Finnish historians' commission, see *Prisoner of War Deaths and People Handed over to Germany and the Soviet Union in 1939–55: A Research Report by the Finnish National Archives*, ed. Lars Westlund (Helsinki: National Archives, 2008).

role of the German ambassador in Helsinki, Wipert von Blücher, has been researched in depth. He had a clear influence at least on not accelerating the national socialist impact on Finland, conducting rather a traditional German power policy. German historian Michael Jonas shows how Blücher used the Finnish general opposition to German *Judenpolitik* as an argument for his own obstruction, always carefully covered by pointing at the military needs for traditional diplomacy.¹⁷ On the other hand, Finnish historian Oula Silvennoinen has proven that, during the second half of 1941, a small Finnish state police unit worked under SS-Einsatzkommando Finnland, which was led by SS-Sturmbannführer Gustav vom Felde. The SS-Einsatzkommando was tasked with filtering out certain groups from the Stalag 309 prisoner-of-war camp in Salla. There existed a list of eleven groups which had to be segregated, among those “professional revolutionaries”, “political commissars of the Red Army”, “members of the Soviet Russian intelligentsia”, and “all Jews”.¹⁸

Command Responsibility and Dramatis Personae

The commanding general of the XVIII Mountain Corps, who started the (failed) initiative for the deportation of the ethnic Karelian inhabitants of East Karelia to Finnish-run concentration camps, was the General der Gebirgstruppe (then a German three-star general) Franz Böhme. He and the staff of his corps had been moved from Greece to Finland some three months before in April and May 1942, as a result of the disengagement of German and Finnish troops on Finnish soil. Böhme, a former Austrian general staff officer, was not just another commanding general of a mountain corps. He was the one who had been put in charge of the Austrian intelligence office following the Anschluss, in order to integrate it into the Greater German security apparatus.¹⁹ This was a task for a convinced national socialist, who before had been disadvantaged in republican Austria. Böhme’s XVIII Mountain Corps had fought its way through the Greek Metaxas Line and was then used as staff for the occupation administration in Greece.²⁰

From 9 October 1941 until 7 December 1941, Böhme and his staff took over from the “Befehlshaber Serbien”, General der Flieger Heinrich Danckelmann, who in most sources is said to have been in charge of this command until 20 October 1941. Böhme’s new appointment was called “Bevollmächtigter Kommandierender General in Serbien (Kommandostab Serbien)”, which can be translated as plenipotentiary commanding general in Serbia. The civil government was conducted in those days by the collaboration government of the former chief of the Yugoslav general staff (from 1934 to 1935) and minister of war of Yugoslavia (from 1939 to 1940) Milan Nedić, who was in charge as prime minister from 29 August 1941. Nedić committed suicide after he was indicted by the Tito regime on 5 February 1946, by jumping

17 Michael Jonas, *NS-Diplomatie und Bündnispolitik 1935–1944. Wipert von Blücher, das Dritte Reich und Finnland* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, Paderborn 2011), 381–387.

18 Oula Silvennoinen, *Geheime Waffenbrüderschaft. Die sicherheitspolitische Zusammenarbeit zwischen Finnland und Deutschland 1933–1945* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2010), 164–171, list on 167–168.

19 For the military career of Franz Böhme, see his German personal file BArch, PERS 6/ 85, and his German “general’s card” BArch, PERS 6/ 299430.

20 Detlef Vogel, “Das Eingreifen Deutschlands auf dem Balkan”, in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, vol. 3: *Der Mittelmeerraum und Südosteuropa. Von der ‘non belligeranza’ Italiens bis zum Kriegseintritt der Vereinigten Staaten*, ed. Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, Stuttgart 1984), 448–454.

from a window of his Belgrade prison. Danckelmann was extradited to Yugoslavia and executed on 30 October 1947. Böhme was indicted in the so-called “Hostages Trial” (officially “The United States of America v. Wilhelm List, et al.”), and committed suicide by jumping from a window in Nürnberg on 30 May 1947. Böhme’s chief of staff from the moment of the establishment of the XVIII Mountain Army Corps in November 1940 until April 1943 was General Staff Colonel Max Pemsel, later a Wehrmacht general lieutenant, who made his way into the West German Bundeswehr, where he served as commanding general of the Second Corps.²¹ As chief of staff, Pemsel had no legal command responsibility. This does of course not affect his moral responsibilities.

On the Finnish side, again, the documents mention Olli Paloheimo, with whom Pemsel negotiated. About one year later, he became colonel and commander of the Finnish East Karelian military government, which reported straight to Marshal Mannerheim. The other Finn mentioned in the document is General Major Johan Arajuri, who was the commander of the Finnish East Karelian government at the time. Paloheimo declined to decide about the deportation, pointing to a visit of Arajuri in Böhme’s headquarters in the near future.²² We have no written evidence, but it seems that it was Arajuri who declined, probably after consultations with Mannerheim. It is interesting that both Paloheimo and Arajuri were “Jeger-officers”, which means that they had fought as volunteers in the Prussian-run Finnish Legion during the First World War, like nearly all commanders of the Winter War.²³

War Crimes, Genocide, and the Context of Several Historical Debates

The debate on the contribution of the Wehrmacht to national socialist rule and measures, including the Wehrmacht’s role concerning the Holocaust, could be called a “frozen debate”. The debate, emerging strongly in the 1990s after the so-called *Wehrmachtsausstellung* (Wehrmacht exhibition) in 1992, focused among others on the example of Serbia, where Böhme, as plenipotentiary commanding general, and his staff from October to November 1941. Special attention in this context concentrated on the 717th Infantry division, which was the specific unit in place and committed massacres in Kraljevo and Kragujevac. Böhme was responsible for ordering the taking hostages at a ratio of 1:100 for every German soldier or Volksdeutscher who was killed, and 1:50 for each one who was wounded. The massacres are well documented in the Nuremberg indictment, and at Kragujevac there is evidence that, under Böhme’s command, the ratio of 1:100 was not just been a number on paper but was indeed practiced in the field. The Austrian historian and political scientist Walter Manoschek highlighted in his dissertation²⁴ that the hostages murdered were selected, among other factors, based on national-socialist racial criteria: Böhme’s order for the taking of hostages from 10 October 1941, on the first day after he took over the command as Befehlshaber Serbien, referred to “communists, all Jews and a certain

21 BAArch, RH-24-18/ 173b; on Max Pemsel, see BAArch, PERS 6/ 30333; Roland Kaltenecker, *Generalleutnant Max Josef Pemsel. Vom Armeeschef während der alliierten Invasion zum Kommandierenden General in der Bundeswehr* (Würzburg: Flechsig Verlag, 2014).

22 BAArch, RH-24-18/ 173b.

23 Agilolf Kesselring, *Des Kaisers finnische Legion. Die finnische Jägerbewegung im Kontext der deutschen Finnlandpolitik im ersten Weltkrieg* (Berlin: Berliner Wissenschaftsverlag, 2005).

24 Walter Manoschek, “Serbien ist judenfrei”. *Militärische Besatzungspolitik und Judenvernichtung in Serbien 1941/42*, 2nd ed. (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1995), 158–168.

amount of national (Serb) and democratic minded inhabitants”.²⁵ The interlinkage between Second World War anti-partisan warfare – basically a military task today known under the acronym “COIN” for counterinsurgency warfare – on the one hand, and, on the other, mass murder based on German national-socialist racial ideology primarily targeting European Jews as part of the bigger picture of the Holocaust, have for decades been well known to Holocaust researchers and military historians.²⁶ Anyway, there prevails the idea that anti-partisan warfare as a pretext or framework for the genocidal mass murder of Jews and a clear connection with the Holocaust had usually been conducted by SS-formations and the SD-Einsatzgruppen. The contribution and guilt of the Wehrmacht as the regular army of the Third Reich has been researched and controversially discussed since the 1990s.²⁷ In the Wehrmacht exhibition, the example of the 717th Infantry Division served as the most prominent example of the involvement of Wehrmacht units in the Holocaust. It remained unclear and unresolved, though, how typical or untypical such an abuse of the cover of anti-partisan warfare for genocidal policy had been. Was it an exception or was it the rule?

Results and Remaining Questions

The example of the XVIII Mountain Corps shows that the same commander with the same staff, and in a similar situation of dealing with partisan warfare in his rear area, acted in two different ways. While in Serbia the defence against the partisans can be seen as a pseudo-legal cover for committing genocide, in Finland it did not lead to the deportation of the Karelian population of Soviet Eastern Karelia. While in Serbia the paramilitary Četniks under Dragoljub Mihailović were radical nationalists with an antisemitic agenda, who cooperated in providing the troops under Böhme’s command with non-Serb or at least non-Četnik hostages, the Finnish regular military, the army of a democratic state, did not cooperate by agreeing to the deportation of the Karelian population. The argument was that there were Karelians in Finland, too. It would not be possible to explain to the Finnish Karelians why their fellow Karelians on the wrong side of the former border should be put into concentration camps. Even though – or perhaps also because – there was an at least rough treatment of Soviet prisoners, strong anticommunism, and the ideal of a Greater Finland, there was no policy for treating Finnish citizens with different ethnic (e.g. Finnish, Swedish, Karelian, Ingerman, Tatar, Russian, and German) or religious (e.g. Lutheran, Orthodox, Jewish, and Muslim) backgrounds badly.

Böhme, who, like Dietl, was ideologically a convinced national socialist, tried at first to implement methods of segregation, as he was used to from the Serbian theatre of war. The SS had already started to implement its murderous segregation policy by establishing an SS-Einsatzkommando under vom Felde. We can imagine the Einsatzkommando as a nucleus for a future Einsatzgruppe. Yet, as soon as Böhme and

25 Walter Manoschek, “Die Massaker in Pancevo und Kragujevac”, in *Repressalien und Terror. ‘Vergeltungsaktionen’ im deutsch besetzten Europa 1939–1945*, ed. Oliver von Wrochem (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2017), 97.

26 Christian Hartmann, Johannes Hürter, and Peter Lieb, *Der deutsche Krieg im Osten 1941–1944. Facetten einer Grenzüberschreitung* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2009). Concerning partisan warfare on the Western Front, see Peter Lieb, *Konventioneller Krieg oder NS-Weltanschauungskrieg? Kriegsführung und Partisanenbekämpfung in Frankreich 1943/44* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2007).

27 Walter Manoschek, ed., *Die Wehrmacht im Rassenkrieg. Der Vernichtungskrieg hinter der Front* (Vienna: Picus Verlag, 1996).

his staff were confronted with a clear objection, they started to change their attitudes through a kind of *realpolitik*. It is noteworthy that it is not historically clear who from a higher political level exactly opposed the deportation of Karelians, but it was most probably Mannerheim. It is also unknown who should be attributed with opposing the extradition of Finnish Jews, and it is not even clear if their extradition was ever demanded or suggested by Himmler or Hitler. Still, opposition to this has been attributed to Rangell, but the social democrat Väinö Tanner is also said to have protested. It seems that there was an all-party agreement on not crossing certain lines, which was common sense among the political and military leadership, as well as among the lower military level in charge. That does not mean that there was no anti-semitism, radical nationalism, or high esteem for the Germans and perhaps even Nazi ideology, among some Finns. What was decisive was that the Finnish leadership, be it President Ryti, Marshall Mannerheim, or Prime Minister Rangell, had a common goal, based on common national values shared with the greater part of the Finnish citizens. Together with the high strategic value of Finland for the war against the Soviet Union, Hitler's high esteem for Mannerheim led to an exception in national socialist anti-Jewish policy. On the other hand, where the political leadership did agree to extradite the non-Finnish population, the national-socialist murder machine functioned as it did in other places. SS-Einsatzgruppe A was also in a geographical sense not far away.

It has not been confirmed, but it is possible, that Böhme's suggestion for deporting the Karelian population inhabiting the eastern side of the former Soviet-Finnish border to Finnish concentration camps – which would first have to be established – was part of a first trial for or a first step to the Holocaust. The timely coordination with Himmler's visit suggests that it was not simply a coincidence. It is noteworthy that the preparations for Himmler's visit started after SS-Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich had been killed on 4 June 1942, which coincided on the same day, were Hitler had visited Mannerheim. The reason behind Himmler's "vacation" together with SS-Obergruppenführer Wolff is still unknown. If Böhme's suggestion was part of a first step to the Holocaust, it would be a similar pattern to the one in Kragujevac, where Böhme filed the order on his first day in command. Perhaps the small finding of a so far unknown document concerning the sparsely inhabited Arctic area might open new perspectives and encourage new interdisciplinary research at the junction of Holocaust and military history.

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Agilolf Kesselring, Associate Professor, History of European Warfare, Department of Warfare/(Finnish) National Defence University. Kesselring, born 1972 in Tokyo, Japan, is a German-Finnish military historian with a focus on the history of warfare, and intelligence in the “long” 20th century. He studied History, Social Sciences and International Law in Hamburg, earned his Doktor der Philosophie (PhD) in History at the Helmut-Schmidt-University of the German Armed Forces (Hamburg) and was named dosentti (associate professor) at the Finnish National Defence University’s Institute of Warfare (Helsinki) with the *venia legendi* of History of European Warfare in 2019. Kesselring teaches also as Lehrbeauftragter (associate sr. lecturer) at the German University of the Public Administration’s intelligence studies faculty (Berlin) on a regular basis since 2022. He has published several books on North-European military history, German Intelligence history, Southeast-European military history, as well as over 70 popular articles covering warfare and intelligence in the 20th century in Finnish and German. Currently he works on a monography on the topic of the hidden German armament of the 1920s and 1930s.

Email: agilolf@hotmail.de

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Miriam Offer

The “Final Final Solution”

The War Against Jewish Fetuses in Their Mothers’ Wombs

Abstract

Operation Barbarossa was a turning point between the array of dehumanising “solutions to the Jewish question”, hitherto concocted by the Nazis, and the gradual escalation into mass systematic annihilation in forest ravines, gas vans, and extermination camps. This article examines the distinctiveness of the decree against births imposed in the Jewish ghettos of Lithuania, established in the second half of 1941, in comparison with the Polish ghettos, as well as the possible connection to the Wannsee Conference decisions. Furthermore, the article addresses the coping strategies adopted in the ghettos. In view of the Wannsee Conference Protocol and the chronological proximity of the conference to the decree’s announcement, the decree appears to have constituted an additional frontier to ensure the “Final Final Solution” discussed at the meeting at Wannsee.

The series of measures taken by the German army and its collaborators against the Jews in the Soviet territories, following Operation Barbarossa, was a clear manifestation of an anti-Jewish extermination policy, even though a “final solution” pertaining to all Jews living in areas under Nazi oppression had not yet been authorised. Operation Barbarossa was a watershed moment between the various dehumanising methods devised by the Nazis thus far to find a “solution to the Jewish question”, such as segregation, racist and discriminatory legislation, expropriation, forced migration, ghettos, labour camps, and other “final solutions” thereafter. These solutions were progressively extended and escalated into total systematic annihilation – murder by shooting into forest pits, in gas vans, and extermination camps.¹

This article sheds light on the significance of the decree against births imposed on the Jews of the Lithuanian ghettos, established in the second half of 1941 following the extermination of most of Lithuanian Jewry in the first weeks after Operation Barbarossa.² The survivors were concentrated in temporary ghettos to exploit the young, healthy Jewish labour force for the German war effort on Soviet territory. Once exhausted, this labour force would be exterminated as well. The article examines the distinctive nature of the decree against births in comparison to the Polish ghettos, the possible connection to the Wannsee Conference decisions, and the coping strategies adopted in the ghettos. A meticulous reading of the Wannsee Conference Protocol and the conference’s chronological proximity to the decree’s announcement indicates that the decree was an additional frontier to ensure the “Final Final Solution” raised for discussion at that gathering in Wannsee.

1 Christoph Dieckmann, *Mediniyut Hahashmada Hanatzit, 1939–1945* [The Nazi Extermination Policy, 1939–1945] (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2001), 277–315, in Hebrew.

2 On the decree against births, see, for example Miriam Offer, “Medicine in the Shavli Ghetto in Light of the Newly Discovered Diary of Dr. Aaron Pik”, in *Jewish Medical Resistance in the Holocaust*, ed. Michael A. Grodin (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2021), 164–172.

“Suitable Treatment” to Prevent a New Jewish Revival

The Wannsee Conference convened on 20 January 1942 to coordinate the “Final Solution to the Jewish Question”. Consequently, a network of extermination camps was established, in which 1.7 million Jews were murdered in 1942 and 1943.³ The Wannsee Conference Protocol states, inter alia, that:

[u]nder appropriate direction the Jews are to be utilized for work in the East in an expedient manner in the course of the final solution. In large (labor) columns, with the sexes separated, Jews capable of work will be moved into these areas as they build roads, during which a large proportion will no doubt drop out through natural reduction. *The remnant that eventually remains will require suitable treatment; because it will without doubt represent the most [physically] resistant part, it consists of a natural selection that could, on its release, become the germ-cell of a new Jewish revival. (Witness the experience of history.)*⁴ [my emphasis, M.O.]

“A new Jewish revival” referred to the fertility potential of Jews who were fit for work and could survive the “dropout through natural reduction”. Thus, they would jeopardise the Final Solution by forming a new generation of Jews who would ensure the continuity of the Jewish people’s heritage. “Witness the experience of history”, states the protocol, reflecting the unmistakable fear that Jewish survivors of the Lithuanian work ghettos could foil the Final Solution intended to exterminate more than 11,000,000 Jews. In response to this potential “danger”, the Wannsee Protocol proposed “suitable treatment” to cope with the issue.⁵

The “suitable treatment” to cope with this “threat”, according to German policy, was apparently to issue a decree prohibiting the birth of Jewish children and enforcing abortions among Jewish pregnant women. In this context, the decree against births in the Lithuanian ghettos can be seen as a “Final Final Solution”.

The Decree Against Births in the Šiauliai Ghetto

The decree against births was imposed in the Lithuanian ghettos of Vilnius, Kovno, and Šiauliai, which were established in the summer of 1941, after war broke out between Germany and the Soviet Union. In the Vilnius and Šiauliai ghettos, the decree was announced on 5 February 1942, and for the first time in Kovno on 24 July 1942. This article investigates the unique nature of the decree against births in the Lithuanian ghettos, focusing on Šiauliai as a case study. As was to be expected, the need to cope with this harsh decree made a grave impression on the ghetto inhabitants, as evidenced in diaries written in the ghetto, in protocols that were preserved, and in survivors’ memoirs.⁶

3 Yad Vashem, *Protocol of the Wannsee Conference, January 20, 1942*, accessed 20 January 2025, <https://www.yadvashem.org/docs/wannsee-conference-protocol.html>.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Miriam Offer, “Refua Verof'im Begeto Shavli Be'ikvot Hasifat Yomano Shel Harofe Aaron Pik, Reshimot Migai Hahariga: Zihronot Ktuvim Bageto Hashavla'i (Lita), 1942, 1943, 1944” [Medicine and Doctors in the Shavli Ghetto Following the Discovery of the Diary of Dr Aharon Pik: *Notes from the Valley of Death – Written Notes from the Shavli Ghetto in Lithuania from the Years 1942, 1943, 1944*] (master’s thesis, University of Haifa, 1993), 52–58, 85–99, in Hebrew; Lea Prais, “Harefua Vehabriyot Begeta'ot Vilna, Kovna Veshavli (1941–1944) Bein Hapitaron Hasofi Leproduktivizatzia” [Between Productivity and the ‘Final Solution’: Medical and Healthcare Problems in the Lithuanian Ghettos – Vilna, Kovna and Shavli (1941–1944)] (master’s thesis, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1998), 79–81, 109–112, in Hebrew.

First-hand sources from the Šiauliai ghetto shed light, from different perspectives, on the decree against births. Particularly important are the diaries of the teacher, author, and historian Dr Eliezer Yerushalmi, in which he documented the history of the ghetto, on request of the *Aeltestenrat* (Council of Elders). Yerushalmi, who had a PhD in history, established an archive in the ghetto and was principal of the ghetto school. During the interwar period, he had been involved in public matters and was active in the Zionist organisation. With the knowledge and consent of the *Aeltestenrat*, he documented, inter alia, the decree against births and the means of coping with it in the ghetto.⁷ Another important source are the personal diaries of the physician Dr Aharon Pick, who played a role in carrying out the policy adopted by the ghetto leaders and physicians by implementing the decree. He described, first-hand, how he was forced to assist several women in advanced stages of pregnancy by aborting the pregnancies and killing the newborns, after they had sought his help due to the worsening conditions and growing impossibility of saving their unborn babies.

Dr Pick was a respected figure in the Šiauliai community, well-versed in Jewish tradition and with rich professional medical experience. He was the only Jewish physician working in the Šiauliai general hospital, where, for sixteen years, he directed the departments of internal medicine and infectious diseases. Alongside his work, he took on numerous public responsibilities in the Šiauliai Jewish community, serving as a member of the Jewish Council, deputy chair of the General Zionist Federation, chair of the local branch of *Tarbut* (culture), and director of the Hebrew public library, and he was also one of the founders of the Hebrew Gymnasium.⁸

While coping with the events imposed on them in the ghetto, Dr Pick and his fellow physicians risked their lives in their attempts to save the inhabitants. In June 1944, a month before the liquidation of the ghetto, Pick died of an illness at the age of seventy-two.⁹

On the eve of the war, approximately 8,000 Jews lived in the city, including refugees. When the Germans invaded, approximately 1,000 refugees fled, and approximately 2,500 Jews were massacred in the Kužiai Forest during the first weeks of the occupation. The ghetto was officially sealed on 1 September 1941, with approximately 5,000 Jews crammed inside. In September 1943, the ghetto was transferred to SS control and became a concentration camp. It was liquidated in July 1944.¹⁰

Two weeks after the Wannsee Conference, on 5 February 1942, the German security police summoned the *Aeltestenrat* of the Šiauliai Ghetto and informed it of the decree against births in the ghetto. On the following day, the decree was announced to all the Jews in the ghetto, and it included the following elements: 1) childbirth in the ghetto was undesirable; 2) the artificial termination of Jewish women's pregnancies was permissible, and required (!); 3) Jewish women giving birth were to be severely punished.¹¹ Pick wrote in his diary that “[t]he date of this decree reducing us to

7 Eliezer Yerushalmi, *Pinkas Shavli, Yoman Migeto Lita'i (1941–1944)* [Shavli Notebook, A Diary from a Lithuanian Ghetto (1941–1944)] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute and Yad Vashem, 1958), in Hebrew.

8 Aharon Pick, *Notes from the Valley of Slaughter: A Memoir of the Ghetto of Siauliai, Lithuania*, trans. Gabriel Laufer and Andrew Cassel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2023).

9 Shmuel Gadon, ed., *Tedik David Pik, Mishelo, Ito, Alav* [Tedik David Pick, By Him, With Him and About Him] (Kibbutz Netzer Hazani: Sifrei Te'ud Vezikaron, 1979), 13–15, in Hebrew.

10 Sima Itzikas, “Korot Geto Shavli (1941–1944)” [The History of the Šiauliai Ghetto (1941–1944)], master's thesis, in *Yahadut Lita, vol. IV* [The Jews of Lithuania, vol. IV] (Tel Aviv: Association of Lithuanian Jews in Israel, 1944), 1–185, in Hebrew; Yad Vashem, *Encyclopedia of the Ghettos, Šiauliai*, accessed 22 January 2025, https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/he/research/ghettos_encyclopedia/ghetto_details.asp?cid=1060.

11 Yerushalmi, *Pinkas Shavli*, 59, 61; Pick, *Notes from the Valley of Slaughter*, 167.

beasts must be remembered from one generation to the next: it was February 5, 1942”¹²

Pick also expressed his wish and hope for future generations to explore these events in-depth, to understand the unique suffering of the Jews under the Nazi regime: “[f]uture readers will surely have hearts sensitive enough to imagine, even without many words, our bitter lives and our emotional tribulations. They will marvel at the extent of our endurance at how much suffering this weak creature called a Jew could bear. ...”¹³

A turbulent atmosphere prevailed in the ghetto following the issue of the decree. “There are no words to describe our feelings upon hearing this decree: helpless rage, disgust, desire for revenge, aggrievement toward heaven ...”¹⁴ Neither Dr Pick nor Dr Yerushalmi could avoid the historical comparison between this decree and the biblical decree by Pharaoh: “Pharaoh only ordered the male children killed, but our modern-day Haman intends to annihilate all.”¹⁵

Two days later, on 7 February 1942, an order was issued to obstetricians: “[t]hey are permitted to perform abortions on Jewish women but are forbidden to allow live births”. That is, both the Jewish women and the obstetricians were responsible for upholding the decree. If they failed, “harsh punishment” would be meted out.¹⁶

About two months later, on 7 April 1942, the Aeltestenrat issued a memorandum to the ghetto inhabitants: “[a] memorandum of the notice issued by the security police on February 5 ... we remind the ghetto inhabitants once again regarding strict adherence to the order ...”¹⁷

Five months after the decree was announced, on 4 July 1942, and about a month before it was put into force, the head of the German security police, Dr Charny, addressed the Aeltestenrat, drawing its attention, once again, to the decree against births. “The last day for permissible births is August 5, 1942”, the head of the German security police reminded the council’s members. He informed them of an extension until 15 August 1942, adding: “[i]n the event of a birth in a Jewish family after that date, the entire Jewish family will be executed, and the *Aeltestenrat* will be held responsible”¹⁸.

As the deadline approached, on 13 July 1942, the Aeltestenrat publicised harsher details concerning births in the ghetto than in the initial notices. Repeated warnings by the Aeltestenrat took a genuinely threatening tone: “[c]hildbirth is forbidden in hospitals and pregnant women’s homes. The women and their families are in danger of death. A list of the women will be drawn up.”¹⁹ For any women who had thought of disregarding the decree by giving birth in secret, this notice left no room for doubt about the future. “... [T]he unprecedented and infamous prohibition against Jewish women giving birth to sons, thus forcing them to abort their pregnancies. How could a heart not break on hearing this?”, wrote Pick.²⁰ About two weeks prior to the enforcement of the decree, the Aeltestenrat issued the following notice:

Last warning! Time is running out. The last hour is almost upon us! August 15 is not far away! Remember, Jewish women, that after the fifteenth, there

¹² Pick, *Notes from the Valley of Slaughter*, 168.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*; Yerushalmi, *Pinkas Shavli*, 59.

¹⁶ Yerushalmi, *Pinkas Shavli*, 61; Pick, *Notes from the Valley of Slaughter*, 153.

¹⁷ Yerushalmi, *Pinkas Shavli*, 72.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Pick, *Notes from the Valley of Slaughter*, 152.

are to be no more births in the hospitals in the ghetto. Remember that, after the fifteenth, it is forbidden to give birth at home. Strict inspections of private homes will be carried out. Physicians, midwives, and nurses will be forbidden to attend to Jewish women in childbirth. Violations of the prohibition will be severely punished. Do not forget the dangerous outcomes for you and for your families! This is our last warning!²¹

The Germans strictly supervised the decree's implementation. About a week after its enforcement, the Germans reprimanded the Aeltestenrat: "[t]here are still pregnant women and many children in the ghetto."²²

About five months later, in January 1943, a terrifying conversation took place between the Aeltestenrat and the German official in charge, who asked: "[h]ave new children been born? By what means were the births stopped? Can the ghetto physicians perform castrations?" Yerushalmi wrote: "[t]he questions were presented in the most mundane fashion as if they were discussing horses, not people. Faces darkened and hearts went silent. Were we to experience something so terrible, even worse than death? To be mutilated and uglified for the rest of our lives? Destruction of the entire ghetto, like of other Jewish communities, would be preferable to this suffering..."²³

The castration rumour spread through the ghetto and people genuinely feared that husbands of women who gave birth would be punished by castration. Following this conversation, the Aeltestenrat ordered cyanide for the entire ghetto via Aharon Zeigernick, a pharmacist in the ghetto.²⁴

The War Against the Unborn in Nazi Ideology

The researcher Beverly Chalmers claims that literature on the Holocaust extensively documents direct extermination methods used against the Jews, such as gassing, torture, starvation, disease, and appalling conditions in ghettos and camps, as well as through the brutality of the *Einsatzgruppen*. She states that the more indirect means of genocide, through the manipulation of human reproduction, have thus far been under-researched.²⁵ Annette Finley-Croswhite claims that Jewish women during the Holocaust were victims of specific gendered violence, in the form of assault on pregnant women, sterilisation, forced abortion, and infanticide. However, studies on this specific aspect of Nazi atrocities are scarce, particularly in the literature not explicitly focused on women. Thus far, no detailed research exists regarding the numbers of Jewish fetuses either shot or gassed in the womb, forcibly aborted, or murdered at birth.²⁶

Nonetheless, the research and documentation point to the planning and execution of total biological extermination, including abortions, mass sterilisation, and castration.²⁷ Even though the biological extermination was directed toward those "unworthy of life" in Germany itself and was perpetuated via other means among

21 Yerushalmi, *Pinkas Shavli*, 96–97.

22 *Ibid.*, 102.

23 *Ibid.*, 154–155.

24 *Ibid.*, 155, n. 3.

25 Beverly Chalmers, *Birth, Sex and Abuse: Women's Voices under Nazi Rule* (London: Grosvenor House, 2015).

26 Annette Finley-Croswhite, "Un(B)earable: Pregnant Bodies and Obstetrical Genocide", in *Recognizing the Past in the Present: New Studies on Medicine Before, During and After the Holocaust*, eds. Sabine Hildebrandt, Miriam Offer, and Michael A. Grodin (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2021), 103–124.

27 Mark Dworzecki, *Eropa Lelo Yeladim: Tohmit Hanatzim Leheres Biyologi* [Europe without Children – The Nazi Program for Biological Destruction] (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1958), in Hebrew.

other populations considered inferior and undesirable by the Germans, Saul Friedländer made a distinction between these processes, identifying the unique nature of the Final Solution:

[i]f sterilization and euthanasia were meant only to enhance the purity of the national community [*Volksgemeinschaft*] and rested on cost–benefit calculations, the segregation and extermination of the Jews – although these, too, were a process of racial purification – were aimed principally at an active and daunting enemy that was perceived as a menace to the very existence of Germany and the Aryan world. Therefore, apart from the objective of purifying the race, common to sterilization and euthanasia, and in contrast to it, the war on the Jews was perceived as a confrontation of apocalyptic magnitude.²⁸

That is also the reason why the fear of a “new Jewish revival” appears in the Wannsee Protocol on the “Final Solution”. Finley-Croswhite claims that the Nazi onslaught on Jewish pregnant women was extensive. Gynaecological genocide was an effective means of exterminating the Jews during World War II, and its long-term statistical and emotional implications demand in-depth research.²⁹

Coping with the Decree Against Births in the Šiauliai Ghetto

The decree against births was one of the harshest inflicted on the ghetto, both ethically and practically. The Germans made the Aeltestenrat, medical staff, pregnant women, and their families responsible for implementing the order. Not only would the “culprits” be put to death, but violation of the decree would put the entire ghetto under the threat of destruction. The implementation of the decree was strictly followed up. The Aeltestenrat’s decisions and coping strategies would seal the fate of the ghetto.

The ghetto historian Yerushalmi wrote:

[t]he *Aeltestenrat* knew very well that their actions would be recorded in the diary. They knew they would be judged by history and therefore weighed up every act. However, they were not deterred from taking on the burden of responsibility for terrible deeds imposed on them by the Nazis such as abortions and the killing of newborns and allowed me to write the details in the protocol.³⁰

The protocol of this meeting in Šiauliai, held by the Aeltestenrat and a select group of ghetto physicians, reflects the issues contemplated in the ghetto regarding the measures to be taken following the decree against births. The meeting took place in March 1943, seven months after the enforcement of the decree in August 1942. It can be assumed that the first “forbidden” births, violations of the decree, were to occur about two months later. During this period, the Aeltestenrat saw fit to discuss the ways to act. At that time it was known that, following a recent birth in Kovno, all the members of the family had been shot and killed. The Aeltestenrat was aware of the implementation of the Nazi policy and attempted to find ways to spare the ghetto inhabitants from harsh punishments.

28 Friedländer, Saul, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution, 1933–1939* (New York and London: HarperCollins, 1997), 39–49.

29 Finley-Croswhite, “Un(B)earable”.

30 *Ibid.*, 15.

The medical staff knew of twenty pregnant women in the ghetto; some may already have been visibly so. Clearly, they were facing a practical problem with potentially disastrous outcomes for the entire ghetto population, not only for the individuals involved.³¹ During the discussion, Aeltestenrat member Berl Karton remarked: “[i]f the newborn’s family were the only ones in danger, we could leave the responsibility to the person involved, but the event is likely to put the whole ghetto at risk.”³²

As mentioned above, the Aeltestenrat warned of the danger several times and of the need to adhere to the decree against births. From 15 August 1942, the day the decree was enforced, the Aeltestenrat ceased its propaganda activity, fearing that continued warnings would attract the attention of the Germans and Lithuanians to cases of recalcitrant pregnancy and birth. In the attempt to propose ways to cope with the decree, the discussion revolved around recalcitrance. That is to say, the Aeltestenrat and ghetto physicians accepted the Nazis’ decree against births as inviolable, and all they needed to do was to ensure its implementation.

The proposed solutions to the problem of recalcitrant pregnancies ranged from mild to severe:

First stage – persuasion, involving several actions: 1. Follow-up and registration of pregnancies. 2. Persuasion, in the presence of a physician and a member of the Aeltestenrat, to perform an abortion. This constituted official clarification to the woman regarding her grave responsibility for the severe catastrophe to come. 3. Making threats, some of them false, such as possible intervention by the German security police, who had supposedly been watching the pregnant woman for some time.

Second stage, if the above-mentioned measures were ineffective: 1. Prohibiting the medical staff from attending to the recalcitrant pregnant woman in the hope of indirectly leading to the death of the newborn. 2. Punishing the pregnant woman’s family by reducing food rations, deporting for forced labour. 3. Killing the newborns; two physicians would deliver the baby, and a nurse would inject the poison while remaining ignorant of the nature of the injection and its outcomes.

During the meeting, Dr Luntz, a gynaecologist, fiercely opposed abortions in the advanced months of pregnancy, as in the case discussed of a woman in her eighth month, regarding whom it was decided that “a premature birth must be induced immediately”. It was also said that “the child must not be born alive because if the child is born, he will serve as an example to others”. “I cannot have such a responsibility on my conscience”, said Luntz. Dr Blecher added: “[t]his is a truly difficult case since no physician can take upon himself to kill a living child. That would be murder.”³³ Dr Direktorowicz claimed that the need to kill fetuses during the final months of pregnancy resembled a case in which the mother’s life is in danger during the birth. According to the *Halakhah* (Jewish Law), the mother’s life takes precedence over the fetus and, therefore, the fetus must be killed to save the mother”.

Luntz was not convinced and reiterated his stance: “I cannot do that.”³⁴

It is interesting to note that Dr L. Pesachowicz, the director of the hospital in the ghetto, and Dr Burstein, the head doctor in the ghetto, indicated unequivocally that the decree be upheld. Dr Pesachowicz suggested making the above-mentioned threats, on behalf of the security police, and Dr Burstein suggested forbidding the medical staff to attend births. It is possible that, by virtue of their senior positions,

31 Ibid., 188–190.

32 Ibid., 189.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid., 190.

they felt a greater responsibility than the others toward the German and Lithuanian officials and thus were steadfast in their opinions. In contrast, Dr Luntz, as a gynaecologist, would have been required to implement these harsh decisions and hence was the moral standard-bearer who opposed killing the fetuses. Naturally, the members of the Aeltestenrat sided with absolute adherence to the law. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that, according to the protocol, all the attendees at the meeting – without exception – signed the decisions.

It is important to note that, in the specific case discussed, Rivka (Regina) Ton-Guz – the woman who was eight months pregnant – refused to have an abortion, gave birth to a live boy, and managed to send him out of the ghetto. The birth took place underground, in a neglected cellar, aided by Dr Luntz. Dr Pesachowicz assisted in anesthetising the baby to transfer him to the Lithuanian side. Consequently, Rivka's husband, Zeev Ton, was dismissed from his work with the Jewish police and was sent to perform light work outside the ghetto. The baby's parents survived the war and, in 1957, the child returned to them and lived with them in the United States. This baby, Ben Zion, eventually became an expert in nuclear physics.³⁵ This case illustrates the heroism of women who refused to capitulate, but it is important to observe that Rivka Ton-Guz gave birth to her son in April 1943, five months before the ghetto became a concentration camp under SS control. The ghetto camp conditions made the options of clandestine births and hiding the babies seem hopeless and extremely dangerous.

In the Šiauliai ghetto, the Aeltestenrat members were highly respected by the ghetto inhabitants. Their stance regarding the decree was undoubtedly taken for the benefit of the entire ghetto, and not out of personal interest to save themselves. This was evident in one incident in which the Germans caught a group of Jews smuggling provisions into the ghetto and ordered the Aeltestenrat to draw up a list of “culprits”. After refusing to comply with the Germans' orders, they were commanded to draw up a list of fifty hostages. Pick writes that “[a]ll that previous night our representatives had pondered, considered, and reviewed a variety of responses, and had finally assembled a list of fifty people to be executed. At the top of the list were the names of the council members, the ghetto managers, and the Jewish policemen. This was the list they turned in.” Thus, the members of the Aeltestenrat offered themselves up as hostages.³⁶

It emerges from the material that abortions were performed in the ghetto nearly every day. Even Dr Luntz, who had voiced his disgust regarding the option of implementing the decree against mothers and their fetuses, was forced to participate. Motek Brum testified that his wife was about to give birth to their first child, “but the threat of death hovered over our heads for such a transgression ... Dr Luntz killed the fetus, underground, in terrible sanitary conditions ... The hospital became a slaughterhouse. Hundreds of pregnancies were aborted, dozens of children were murdered, there was no more childbirth among the 5,000 Jews in the Šiauliai Ghetto.”³⁷

35 Ibid., n. 32, 348, n. 5; Schneidermann, S.L. “Pegisha Ahat Benyo York” [A Meeting in New York] *Davar Hashavua*, 23, 7 June 1957, in Hebrew, <https://www.nli.org.il/he/newspapers/dav/1957/06/07/01/?e=-----he-20--1--img-txIN%7ctxTI-----1>, accessed 25 January 2025; Schneidermann, “Di Elteren Fun Bn-Tsiun Gats Zeynen Geven Farshikt in Natsishe Shklafen-Lagern” [The Parents of Ben Zion Guz Were Sent to a Nazi Slave-Labor Camp] *Forverts* 61, 26 April 1957, in Yiddish, <https://www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/?a=d&d=frw19570426-01.1.2&e=-----en-20--1--img-txIN%7ctxTI-----1>, accessed 25 January 2025.

36 Pick, *Notes from the Valley of Slaughter*, 222.

37 Mordechai (Motek) Brum, *Pirkei Hayyim* [Chapters in My Life] (Kibbutz Lohamei Haghetaot: Pinkas Edut, Beit Lohamei Haghetaot-Ghetto Fighters House, 1990), 73, in Hebrew.

In September 1943, after the liquidation of the Vilnius Ghetto, the Kovno and Šiauliai ghettos were turned into concentration camps and placed under SS control. About two months later, on 5 November 1943, when most of the ghetto inhabitants had left for the forced labour camps, the Children's *Aktion* took place. About 500 children under the age of ten were deported to their deaths, except for a small number who managed to hide. Pick wrote as follows:

[v]engeance like this, for the blood of a child, Satan has yet to devise ... A deathly silence has descended on the ghetto. Not a person can be heard in the street, only mourning and moaning from every direction. Terror and desperation ... Rachel is weeping for her children; mothers cry for their babies, torn away from them and now gone. Has such a thing ever been heard of? Has anything like this ever happened?³⁸

At this stage, repeated attempts were made to seek help to hide, in Lithuanian homes outside the ghetto, children and babies who had hitherto been concealed in the ghetto. Yerushalmi wrote that the *Aeltestenrat* escaped to the city and knocked on the doors of all of the important Lithuanian businessmen. They begged them to save the children who remained after the *Aktion*, but no one would help. No one would risk his freedom by heading a project to save the Jewish children. "Nonetheless, a handful of parents succeeded in persuading Lithuanian acquaintances to take in their children, but many changed their minds on the spot. Others did not even accept the children when they were brought to them in the city and the wretched parents had to return them to the ghetto at risk to their lives ..."³⁹

It is noteworthy that, in isolated cases, Lithuanians agreed to accept a child but, following the children's difficulties and lack of adjustment, returned them to their parents in the ghetto. For example, Gideon Shub recounts in his memoir that his sister Amia, who was born in the ghetto, was taken to a Lithuanian family, but her couriers were forced to return her to the ghetto.⁴⁰

In the period following the Children's *Aktion*, women who were still concealing their pregnancies, despite the decree against births, understood that, from then on, there would be no chance of keeping the babies alive after birth. Only at this stage, as described by Yerushalmi, did women in advanced pregnancy plead with the medical staff to help them give birth and to kill the newborns:

[i]n addition to our humiliations and demoralizations, we must also shoulder the punishment of being the murderers of our children ... in those dark days, there were three women in the final weeks of pregnancy. The wretched women were unable to hide from the constant inspections. They found nowhere to conceal themselves nor their newborns. In greatest despair, the women begged the doctors and *Aeltestenrat* members to induce premature births and to kill their babies ...⁴¹

He described the tragic dilemmas facing the leaders, physicians, and decision makers:

[w]e are living in a nightmare and cannot think reasonably. We are acting on impulse and living by our instincts, but it is doubtful if we are functioning properly. We are knocking on the doors of all Lithuanians of influence, begging for the lives of our children and for our own dull, broken lives. We have forgotten that only two years ago, those people ... behaved in the exact same

38 Pick, *Notes from the Valley of Slaughter*, 195.

39 Yerushalmi, *Pinkas Shavli*, 312.

40 Gideon Shub, *Shuv Beshvil Hahayim* [Back to Life] (Ra'anana: Docustory, 2011), 56–60, in Hebrew.

41 Yerushalmi, *Pinkas Shavli*, 315.

way as the Ukrainians and the SS today. They have the blood of 250,000 of our brothers on their conscience ... Would it be better for us, the last remnant of the Lithuanian group, to die a martyr's death rather than humiliate ourselves in front of our murderers? ... Or should we cling on to life with all our strength, in any way, so that we can tell the world what they did to us?⁴²

These horrifying testimonies are reinforced by Dr Pick's diary. He recounts two cases of infanticide, when he was forced to participate in the killing of babies, as requested by their mothers, and to prevent the danger hovering over the entire ghetto. The incident occurred on 10 December 1943:

[s]ome aspects of our accursed lives will never be erased and can scarcely be believed: How civilized people with high moral principles descended so far that we have now become destroyers and murderers. The edict prohibiting births in the ghetto still stands. And despite the danger that such incidents pose for the entire ghetto, several deliveries did occur: normal, living babies were born, to women who refused to terminate their pregnancies in time.⁴³

Pick provides an honest and painful description of the tragedy:

[w]e carry out this repulsive mission by injecting them with powerful toxins. The life it fell to me to end was a phenomenon without precedent in the medical literature. The child survived without food, without a drop of water or milk for seven days! Dr. Burstein and I administered injections of morphine and heroin, in quantities sufficient to kill several adults! How tenacious is life! How powerfully does it resist all attempts to cut it short in its first days! I would never have believed that an infant, barely arrived in this world, would cling to life so powerfully. Nothing in the medical literature describes or explains it. After all, who would starve a child for seven or eight days? After injecting morphine and scopolamine, on the seventh day they injected him with heroin, and he expired. Thus they forced us to act as angels of death, as murderers ...⁴⁴

As apparent from the documentation left by the ghetto inhabitants, coping with this decree was one of the most difficult challenges. A look at how the German regime's administration and dynamics developed in the ghetto can shed light on the methods of coping with the decree against births. Four periods can be identified in the life of the Lithuanian ghettos. The characteristics of each period affected how the ghetto inhabitants coped with the decree against births.⁴⁵

The first period – from the occupation and establishment of the ghettos in the summer of 1941 until the announcement of the decree in February 1942, that is, six months in the ghetto in which there was still no need to cope with the harsh decree.

The second period – from the date that the decree was announced until the date it came into force, that is, from February 1942 to August 1942, seven months in which the threat of the decree hung over the ghetto. This was an intermediate stage. During these first two periods, childbirth in the ghetto was still permitted.

42 Ibid.

43 Pick, *Notes from the Valley of Slaughter*, 229.

44 Ibid.

45 On coping with the decree against births in the Šiauliai Ghetto, see Offer, "Refua Verof'im Begeto Shavli", 85–86. On the different stages in the life of the Šiauliai Ghetto, see Itzikas, *Korot Geto Shavli; Encyclopedia of the Ghettos*.

The third period – from the date that the decree was enforced until the Vilnius Ghetto was liquidated and the Kovno and Šiauliai ghettos were turned into concentration camps, that is, from August 1942 to September 1943. Namely, a period of about one year fraught with tension and dread, which posed a variety of challenges: abortions, contraception, clandestine births, smuggling babies outside of the ghetto, and more.

The fourth period – from the ghettos' conversion to concentration camps until their liquidation, that is, from September 1943 to July 1944. At this stage, the SS were directly in control, the Children's Aktion was carried out while the parents were at work. By the time they returned, their children had been abducted and deported for extermination.⁴⁶ Under these circumstances, women who were concealing their pregnancies understood the hopelessness of giving birth and sustaining a child. During this period alone, isolated cases of the killing of babies at their mothers' request were reported. According to Yerushalmi, three such cases occurred in the Šiauliai ghetto.⁴⁷

These distinct stages clearly indicate the attempt to cope with and resist the decree against births, despite the near impossibility to do so. Documentation from the ghetto period reports that several women emphatically refused to comply with the decree and preserved their pregnancies in secret and in peril, until they were defeated by the harshening of the ghetto conditions and its conversion into a concentration camp.

The Unique Nature of the Decree Against Births in the Lithuanian Ghettos

It is noteworthy that the decree against births was not imposed in the Polish ghettos.⁴⁸ To understand why the decree was issued in the Lithuanian ghettos and not in those on Polish soil, two periods in the establishment of the ghettos must be distinguished:

1. Ghettos established in 1939 and 1940 in Poland, before the Final Solution was set in motion.
2. Ghettos established after the summer of 1941 in the German-occupied areas of the Soviet Union. At that stage, the Final Solution – the slaughter and extermination – was in full swing, but several “forced labour” ghettos were set up to serve the German army and the war effort. In these “work ghettos”, extermination was temporarily stopped until they, too, were eventually liquidated. After the massive slaughter at the end of 1941, approximately 50,000 of the 250,000 Lithuanian Jews remained and were concentrated in four ghettos: Vilnius with approximately 20,000 Jews; Kovno with approximately 17,000 Jews, Šiauliai with approximately 5,500 Jews, and Swienciany with approximately 1,500 Jews.⁴⁹

At the stage in which the Lithuanian ghettos were established, the Germans – even though they had, temporarily, left alive a young, healthy Jewish labour force –

⁴⁶ On the details of this Aktion, see Yerushalmi, *Pinkas Shavli*, 302–307.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 314.

⁴⁸ If such a decree had been issued in the Warsaw or Łódź ghettos, it would have undoubtedly been mentioned in the varied documentation preserved from that period or in survivors' testimonies. However, no testimony of such a decree exists. Moreover, births, albeit few, appear in testimonies even up until the final days of both those ghettos.

⁴⁹ Dieckmann, *Medinyut Hahashmada Hanatzit*, 277–315.

imposed the decree against births. This was in accordance with the “suitable treatment” detailed in the Wannsee Conference Protocol, to ensure the extermination of all the Jews, to the very last one. In contrast, at the time of the decree against births in the Lithuanian ghettos, in August 1942,⁵⁰ the *Grossaktion* to Treblinka was at its height and the Jews of Poland were gradually being deported to extermination camps.⁵¹ Although the Łódź Ghetto was the last to be liquidated, deportations of Jews from there to the Chełmno extermination camp began in December 1941. By the end of 1942, more than 70,000 Jews had been murdered in the camp.⁵² With deportations underway at that time, a decree against births in the Polish ghettos was unnecessary.

In the largest ghetto, the Warsaw Ghetto, the teacher Abraham Lewin wrote in his diary, about a month before the *Grossaktion* in July 1942, that

[o]ne hardly sees pregnant Jewish women. In the ghetto, people die or are murdered. They are not born ... However, ... there's no rule without an exception. When you circulate in the ghetto and observe passersby carefully, sometimes you can make out a Jewish woman who's pregnant. Today I saw two such women. It left a big impression, I'd say, a tremendous impression. That the Jewish woman today, under the benighted, merciless conditions, can marshal such courage as to bring a new Jewish creature into the world and then raise him – it's heroism and great audacity. If I had the slightest poetic talent to write songs, I'd write a warm paean of praise to the pregnant woman or the young Jewish mother in the ghetto ... by virtue of these national heroes, the light of the Jews and of Judaism will not go out altogether, at least symbolically.⁵³

Conclusion

The decree against births in the Lithuanian ghettos was part of the coordination directive of the Final Solution for “suitable treatment” against the creation of a “new Jewish revival”, as stated in the Wannsee Conference Protocol. This decree reflects the Nazi evil and its antisemitic, racist, and apocalyptic concepts. The war against the Jewish women's wombs and against their unborn children was the final frontier to ensure a “Final Final Solution”. In contrast, investigating the ghetto Jews' reaction to the decree reveals the unique nature of the victims' coping strategy. The Jewish leadership in the ghetto and the medical staff addressed coping with the decree against childbirth with due gravity and did not shirk difficult decisions. Saving the lives of the ghetto inhabitants was uppermost in their minds, and ethical principles remained high on the agenda. They chose to memorialise the tragic dilemmas they faced by chronicling the events in the ghetto and presenting them before the judgment of history. Thousands of women in the Lithuanian ghettos were painfully coerced into ending their pregnancies, while continuing to bear the burden of forced labour in the ghetto. They cleaved to the value of life in the hope of surviving the war

50 The decree was issued on 5 February, and 15 August was the date set for its implementation.

51 Havi Dreifuss (Ben-Sasson), *Geto Varsha – Hasof* [Warsaw Ghetto – The End (April 1942–June 1943)] (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2017), in Hebrew.

52 Michal Unger, ed., *Hageto Ha'aharon: Hahayyim Begeto Lodz 1940–1944* [The Last Ghetto: Life in the Lodz Ghetto 1940–1944] (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1995), 262–268, in Hebrew.

53 Abraham Lewin, *A Cup of Tears: A Diary of the Warsaw Ghetto* (London: Fontana-Collins, 1988); Havi Ben-Sasson and Lea Prais, “Twilight Days: Missing Pages from Avraham Lewin's Warsaw Ghetto Diary, May–July 1942”, *Yad Vashem Studies* 33 (2005), 46–47.

and raising new families, and many of the survivors fulfilled this goal. Some women, notwithstanding the risk to their lives, did not surrender their right to motherhood and refused to succumb to the decree that demanded forced abortion. Information about the German defeat at the front gave them hope that the war would end quickly, and that they would survive and succeed in hiding their babies; some were indeed successful. The estimated loss of life due to the forced abortions and prohibition against childbirth was enormous. However, the Germans' fear that a minority would survive and establish a "new Jewish revival", as stated in the Wannsee Conference Protocol, was in fact realised despite the decree against births.

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Miriam Offer is a senior lecturer at Western Galilee College and teaches the history of medicine during the Holocaust in the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences at Tel Aviv University. She is an expert researcher of Jewish medicine during the Holocaust, with emphasis on organisation, science, and ethics as reflected in Jewish medical activity during the Holocaust. Her prominent recent publications include: the authored book, *White Coats in the Ghetto: Jewish Medicine in Poland during the Holocaust* (Yad Vashem); a co-edited book, *Recognizing the Past in the Present: New Studies on Medicine Before, During and After the Holocaust* (Berghahn); a special issue of *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues* (36), titled *Jewish Women Medical Practitioners Before, During and After the Holocaust* (Indiana University Press, Hadassah-Brandeis Institute & Schechter), as consulting editor; and a co-edited issue of *KOROT: The Israel Journal of the History of Medicine and Science* (25) titled *Education and Ethics in the Shadow of the History of Medicine During the Holocaust* (The Hebrew University Magnes Press).

Miriam Offer is involved in various international research projects. She is a member of the Lancet Commission on Medicine and the Holocaust: Historical Evidence, Implications for Today, Teaching for Tomorrow, and heads a research team on Medicine, Morbidity, and Childhood During and After the Holocaust, which is funded by the Israel Ministry of Science and Technology. Alongside her research activities, She is engaged in Holocaust education for the general public. Inter alia, she founded and directed the Hedva Eibeshitz Institute for Holocaust Research in Haifa, and she was one of the leading academic staff of the Israel Medical Association's "Witnesses in White" project, involving visits to Poland for Israeli physicians. She is among the leaders of a pioneering course in Israel to train physicians and health professionals to teach medicine and the Holocaust to students and employees of the health professions.

Email: miriamoffer@gmail.com

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Glen Segell

Intelligence, the Polish Resistance, and Government-in-Exile

The Sabotage of Railways and the Aerial Bombing of Auschwitz (or Lack Thereof)

Abstract

In 1981, Sir Martin Gilbert published his influential work *Auschwitz and the Allies*, arguing that the West was unaware of the “true nature” of Auschwitz Birkenau until 1944. He wrote about this in the context of whether to bomb railway lines and the camp itself. This did not materialise and has come to symbolise in the popular mind callous indifference to – or even complicity in – the crimes the Nazis committed there. This article contributes to the debate and discipline by focusing on how the Polish resistance, its intelligence operations, and government-in-exile in London provided a constant flow of information from 1942, some of which was made public at the time. Furthermore, this article argues that, on the one hand, the Allies lacked the accurate bombing capability until April 1944. However, on the other hand the viable option of sabotage of railways by the Polish resistance was not even attempted to prevent Jews being taken to their incarceration and death. Could Britain and the Allies, including the Polish resistance, have done more to stop the horrors of Auschwitz? The answer is “yes”.

The historian Sir Martin Gilbert gave due respect to the topics of the Holocaust and indeed leadership, including that of the British Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill. From his research he asked a very fundamental question that was published in The Times newspaper on 27 January 2005 and that was: “[c]ould Britain have done more to stop the horrors of Auschwitz?”¹

This article pays tribute to Sir Martin for his prolific and exhaustive work that paved the way for future historians to combine research on the Second World War and the Holocaust. It poses questions based upon and beyond that of Sir Martin. I should note that I am not a historian of either topic, that of the Second World War or the Holocaust. While researching a few decades ago for my doctorate on military intelligence and the procurement of aircraft weapons, I stumbled upon significant material on the topics of bombing Auschwitz and railway sabotage that I will present in this article. In my doctorate, one case was the Tornado aircraft that was procured after the prototype TSR.² was cancelled, to replace the Canberra that had replaced the Mosquito for the same roles of reconnaissance and tactical bombing. From that I followed the trail on the Mosquito aircraft that led me down the path of examining the Polish government-in-exile, the military intelligence it provided to the world during the Second World War, aerial bombing, and Polish resistance railway sabotage, and so I gleaned an insight into Auschwitz.

1 Martin Gilbert, “Could Britain Have Done More to Stop the Horrors of Auschwitz?” *The Times*, 27 January 2005, 2.

From this I can offer an answer to Sir Martin's question, but from different sources and different perspectives than the ones he cited. This article thus makes an innovative contribution to the field and, indeed, pays tribute to Sir Martin. The answer I can offer to Sir Martin's one are the conclusions reached in this article and they are clear. These are that the close cooperation and the quantity of intelligence gathered by the Polish resistance that was sent to the Polish government-in-exile in London leaves no doubt whatsoever. They knew throughout the Second World War about the true nature of Auschwitz but not necessarily about the number of victims. There was no lack of data flowing out of Poland. Of the 45,770 intelligence reports from occupied Europe that were processed by the Allies, 48 per cent were from Polish sources.²

This intelligence was given in real time and with urgency to Allied forces as early as 1941. There is no evidence that they acted to stop the Nazi's declared intention to annihilate the Jewish nation. A point known at the time of the Second World War was that of capability. There is evidence that the larger Allied forces – the American, British, and Soviets – had limited heavy bombing means at their disposal until April 1944 to bomb Poland. However, even when they were in range, like the Mosquito aircraft from Italy, and had the means to accurately stop the Holocaust in Auschwitz, they were not deployed for this mission.

Notwithstanding the widely debated topic of bombing, there was an alternative means available, especially to the Polish resistance, throughout the Second World War. There is evidence of substantial sabotage to railways in Poland, especially those taking German supplies and forces to the front in the east with the Soviet Union. However, there is no evidence of sabotage to those railways that took Jews to their incarceration and death, or even to slow down or prevent gas being transported to the crematoria. The data indicates that there were approximately 2,900 acts of railway-related sabotage (including smaller incidents) in Poland in the period from 1941 to 1944, but none against railways to the death camps.³

This then leads to more questions beyond that of Sir Martin's. For example, why did Britain and the Polish government-in-exile in London not look towards railway sabotage? Indeed, the facts are clear that from the summer of 1942 until the spring of 1944: more than a million Jews were deported to Auschwitz by rail. The origins were France, Holland, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Norway, Greece, Yugoslavia, and Poland. Furthermore, did any resistance organisation in these countries seek to find out why only Jews were being taken and to where? Why did the Polish resistance not gather more intelligence on Auschwitz-Birkenau (Auschwitz II), and especially the I. G. Farbenindustrie (dye industry syndicate commonly known as IG Farben) giant fuel and artificial rubber factory in Monowitz-Buna (Auschwitz III)? I am by no means the only researcher to have posed such questions, and others have also contemplated whether bombing Auschwitz would have taken away from the war effort. Was the IG Farben factory a valid war target and, if so, why was it not bombed? If it had been possible, would it have been effective or would it have done more harm than good to bomb the crematoria at Auschwitz, considering that inaccurate bombing might have killed many?⁴

2 Halik Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed: Poland and the Poles in the Second World War* (London: Allan Lane, 2012), 1–13.

3 Kolejnictwopolskie, "History of Railways, Railways During World War II", EU Railways, accessed 1 June 2024, <https://kolejnictwopolskie.pl/en/knowledge/kolejowa-ii-wojna>.

4 Michael J. Neufeld, *The Bombing of Auschwitz: Should the Allies Have Attempted It?* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 1–14.

The evidence examined in this article overwhelmingly leads towards an answer to these questions that considers that Britain and the other allies, and indeed the Polish government-in-exile and the resistance, could have at least attempted to do more but did not. To examine this in more detail, the structure of this article is in sections that present evidence on points emerging from such a view. The first point is that, yes, there was deliberate German deception to keep the secret of Auschwitz's location and purpose hermetically sealed. Yet, as examined in this article, from the onset in 1941 and 1942 and onward, the Polish government-in-exile did inform the world of the plight of the Jews and called for the bombing. Another point is that, yes, Auschwitz did lay beyond the range of Allied heavy bombers from Britain, while disputes with the Soviets resulted in their airfields not being used. The Soviets lacked their own bombing capability. Yet, there is no evidence of any discussion between the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union to even attempt to bomb Auschwitz. Even if all the above were to have been declared top secret and no records kept of the debates and decisions to the contrary, the most damning point is that, in April 1944, Auschwitz was in the range of accurate bombing by the Mosquito aircraft that photographed it. However, no bombing mission was attempted.⁵

That leads to voicing a modification of Sir Martin's question to: could the Polish resistance have done more to stop the horrors of Auschwitz, even if the British did not? To be sure, there was close cooperation, and a large quantity of overall intelligence gathered by the Polish resistance was sent to the Polish government-in-exile in London. Evidence on Auschwitz was given by them to the world. Why, then, did they not try to prevent the mass killings? For example, there is evidence of substantial sabotage to railways throughout Europe, but not to those that took Jews to their incarceration and death, or even to slow down or prevent gas from being transported to the crematoria.

The methodology of this article continues by citing primary and secondary sources to examine and expand upon the points raised in this introduction. The article is divided into seven sections that examine Sir Martin Gilbert's problem statement about Auschwitz, the Polish government-in-exile, the British and American (non-)bombing of Auschwitz (II) Birkenau, the Soviet (non-)bombing of Auschwitz, the Mosquito aircraft, intelligence and the Polish resistance, and the (non-)sabotage of railways.

Sir Martin Gilbert Poses a Problem Statement about Auschwitz

The Auschwitz camp has its origins in providing labour for German industrial and armaments aims. In April 1941, IG Farben began the construction of a huge factory complex to manufacture synthetic rubber and fuel. IG Farben was a corporation formed from several German chemical companies. Prisoner-of-war labour was used to build the factory complex.⁶

As demand for labour increased, additional work camps were started around the factory complex. The main camp was built in October 1942 at the southeastern edge of the factory area and was called "*Dorfrand*" and later the "*Buna Lager*". This became the largest camp, and in 1944 it gained autonomy and operated as Auschwitz III/

5 "Aerial Photographs of Auschwitz", Yad Vashem, accessed 1 June 2024, <https://www.yadvashem.org/from-our-collections/auschwitz-aerial-photos.html>.

6 IG Farben, "Auschwitz History", IG Farben, accessed 1 June 2024, <https://www.auschwitz.org/en/history/auschwitz-iii/ig-farben/>.

Monowitz. There were forty-seven Auschwitz sub-camps in total. Penal labour included selections of people from arriving train shipments of Jews from around Europe and numbered over 35,000 in 1944. Other than the Jewish labourers, there were IG Farben civilian workers from Germany and Poland, including apprentices, forced labourers from Croatia, Italy, Poland, Ukraine, and the Soviet Union, and even Nazi Hitler Youth girls from the League of German Girls (*Bund Deutscher Mädel* or BDM) and the War Auxiliary Service Maidens of the *Reich Labour Service* (Kriegshilfsdienst-Maiden of the Reichsarbeitsdienst or RAD).⁷

That meant that, by 1944, there were three locations that used the name “Auschwitz”. The main Auschwitz I death camp, the Birkenau (Auschwitz II) death camp, and the IG Farben giant fuel and artificial rubber factory in Monowitz-Buna (Auschwitz III). Former German President Horst Koehler said that, as the largest Nazi extermination camp, it was home to the worst crime in human history. Rudolf Höss, the commandant of Auschwitz, confessed during his trial after the Second World War that approximately 1.1 million prisoners, mostly Jews, had been killed there.⁸

The IG Farben factory complex (Auschwitz III) eventually measured over three square kilometres in area, with scores of buildings for chemical and fuel production and processing, power plants, and manufacturing machinery. It would certainly have been visible to anyone and, indeed, and the smoke and crematoria smell from Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II, which were no more than six kilometres away, also reached that far. There is photographic evidence that SS leader Heinrich Himmler visited there in July 1942. This was Himmler’s second visit to Auschwitz and, on this occasion, he visited all three Auschwitzes, and even observed a transport of Jews being killed in the gas chamber of Bunker I at Auschwitz II.⁹

It was indeed a large enterprise, which highlights the first problem statement chosen by the author of this article that emerges from Sir Martin’s writings. He argues that the West was unaware of the true nature of Auschwitz II until 1944.¹⁰ He wrote about this in the context of whether to bomb railway lines and the camp itself. This did not materialise and has come to symbolise in the popular mind the callous indifference to – or even complicity in – the crimes the Nazis committed there.¹¹

What, then, was the true nature of Auschwitz in the context of the Holocaust as different from the context of the Second World War? In the context of the Second World War, there is documentation that, between 1933 and 1945, Nazi Germany and its allies established more than 44,000 camps and other incarceration sites, including ghettos. The perpetrators used these sites for a range of purposes, including forced labour and the detention of people thought to be enemies of the state. That then refers to the activities originally at Auschwitz I and throughout at Auschwitz III.¹²

In the context of the Holocaust, the true nature of Auschwitz II is that it was also a killing centre, additionally referred to as an extermination camp or death

7 BBC, “Auschwitz: How Death Camp Became Centre of Nazi Holocaust”, BBC, accessed 1 June 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-50743973>.

8 Brent Douglas Dyck, “Why Didn’t Allies Bomb Auschwitz?,” *Warfare History Network*, last modified 25 January 2021. https://www.realclearhistory.com/2021/01/25/why_didnt_allies_bomb_auschwitz_657641.html.

9 IG Farben, “Auschwitz History”.

10 Martin Gilbert, “The Question of Bombing Auschwitz”, in *The End of the Holocaust*, ed. Michael R. Marrus (Berlin and New York: K. G. Saur, 1989), 249–305.

11 Barbara Rogers, “British Intelligence and the Holocaust: Auschwitz and the Allies Re-examined”, *The Journal of Holocaust Education* 8, no. 1 (1999): 89–106.

12 Raphael Hormann, *Cultural Contact Zone: Transdisciplinary Perspectives on Slavery and Its Discourses* (Münster: Waxmann, 2010), 275–291.

camp, designed to carry out genocide. Gas chambers are thought to have started on 26 March 1942 at Auschwitz II, with substantial train loads of imprisoned Jews crossing Europe by rail throughout 1942. These included 300,000 from Poland in May, 23,000 also in May from Austria and Germany, 60,000 from the Netherlands in July, 25,000 from Belgium and 10,000 from Yugoslavia in August, 46,000 Jews from the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in October, and 700 from Norway in December. Until November 1944, the camp functioned as a factory for mass murder, receiving transports from all over Europe.¹³

Academic literature after the war informs that, between 1941 and 1945, the Nazis established five killing centres in German-occupied Poland: Chełmno, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, and Auschwitz-Birkenau (Auschwitz II). The overwhelming majority of the victims of the killing centres were Jews as part of a policy called the “Final Solution”.¹⁴

The Polish Government in Exile

The large area covered by the camps and factory and the diversity of the people there leads to the question of when exactly the mass killing at Auschwitz II started and at what date others beyond the Nazis knew about it. The way to answer these questions is to turn to data given to the world by the Polish government-in-exile in London. A government-in-exile consists of an individual or a group of individuals residing in a foreign state, and who claim supreme authority over either a state in the sense of international law which is still under the control of another national or foreign authority, or a state to be created on the territory of another.

The Polish government-in-exile in London was formed in the aftermath of the invasion of Poland in September 1939, and the subsequent occupation of Poland by Germany, the Soviet Union, and Slovakia. Its president at the time was Władysław Raczkiewicz. Despite being in exile, it continued to exert considerable influence in Poland during the Second World War. This included through the structures of the Polish Underground State and its military arm, the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*) resistance.¹⁵

It provided the Allies with some of the earliest and most accurate accounts of the ongoing plight of Jews.¹⁶ One of which was a first request to the British Royal Air Force (RAF) for the bombing of Auschwitz I that came in January 1941.¹⁷ Perhaps their interest was spurred by the first people to be mass gassed to death there. This was a group of Polish and Soviet prisoners in September 1941. This way of killing had already been tried out in 1939–1941 in Germany, where, within the euthanasia program, more than 70,000 mentally disabled German citizens were murdered. The RAF didn't bomb and after the war intelligence analysed that indicated that construction work began on an additional camp, Auschwitz II in February 1941. The Nazi's not challenged on Auschwitz I had expanded to Auschwitz II that became the site of the huge gas chambers where hundreds of thousands were mur-

13 “Auschwitz-Birkenau”, Holocaust Memorial and Museum, accessed 1 June 2024, <https://www.auschwitz.org/en/history/auschwitz-calendar/year-1942/>.

14 Nikolaus Wachsmann, *Concentration Camps in Nazi Germany* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2009), 1–78.

15 Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 14–22.

16 David Engel, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz: The Polish Government-in-exile and the Jews, 1939–1942* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 34–41.

17 Edward B. Westermann, “The Royal Air Force and the Bombing of Auschwitz: First Deliberations, January 1941”, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 15, no. 1 (2001): 70–85.

dered until November 1944. It was the site of the crematoria where their bodies were burned.¹⁸

The Polish government-in-exile persisted in their efforts. For example, during 1941 and 1942 Polish leaders such as Raczynski and the courier of the Polish underground movement, Jan Karski, continued to call for bombing by the Allies, but to no avail.¹⁹ There is inference that a definite and detailed picture of activities at Auschwitz II had been provided to the British government from a variety of sources by December 1942, but not the quantitative scale of the mass killings.²⁰

This inference of intelligence took the form of a note from Raczynski, sent on 10 December 1942 to the governments of the United Nations. It was the first official denunciation of mass exterminations of civilians in the Second World War and of the Nazi aim of the total extermination of Jews.²¹ It was also the first publicly available document singling out the sufferings of European Jews as Jews and not as citizens of their respective countries of origin. This note triggered the Declaration of the Allied Nations of 17 December 1942. There is no evidence of any action taken against the Nazis to prevent or stop the mass killings of civilians, mainly Jews, following the Declaration.²²

The British and American (Non-)Bombing of Auschwitz (II) Birkenau

The lack of any Allied attempt to turn the Declaration into action leads to the assumption of and outcry over the Allies' callous indifference to – or even complicity in – the crimes the Nazis committed on Polish soil. However, the picture is not so straight forward: knowing something is amiss is one thing, but being able to tackle it is another. One reason was the inability of American and British heavy bombers to undertake the mission. The range for the Royal Air Force's (RAF) Avro Lancaster, RAF Handley-Page Halifax, or the United States Army Air Forces' (USAAF) B-17, B-24, and B-29 aircraft, for example, was too far from Poland, with their only available bases in the United Kingdom, and the accuracy was appalling. This fact and finding do not diminish the indifference, or even complicity, of the Poles and other Allies in the crimes that the Nazis committed. They could have asked to use Soviet bases that were within range of Poland, but there is no evidence of this having even been considered.

That brings into question air power in the Second World War and, indeed, there was some truth regarding this as well as many myths. The tactics of heavy bombers have their origins well before the Second World War began. Then, the belief was that groups of bombers capable of devastating cities would be a deterrent to war. This led to "the bomber will always get through" phrase used by British Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin in his 1932 "A Fear for the Future" speech given to the British parliament. When the Second World War started, added to this was the view that this capability could force an enemy population into fear and surrender. It could be said it did sometimes work: for example, over 2,500 civilians were killed by the German Luft-

18 BBC, "Auschwitz: How Death Camp Became Centre of Nazi Holocaust".

19 Martin Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies* (New York: Pimlico, 1981), 101.

20 Michael J. Cohen, "Churchill, and Auschwitz: End of Debate?," *Modern Judaism – A Journal of Jewish Ideas and Experience* 26, no. 2 (2006): 127–140.

21 Edward Raczynski, "Note of the Foreign Minister Edward Raczynski," Projectin Posterum, 10 December 1942, accessed 1 June 2024, http://www.projectinposterum.org/docs/mass_extermination.htm.

22 Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, 102.

waffe bombing of Warsaw in 1939, and in part that led to a quick and early Polish surrender.²³

Hence, throughout the Second World War, the concept of bombing and so the policy and strategy were promoted at all levels in Britain. For example, Professor Frederick Lindemann, the British government's leading scientific adviser in 1942, presented the Dehousing Paper to the Cabinet, showing the effect that the intensive bombing of German cities could produce. It was accepted by the Cabinet as a policy, and RAF Air Marshal Arthur Harris was appointed to carry out the task. It became an important part of the total war policy and strategy waged against Germany.²⁴

To this end, then, a large proportion of the industrial production of the United Kingdom was harnessed for the task of creating a vast fleet of heavy bombers. Deterrence, however, is different from precision tactical missions. In practice, there is no evidence to suggest that the bombing effect on German production was more than remarkably small. Furthermore, the RAF and USAAF bombing did not force the German population into fear and to surrender.²⁵

Bearing this in context when turning to the feasibility of bombing Auschwitz, the truth was that aerial bombing was terrible and not feasible.²⁶ To be sure, the factor of distance is indicative of where the Allies bombed, and Poland did not feature. According to the United States Strategic Bombing Survey released after the Second World War in September 1945, between 1939 and 1945, Allied bombers dropped 1,415,745 tons of bombs over Germany (51.1 per cent of the total bomb tonnage dropped by Allied bombers in the European campaign), 570,730 tons over France (20.6 per cent), 379,565 tons over Italy (13.7 per cent), 185,625 tons over Austria, Hungary, and the Balkans (6.7 per cent), and 218,873 tons over other countries (7.9 per cent).²⁷

Another factor was accuracy. Even by 1943, after the United States had joined the European war with newer technology, the average circular error for any bomb dropped meant that only 16 per cent of bombs fell within 300 metres of the targeted point. To put it another way, in 1941, American planners determined that it would take 220 bombers just to hit a 100 square metre target from a height of 7,000 metres, and that was not even a 100 per cent probability!²⁸ Clearly, high-altitude American and British heavy bombers were not suitable, and even if they had been used, they could have killed and wounded many inmates of Auschwitz between 1941 and 1944.

If one were to step into the shoes of the Polish government-in-exile or any of the Allies who knew that bombing was not feasible from Britain, then the questions to be posed are whether there were alternatives and, if so, why they were not used. That leads to examining bombing from the Soviet Union or the sabotage of railways by the Polish resistance. The latter might well even have had an advantage over bombing for another reason. Sabotage could be sustained literally on a nightly basis, whereas bombing either of the crematoria or railways would have been dependent on weather conditions. These two options are examined in the next sections, yet the conclusions are that there is no evidence that the Polish resistance ever attempted sabotage, or

23 Richard Overy, *The Bombing War: Europe 1939–1945* (London: Penguin Books, 2013), 79.

24 Norman Longmate, *The Bombers: The RAF Offensive Against Germany 1939–1945* (London: Hutchinson, 1983), 131, 393.

25 Alan J. Levine, *The Strategic Bombing of Germany, 1940–1945* (New York: Greenwood, 1992), 4–16.

26 Paul Martin, *Invisibles vainqueurs: exploits et sacrifice de l'Armée de l'air en 1939–1940* (Paris: Y. Michelet, 1990), 345.

27 Claudia Baldoli and Andrew Knapp, *Forgotten Blitzes: France and Italy under Allied Air Attack, 1940–1945* (New York: A&C Black, 2012), 2.

28 United States of America, Secretary of War, "The United States Strategic Bombing Survey Summary Report (European War)", ANESI accessed 1 June 2024, <https://www.anesi.com/ussbs02.htm>.

that the Polish government-in-exile in London ever proposed this alternative to the Allies, or that the Allies ever contemplated this tactic. There is also no evidence of bombing from Soviet air bases being contemplated.

The Soviet (Non-)Bombing of Auschwitz

The alternative to mitigate the factor of distance from Britain to Poland could have been Soviet involvement. Soviet airbases were the closest and in range of the whole of Poland. Soviet airfields were in range, as seen from the Soviet bombing in 1942 of targets further afield, including Berlin, Helsinki, Budapest, Bucharest, and the German-occupied Polish cities of Kraków and Warsaw. Theoretically, then, it would have been possible for American and British bombers to have used these to bomb targets in Poland, including Auschwitz.²⁹

There was only one documented case of cooperation between the three air forces, and this was from June to September 1944. Operation Frantic was a series of seven shuttle bombing operations in which American aircraft flew from Britain and Italy to Soviet airfields in Ukraine and bombed enroute back to their bases.³⁰ Britain's RAF did not participate in Operation Frantic. Nazi death camps were not the targets.³¹

There is no clear and definite reason and rationale for the lack of further cooperation between the three air forces, other than that the political relations between the Allies including the Soviets, and Polish government-in-exile were strained. A reason for this was exemplified in April 1943, when the Germans announced that they had discovered at Katyn Wood, near Smolensk, Russia, the mass graves of 10,000 Polish officers. A German investigation proclaimed that this included 4,443 bodies of persons who had been taken prisoner in 1939 and murdered by the Soviets.³²

Another example is that, during 1943 and 1944, the Allied leaders, particularly Winston Churchill, tried to bring about talks between Soviet leader Joseph Stalin and the Polish government-in-exile regarding the future of Poland independence after the Second World War. However, these efforts broke down over several matters. The government-in-exile's refusal to accept the proposed new Polish borders infuriated the Allies, particularly Churchill.³³

Notwithstanding the strained Soviet and Polish relations, this should not theoretically have prevented direct Soviet military action against the Nazi death camps, with or without an American or British request. One reason for this lack of action could have been explained after the Second World War, when Soviet Marshal Vasili Sokolovsky revealed that the Soviets would have gladly launched a strategic bombing offensive against Germany (without mentioning the Holocaust) had they had the capability. Soviet aircraft, such as the U-2, Pe-8, II-2, II-4, Su-2, Tu-2, Yak-2, and Yak-4, were even more inaccurate than their American and British counterparts and their bomb payload was insufficient.³⁴

29 Horst Boog and Derry Cook-Radmore, *Germany and the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 25–33.

30 Mark Conversino, *Fighting with the Soviets: The Failure of Operation Frantic* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1997), 53–57.

31 John Deane, *The Strange Alliance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1946), 17.

32 Janusz. K. Zawodny, *Death in the Forest* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2016), 51.

33 Anna M. Cienciala, "The Foreign Policy of the Polish Government-in-Exile, 1939–1945: Political and Military Realities Versus Polish Psychological Reality", in *Reflections on Polish Foreign Policy*, eds. John S. Micgiel and Piotr S. Wandycz (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 103–124.

34 Vasily. D. Sokolovsky, *Military Strategy* (New York: Praeger, 1963), 183.

The Mosquito Aircraft

Adding to the examination over the lack of Allied aerial bombing against the death camps is the progress of the Second World War. For example, by April 1944 the debate on heavy bombers – be they American or British, with direct Soviet involvement or the use of Soviet bases – would have been obsolete. On 4 April 1944, a British-manufactured photographic reconnaissance (PR) version of the Mosquito II aircraft of the South African Air Force 60 Squadron took the first photographic evidence of the mass murdering by gas of civilians, mainly Jews at Auschwitz. The squadron had, since February 1943, been serving with British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery in North Africa. In May 1943, it was sent to Italy to carry out large-scale photographic surveys of parts of Sicily and other Axis-held areas, eventually ranging over the Alps and deep into Austria and Germany.³⁵

On 4 April 1944, it flew out of Foggia base in southern Italy to photograph the IG Farben factory in Monowitz (Auschwitz III). The photographs showed rows of people lined up, plus smoking chimneys of the crematoria and other characteristics that could only have led to an analysis concluding that it was a death camp. The South African Mosquito planes further photographed the factory and parts of the camp complex on 31 May, 26 June, 25 August, and 8 September. There was no bombing of Auschwitz despite having such intelligence data.³⁶

The Mosquito aircraft had entered service in July 1941 and, by October that year, was photographing enemy harbours with microscopic details in France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Norway.³⁷ The pilot would operate the camera himself with a push-button control.³⁸ As time progressed, the camera was also improved from the Williamson F.24 to the F.52 (1942) and then to the F.63 versions. The F.52, for example, used an image format of 8.5"×7" with magazines up to 500 exposures.³⁹ The first versions of Mosquito had a range of 4,040 kilometres, and by October 1942 this had been extended to 4,720 kilometres.⁴⁰

At the time, this was not far enough to operate over Poland as the distance from London to Auschwitz II is 2,726 kilometres one way.⁴¹ However, as seen by the photographic mission of 4 April 1944, the progress of the Second World War meant that, by then, Italy was in Allied hands and targets over Poland were in range. While the inaccuracy of American and British heavy bombers was still a relevant factor to be considered, this was not the case for the Mosquito. The Mosquito could be deployed in multiple roles, including bombing. The bomber version could have been used to accurately bomb any target in Auschwitz. The Mosquito had a record of accurate attacks against small targets such as tanks, trains, motor transport, and buildings, as well U-boats (submarines) and other surface ships.⁴²

35 "South African Air Force 60 Squadron", South African Air Force, accessed June 1, 2024, <https://www.saairforce.co.za/the-airforce/squadrons/12/60-squadron>.

36 Yad Vashem, "Aerial Photographs of Auschwitz".

37 "Mosquito Guns and Camera", YouTube, accessed 1 June 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qmY99s-nA_po.

38 Roy Conyers Nesbit, *Eyes of the RAF* (Hampshire: Sutton Publishing, 1996), 23–31.

39 "Mosquito Camera," Web Archive, accessed 1 June 2024, https://web.archive.org/web/20120619010722/http://www.airrecce.co.uk/cameras/raf_ww2_cameras.html.

40 Martin Bowman, *Mosquito Photo-Reconnaissance Units of World War 2* (London: Osprey Publishing, 1999), 46–51.

41 Phillip Birtles, *De Havilland Mosquito: The Original Multirole Combat Aircraft* (Surrey: Fonthill Media, 2017), 24.

42 David Boyd, "Airborne Rockets Used by the British During WWII", accessed 1 June 2024, http://www.wwi-equipment.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=98:airborne-rockets-used-by-the-british-during-wwii&catid=44:gunsrockets&Itemid=60.

This bombing accuracy of the Mosquito was demonstrated on 30 January 1943, the tenth anniversary of Hitler being made chancellor of Germany and the Nazis gaining power. That morning, Mosquito aircraft attacked and knocked out the main Berlin broadcasting station while the chief of the German Air Force (Luftwaffe), Command-in-Chief Hermann Göring, was speaking, taking his speech off the air. Its armaments were accurate and deadly. It could carry a cannon gun firing twenty-five shells in twenty seconds or an offensive load of up to 910 kilograms of bombs, or eight RP-3 unguided rockets (with a twenty-seven-kilogram warhead).⁴³ Another example of its accuracy was seen on 18 February 1944 in the raid on Amiens prison as part of Operation Jericho. It was able to destroy the German guardhouse, breach the exterior walls, and free prisoners by putting holes in the cell-block walls.⁴⁴

The focus of the debate and examination is not then solely one of range, capability, and accuracy. Clearly, by 1944, Auschwitz was within bombing range by the Mosquito, which could have undertaken the mission to destroy the crematoria. The examination needs to point to Allied decision makers and their intentions or lack thereof. To be sure, intelligence sources show that by the time Auschwitz had been liberated on 27 January 1945, the Allies had photographed it at least thirty times. That was not just by the South Africans, but also by the USAAF on 8 July by a F-5 Lightning plane from the 5th Photographic Reconnaissance Group operating from Bari, Italy. They also flew over the Auschwitz area on 29 November, 21 December, and finally on 14 January 1945 – only two weeks before the liberation of the camp by the Soviet Army. The photos were stored at the Mediterranean Allied Photo Reconnaissance Wing in Italy, which was commanded by American president Franklin D. Roosevelt's son, Colonel Elliott Roosevelt. Some photos even showed inmates being marched to the gas chambers.⁴⁵

Adding to these photos are other intelligence sources. Also, on 7 April 1944, two escapees from Auschwitz (Walter Rosenberg, aged nineteen, and Fred Wetzler, aged twenty-five) brought eye-witness accounts of Nazi activities there, including the scale of the mass slaughter of Jews.⁴⁶ In mid-June 1944, information from the Vrba-Wetzler report arrived in London. They were two Slovakian Jewish prisoners who had escaped Auschwitz and provided eyewitness accounts. Thereafter, there was Swiss press coverage of the report, and some details began appearing in American and British newspapers in June 1944.⁴⁷

That leaves the bottom line of this section showing Auschwitz as being in range of the Allied forces, with the Mosquito aircraft being capable of bombing it, and with both eye-witness accounts and photographic evidence by April 1944. Yet, there are no documents of any intended action by the Allies. It is doubtful if a decision to bomb Auschwitz was ever contemplated. For example, in a memo written in late June 1944 after the D-Day invasion, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the supreme allied commander in Europe, listed the targets that the Allied air forces should bomb in order of importance. First were the Nazi V-1 and V-2 rocket launch sites aimed at

43 John Batchelor and Malcolm Low, *de Havilland Mosquito Manual (Plane Essentials)* (Melbourne: Publishing Solutions, 2008), 7–9.

44 Adam L. K. Wey, "Special Operations by Air Power: Strategic Lessons from World War II", *Air Power History* 64, no.1 (2017): 33–40.

45 Rondall Ricem, "Bombing Auschwitz: US 15th Air Force and the Military Aspects of a Possible Attack", *War in History* 6, no.2 (1999): 205–229.

46 Jonathan Freedland, "The Men Who Escaped Auschwitz to Try to Warn the World", *Time Magazine*, 29 December 2021, 76.

47 "Document Feature: Vrba-Wetzler Report and the Auschwitz Protocols", Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, accessed 1 June 2024, <https://www.fdrlibrary.org/vrba-wetzler-report>.

Britain, and the factories that the rockets were manufactured in. The next priorities were “a. Aircraft industry; b. Oil; c. Ball bearings; d. Vehicular production”. Bombing Auschwitz was not even a consideration.⁴⁸ Added to this is the view of historians that, even if Stalin had been requested to bomb Auschwitz or permit the use of his airfields to do so, he would have refused, not only because of antisemitism, but also due to a complicated shift in the Soviet Union’s nationalities policy.⁴⁹

Intelligence and the Polish Resistance

The above debate and examination in this article has taken the assumption that the Americans and British only knew the true nature of Auschwitz from April 1944, and that even if they had known about it before, any decision not to bomb it would have been based on the tactical infeasibility of range and accuracy. It has also taken the assumption that there could have been no excuse for not having bombed Auschwitz after April 1944, nor for not having used Soviet airbases. That leads to this section that examines the intelligence surrounding the watershed date of April 1944. It poses the question: was April 1944 the first time that the true nature – the mass killing of Jews – of Auschwitz was revealed? That is the watershed date taken by Sir Martin Gilbert. This article contends the true nature was known well before this.

As a start in sustaining such a view, it must be noted that Polish intelligence was so excellent that it famously smuggled information to the Allies about the Nazis’ secret weapon, the V2 Rocket, and even broke the Nazi secret Enigma code before the Second World War.⁵⁰ Further, it is estimated that, in total, some 45,770 intelligence reports from occupied Europe were processed by the Allies, of which 48 per cent were from Polish sources. There was clearly no lack of Polish intelligence capability nor in the quantity and quality of data that it provided to the Allies.⁵¹

To be sure, when examining the intelligence provided by the Polish resistance and the requests by the government-in-exile for the bombing Auschwitz from 1941, they passed on constant evidence of Nazi Holocaust activities there throughout. Chronologically, there is a list of forty-five reports from the Polish resistance detailing Nazi actions against Jews in Auschwitz that reached the Allies from March 1941.⁵²

One of the first reports was from Witold Pilecki, a Polish patriot who volunteered to be imprisoned in Auschwitz. It arose when the Polish resistance wanted to know what had befallen two of Pilecki’s fellow resistance fighters. On 19 September 1940, Pilecki deliberately joined a group of men being arrested by Nazis in Warsaw. His first report from Auschwitz I was sent to the Polish government-in-exile in London in May 1941 through Lieutenant (Res.) Karol Świątorzecki, as he was being released from the camp. They passed it onto the Allies. Pilecki appealed to the Allies to bomb Auschwitz and end the “monstrous torture” that was taking place there. The report was forwarded to the highest levels of the British military. Sir Charles Portal, chief of the British Air Staff, warned that any raids on Auschwitz “avowedly conducted

48 Brent Douglas Dyck, “Why Didn’t Allies Bomb Auschwitz?”, *Warfare History Network*, last modified 25 January 2021. https://www.realclearhistory.com/2021/01/25/why_didnt_allies_bomb_auschwitz_657641.html.

49 Danny Orbach and Mark Solonin, “Calculated Indifference: The Soviet Union and Requests to Bomb Auschwitz”, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 27, no. 1 (2013): 90–113.

50 “Polish Intelligence 1939–1945, Poland in Exile”, Poland in Exile, accessed 1 June 2024, <http://www.poland-inexile.com/intelligence.html>.

51 Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 23–33.

52 Rogers, “British Intelligence and the Holocaust”, 89–106.

on account of the Jews would be an asset to enemy propaganda” and declined to act.⁵³

Further reports were passed on to his superiors in Warsaw either via inmates working in the laundry department, or through released inmates. These were dated December 1941, January 1942, May 1942, June, and July 1942. From Warsaw, these reports were sent on to Britain through the intelligence cell “Anna” which was based in Sweden. To these were added reports by, for example, Auschwitz escapees Wincenty Gawron and Stefan Bielecki (16 May 1942), and Eugeniusz Bender, Kazimierz Piechowski, and Stanisław Jaster (20 June 1942).⁵⁴

Another detailed report was from Jan Karski (Yad Vashem Righteous Among the Nations), a courier who risked his life to bring information about the Nazi’s extermination of Jews to the Allies. Karski once said that “[t]he Lord assigned me a role to speak and write during the war when, as it seemed to me, it might help. It did not”. In October 1942, he delivered a report to the Polish government-in-exile in London, but to no avail.⁵⁵

The Polish government-in-exile was not silent. For example, in November 1942, it informed the Allies that tens of thousands of Jews and Soviet prisoners of war were shipped to Auschwitz “for the sole purpose of their immediate extermination in gas chambers”.⁵⁶ This news that “trainloads of adults and children [were] taken to great crematoriums” was published in *The New York Times* newspaper.⁵⁷

On 17 December 1942, following this mounting evidence of transportation and mass killing, British foreign secretary Anthony Eden read in the House of Commons the United Nations Declaration, including that the German authorities were “carrying into effect Hitler’s oft-repeated intention to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe”.⁵⁸ Yet, there is no documented evidence of any action being taken to prevent or stop this.

Given this mounting data, some made public, and the political declarations, it is hard to imagine that any intelligence analyst in the Allied forces or the Polish resistance could ever have claimed that the topic did not need further investigation. Following this view, the watershed for intelligence data and knowledge of the true nature of Auschwitz could well have been April 1943. Then, Witold Pilecki, along with Jan Radziej and Edward Ciesielski, escaped from Auschwitz II. Pilecki prepared the most important document, “Report W”, in which he described the situation in the Nazi concentration camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau, including numerous hand-written plans. The intelligence was so detailed that it led the Directorate of Civilian Resistance in Poland to report that people had their prison number tattooed, were being gassed in the chambers, and were being burned in a crematorium. It suggested that over 1.5 million people had been brought to the Auschwitz

53 Gillian Brockell, “The Polish Hero Who Volunteered to Go to Auschwitz – and Warned the World about the Nazi Death Machine”, *The Washington Post*, 26 January 2020, 12.

54 Witold Pilecki, *Report WKL Auschwitz 1940–1943* (Warsaw: Institute of National Remembrance, Pilecki Project Committee, 2023), 1–23.

55 “Jan Karski (Yad Vashem Righteous Among the Nations)”, Yad Vashem, accessed 1 June 2024, <https://www.yadvashem.org/righteous/stories/karski.html>.

56 David Cesarani and Sarah Kavanaugh, *Holocaust: Responses to the Persecution and Mass Murder of the Jews* (New York: Psychology Press, 2004), 190.

57 Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, “Document Feature: Vrba-Wetzler Report and the Auschwitz Protocols”.

58 “17 December 1942: Declaration on the Persecution of the Jews”, Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, accessed 1 June 2024, <https://www.hmd.org.uk/resource/17-december-1942-declaration-on-the-persecution-of-the-jews/#:~:text=The%20then%20Foreign%20Secretary%2C%20Anthony,a%20spontaneous%20moment%20of%20silence.&text=Eden%20read%20to%20the%20House,Jews%20in%20Nazi%20occupied%20Europe.>

camp by March 1943. Most of those people were Jews. Nobody acted on this information.⁵⁹

An important quote from “Report W” to show that by 1943, and not April 1944 as contended by Sir Martin Gilbert, the true nature of Auschwitz was known is:

[i]n Warsaw, on 23 October 1943, through “Jeż” I was able to contact the Deputy of “233” (presumably it was First Lieutenant Colonel Jerzy Uszycki, since July 1942 Head of Signals with the Department V at the Armia Krajowa [AK] Headquarters, Chief of AK Corps of Signals and Deputy Chief of Department V at the AK Headquarters), I presented Auschwitz issues to. Later on, on 29 October 1943, as ordered by the Deputy of “233”, I thoroughly discussed all Auschwitz issues, including planning a military intervention there, with an operations officer “233” – nom de guerre “Zygmunt”, “Wilk”. The response from him was as follows: “After the war I will show you how thick are the Auschwitz files in our archives.” When I suggested that the thickness of these files brings no relief to Auschwitz inmates, “Zygmunt” – “Wilk” responded: “I can assure you that we will contact you as soon as this matter becomes live. Witold.”⁶⁰

Another report, from a Polish agent codenamed Wanda, was given to the American military attaché in London in January 1944. She claimed that “[c]hildren and women are put into cars and lorries and taken to gas chambers.”⁶¹

Adding to this intelligence data, on 21 March 1944, the Polish Ministry of Information released a report to the Associated Press that could not have been more explicit in stating that “more than 500,000 persons, mostly Jews, had been put to death at a concentration camp” – Auschwitz. The report stated that most had been killed in gas chambers, “but since the supply of gas was limited some persons are not dead when they are thrown into the crematorium.”⁶²

This information about Auschwitz that was distributed by the Polish government-in-exile in London to the Allies was in part also published in the *Jewish Chronicle* (New Jersey, United States), the *Polish Jewish Observer* (exile in London), and by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (New York, United States), for instance.⁶³ More lengthy published reports, with evidence that the Polish government-in-exile in London provided to the Allies on the nature of the internment and extermination of Jews and others, was published. This included, for example: (1) German camps (Auschwitz, Oranienburg, Mauthausen, and Dachau) described in “The Polish White Book” (New York, 1941); (2) Halina Krahelska’s report “Auschwitz Oświęcim, pamiętnik więźnia” (Auschwitz: Diary of a Prisoner: 1942) and (3) “The Mass Extermination of Jews in German Occupied Poland”, a paper issued by the Polish government-in-exile addressed to the United Nations in 1942.⁶⁴

Such details about the constant provision and flow of intelligence data leads to the conclusion that the Allied policymakers, and the Polish government-in-exile

59 Pilecki, *Report WKL Auschwitz 1940–1943*, 25.

60 *Ibid.*, 70.

61 Richard Breitman, “Allied Knowledge of Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1943–1944”, in *Roosevelt and the Holocaust: How FDR Saved the Jews and Brought Hope to a Nation*, ed. R. L. Beir (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013), 175–182.

62 David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941–1945* (New York: Plunkett Lake Press, 2019), 67.

63 *Jewish Chronicle*, “Failed to Report the Atrocities”, PressReader, 23 January 2015, <https://www.pressreader.com/uk/the-jewish-chronicle/20150123/281741267817392>.

64 Enrique Aynat, “Auschwitz and the Exile Government of Poland According to the ‘Polish Fortnightly Review’ 1940–1945”, *The Journal of Historical Review* 11, no. 3 (1991): 281–319.

and resistance in Poland, are guilty. There was no failure in the gathering of intelligence or the presentation of it to the public or to the Allied powers. There was a failure to act, and to pressure and to galvanise against a genocide, the Holocaust. That is not to say that the Polish resistance did not do something against the Nazis. There was some involvement, for example, in the Warsaw Uprising of Jews against the Nazis in 1944.

Railway (Non-)Sabotage

This article has so far shown a direct link between the Polish resistance, Second World War intelligence, the Polish government-in-exile, and to information on the Holocaust as it was happening in real time. This section turns to consider whether the Polish resistance knew about the Allies' decisions not to bomb, if it should have been the one to act with alternative means, and whether it had the capability to do so. The bottom line is that, while there is no indication that Allied decisions about bombing were ever conveyed to the Polish resistance, there is no reason why they could not have undertaken railway sabotage, for example, as an alternative. There is no indication that this was discussed by the Polish government-in-exile with the Allies.

A point on capability is provided by historian Norman Davies who wrote that "[t]he Polish Home Army was perhaps the most extraordinary of all the world's war-time resistance movements". Its strength lay not only in its numbers but also in the breadth of its operations, which included everything from intelligence gathering and sabotage to full-scale military operations.⁶⁵ Furthermore, the historian Gordon L. Rottman noted that "railroad sabotage was one of the most frequent partisan activities in all theatres of the war".⁶⁶

This, then, leads to the observation that sabotaging the railway to Auschwitz was feasible but a notable exception in not having been implemented. There is no evidence to indicate that the railway lines to Auschwitz that brought not only the victims but also supplies, including gas, were in any way targeted by the Polish resistance or considered by the Allies and the Polish government-in-exile at any stage. So, while blame could be levelled at the American, British, and Soviet allies for not bombing Auschwitz, additional blame must be levelled at the Polish resistance for not sabotaging the railways.

Railway sabotage was one of the main tactics used by the resistance to German occupation throughout Europe during the Second World War.⁶⁷ In 1993, Marek Ney-Krwawicz counted approximately 2,900 acts of railway-related sabotage in Poland in the period from 1941 to 1944. The total losses suffered by Polish railways included the destruction of 38 per cent of railway lines, 46 per cent of bridges, 50 per cent of tunnels, 37 per cent of railway buildings, 6,000 steam locomotives, and over 60,000 wagons.⁶⁸

The sabotage started in earnest when, on 22 June 1941, the commander-in-chief of the Polish Armed Forces in exile, General Władysław Sikorski, ordered the chief commander of the Union of Armed Struggle (the Polish resistance), General Stefan

65 Norman Davies, *Heart of Europe: The Past in Poland's Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 78.

66 Gordon L. Rottman, *World War II Allied Sabotage Devices and Booby Traps* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 88.

67 Krzysztof Komorowski, *Boje polskie 1939–1945: przewodnik encyklopedyczny* (Warsaw: Bellona, 2009), 44.

68 Kolejnictwopolskie, "History of Railways, Railways During World War II".

Grot-Rowecki, to intensify sabotage and subversion activities. The reason was that close to 100 per cent of the German supplies to the Eastern Front lines passed through Polish territories.⁶⁹

At first, this sabotage was uncoordinated and done by individual workers, and included simple delays, misdirecting and misrouting trains, arson, and damage to wagon traction or brakes.⁷⁰ This escalated with the pouring of sand into wagon grease tanks, the replacement of address stickers on wagons, and the assignment of double numbers to wagons after repairs. Railway men also provided enormous support in organising the illegal deliveries of foodstuffs to cities, and in conspiring to carry mail, courier mail, or hidiers.⁷¹

By the summer of 1942, this sabotage was well organised and coordinated, and of daily frequency and intensity. For example, the largest achievement of the Warsaw District Union of Retaliation was Operation *Wieniec* (Garland) on the night of 7 and 8 October 1942, during which the rails surrounding Warsaw were blown up. Operation *Bariera* (Barrier) interrupted railway traffic simultaneously at ninety-two points nationwide. The numbers of attacks thereafter quadrupled or more between 1942 and 1943. For example, Warsaw had 25 acts of railway sabotage attacks in 1942 compared with 138 in 1943. There were several notable acts of railway sabotage outside of Polish territories, such as in Germany and Belarus in 1942.⁷²

According to German reports, the Polish resistance carried out approximately 600 attacks on railway infrastructure throughout the country in 1942 and 1943. Krzysztof Komorowski notes that the acts of sabotage intensified, and by 1944 and 1945 there were over 2,000 attacks. By that stage, the Polish Home Army had over 400,000 members.⁷³

Despite this intensity and frequency, there is no evidence to show that the railways to Auschwitz were affected. It appears that the Polish railway workers simply carried on, and the Polish resistance did not stop the railway transport of Jews in cattle wagons on a one-way journey from all over Nazi-occupied Europe to be gassed to death at Auschwitz. For example, in the “Shoah Interview with a Polish Railway worker Henryk Gawkowski”, the locomotive conductor at the Treblinka death camp station, Gawkowski, estimates that he transported approximately 18,000 Jews to that death camp without undertaking any sabotage.⁷⁴

Putting into perspective the lack of the Polish resistance’s sabotage of railways to slow down or halt the Holocaust, it should be noted that the rest of Europe was no different. The Flemish village of Boortmeerbeek is notable for being the only place in Europe where a train transport of Jews was stopped by resistance fighters, on 19 April 1943. Out of a train, Transport XX (20), holding 1,631 Jews, the Belgian Resistance Movement helped 17 people to flee, while a further 219 jumped from the wagons. Of the 236 people who escaped, 91 of them were recaptured and put on the next transport to Auschwitz, 25 were killed either while escaping or shortly afterwards, and

69 Komorowski, *Boje polskie 1939–1945*, 45.

70 David T. Zabecki, “Sabotage” in *World War II in Europe*, ed. David T. Zabecki (London: Taylor & Francis, 2015), 1256.

71 Stanisław Kania, *Polska gwara konspiracyjno-partyzancka, 1939–1945* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1986), 130.

72 Komorowski, *Boje polskie 1939–1945*, 47.

73 Richard J. Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 1994), 197–198.

74 “Henryk Gawkowski and Treblinka Railway Workers”, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Film Digitized Accession Number: 1996.166 RG Number: RG-60.5036 Film ID: 3362, 3363, 3364, 3365, 3366, 3367, 3818, 3743, 3744, 3368, 3370, 3371, 3372, accessed 1 June 2024, https://collections.ushmm.org/film_findings/gaids/RG-60.5036_01_trl_en.pdf.

120 succeeded in their bid for freedom. This action is a unique fact in the history of the Holocaust. Nowhere else in Nazi-occupied Europe was such an action undertaken on a transport of Jews to a death camp.⁷⁵

Conclusion

The examination conducted in this article has included sources on the Holocaust and those on the Second World War. It has linked the study of the two historical topics into one, by focusing on intelligence data and the lack of action. This focus on intelligence has determined that the Polish government-in-exile knew throughout the war about the true nature of Auschwitz, and it passed this data on to the Allied powers and the media. Clearly, there was knowledge of what was happening in Auschwitz from the earliest days and throughout the war: the Polish government-in-exile requested action, but the Allies did not act, and nor did the Polish resistance.

A summary of the examination is that, even when the Allies knew about the mass killings of civilians, mainly Jews, at Auschwitz, they did not have the bombing capability – the range and accuracy – until 1944. The option of Soviets airbases was never considered, the Soviets lacked the bombing capability, and there were disputes between the Allies including the Soviets, and the Polish. From April 1944, both aerial reconnaissance and eye-witness accounts provided exact details of the Holocaust, and the Mosquito aircraft could have accurately bombed the crematorium in Auschwitz. There is no evidence that this was considered by the Allied powers. If it had been, then Auschwitz might have ceased to function at least a year earlier. How many thousands of lives could have been saved?

There was a significantly large amount of intelligence gathered by the Polish resistance and supplied to the Polish government-in-exile in London and the Allies and carried by the media. This intelligence data made public after the Second World War substantiates the popular mindset of the callous indifference to, or even complicity in, the crimes that the Nazis committed. This point is exemplified by that of railway sabotage. There is no evidence that this tactic was ever contemplated by the Allies or the Polish resistance with regards to the railways to Auschwitz.

That just leaves one point for the bottom line, that is, from the writings of Sir Martin Gilbert's work on Auschwitz arguing that the West was unaware of the true nature of Auschwitz Birkenau until 1944. From at least 1942, as examined in this paper, one plus one would have equalled two for even the lowest level of intelligence analyst, not to mention more seasoned politicians or military leaders, if they had been interested. For example, necessities such as food, clothing or heating were not being transported to Auschwitz to meet the most basic needs of the number of mainly Jews who were being transported there. Millions of civilians simply disappeared! There were no graves, and the smoke coming from the chimneys of crematoria showed that these were operating. So why did no Polish resistance or Allied intelligence analyst ask what was happening?

Typical of both political and military thinking, and in meetings behind the scenes, then and even today, is the argument and opinion that nothing could be done, or even if something were done that it would be too little, and so nothing was

⁷⁵ "Who Stopped the 19 April 1943 Train to Auschwitz?", *Discovering Belgium*, last modified 19 April 2020. <https://www.discoveringbelgium.com/april-19-1943-train-auschwitz/>.

done. Then and now the proposals of optimists, those who argue that something should be done, are rarely even considered. Following such a line of “group think”, bombing by Mosquito aircraft, for example, would not even have been on the agenda. Even if it had been on the agenda, railway sabotage or even an uprising would have been weighed against due concerns for the possible consequences, such as repression against the population at large. Clearly, the order never came to even try.

To conclude, then, it would be fair to concur with Sir Martin Gilbert’s opinion: that Britain – and even more so the Polish resistance – should and could have done more to stop the horrors of Auschwitz. Clearly, the intelligence reports and requests by the Polish government-in-exile from 1941 to 1944, and the aerial reconnaissance and eye-witness accounts from 1944, were ignored. Those guilty are clearly more than the Nazis. How could anyone, especially intelligence analysts, ever claim that they never knew or even never contemplated at least in passing the true nature – the mass killing of civilians – of Auschwitz?

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Glen Segell is Professor, NATO-EU Strategy Group. He has held teaching and research positions in Israel, Ireland, South Africa, and the United Kingdom. He is Editor of two peer-review journals and on the Editorial Board of others. Subjects that interest him are military intelligence, and civil-military relations, especially extremist politics.

Email: glen@segell.com

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Verena Buser

Jewish Children and Teenagers Surviving the Last Deadly Months of the Holocaust in Bergen-Belsen

Abstract

Opened in 1943, the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp near Celle, Germany, held at least 3,000 children and adolescents, most of them Jewish. In 1944, a process began in which thousands of prisoners died intentionally in Bergen-Belsen. Bergen-Belsen served first as an “evacuation camp” for prisoners from concentration camps near the front; from the summer of 1944. However, it also functioned as a transit camp for women and girls, many of them Polish, who were sent to subcamps for forced labour. Furthermore, it was used as a (cynically called) “rest camp” for prisoners who had been sent to concentration camps on Reich territory as sick and unfit for work. They died from deliberate neglect, as they were not cared for. In the last months of the war, between January and April 1945, some 80,000 to 90,000 people arrived at the camp.

This article focuses on children’s experiences and their adaptation to camp life despite death, murder, starvation. The evaluation and analysis of these testimonies and interviews with child survivors, who report from the perspective of adults today, shows that children had a specific view of the concentration camp that differed from that of adults and, at the same time, helped the children to cope with everyday life in the camp. In the oral histories or eyewitness accounts of survivors, there are repeated references to the “quicker” adjustment of children and adolescents compared to older prisoners. Nevertheless, the memories of that time never left them. The testimonies of Jewish child survivors serve as crucial historical evidence, particularly in an era in which Holocaust scholarship faces challenges such as distortion, denial, and revisionism.

At the time of writing, the world is at the eve of commemorating the eightieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War and the liberation of the camps. There are still a few Jewish child survivors of the Holocaust who went through Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, or other camps under German administration in Nazi-occupied Europe. At the end of the war, and on their way to a new life, they often had a double burden to carry. Their parents, often preoccupied with their own concerns, were survivors themselves. The children had survived the camps under the most difficult and horrible conditions, often marked by the loss and death of loved ones. The child survivors had witnessed death, starvation, and crime. Despite this burden, many of them showed great resilience and started families of their own.¹

1 See the online exhibition “Whoever Saves a Life...” *Life Stories of Children of the “Lost Transport”*, curated by the author and Thomas Irmer. This exhibition was developed in 2021 and 2022 and initiated by the Technisches Denkmal Brikettfabrik ‘Louise’ Domsdorf. It is based on interviews with Jewish child survivors of Bergen-Belsen who survived the “Lost Transport”, and with their descendants.

In all the concentration camps which belonged to the central administration *Inspektion der Konzentrationslager* (IKL, Inspection of Concentration Camps), there were minors among the prisoners, even in the very first camps that were established right after Adolf Hitler came to power in January 1933.² The best-known example of a teenager who was a prisoner in a concentration camp is that of the German-Jewish girl Anne Frank from Frankfurt am Main. Her diary is a “cornerstone of the culture of remembrance” not only in the Federal Republic of Germany³ but also worldwide. It is a paradigmatic example of the persecution of children and young people under the Nazi regime. After the Frank family had been discovered in their hiding place in Amsterdam, the then fifteen-year-old Anne Frank was deported with her sister and mother via the transit camp Westerbork in the Netherlands to Auschwitz-Birkenau⁴. As the Red Army advanced and the Auschwitz camp system was disbanded, more than 60,000 prisoners were evacuated to Germany on death marches by foot, in wagons, and by train. Countless Jewish and non-Jewish prisoners died on the way or were murdered by the guards, the killing machine, and the Birkenau staff, who arrived on German soil and continued the killing. Anne and her sister Margot died shortly before the liberation of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in April 1945.

Like countless other Jewish children and young people, Anne did not survive the Holocaust and was unable to bear witness to the atrocities, be it in a diary or to the world. The life of children in Bergen-Belsen is described below using the example of the *Sternlager* (Star Camp). This was a subcamp in which the Jewish prisoners were held hostage, and they lived there in a situation that was different to the other camps. The existence of these Jewish children on German territory was an exception, as the camps on German territory were made “Jew free” in October 1942. Against the background of the unfolding genocide of European Jews, being sent to a concentration camp meant for Jewish children and young people their temporary survival under inhumane conditions.

The Historical Background of Bergen-Belsen⁵

At the end of April 1943, the *SS-Wirtschaftsverwaltungshauptamt* (SS-WVHA, SS Economic Administration Headquarters) set up a camp on part of the Stalag XI C/311 POW camp near Celle, about fifty kilometres north of Hanover, where Jews with foreign citizenship or “Palestine certificates” were interned from 6 May.⁶ Jews living in the four separate sections called residence camp – the Special Camp for Polish Jews, the Neutral Camp, the Star Camp, and the Hungarian Camp – were considered hostages and were to be exchanged for Germans interned abroad or for financial compensation. From June 1943, these four parts of the camp were referred to in SS-WVHA correspondence as the Bergen-Belsen “detention camp”. Although

2 Verena Buser, *Überleben von Kindern und Jugendlichen in den Konzentrationslagern Sachsenhausen, Auschwitz und Bergen-Belsen* (Metropol Verlag, 2011).

3 Wolfgang Benz, “Mythos Anne Frank”, in *Als Kind verfolgt. Anne Frank und die anderen*, ed. Inge Hansen-Schaberg (Metropol Verlag, 2004), 99–108, 99.

4 Verena Buser, “Children”, in *The Routledge Handbook of Auschwitz-Birkenau*, ed. Sarah Cushman, Joanne Pettitte, and Dominic Williams (Routledge, forthcoming 2025).

5 An extensive list of literature on the camp’s history, trials, and survivor memories can be found on the website of the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, <https://bergen-belsen.stiftung-ng.de/de/forschung-dokumentation/literatur/allgemein/>.

6 Hans-Heinrich Nolte, ed., *Häftlinge aus der UdSSR in Bergen-Belsen. Dokumentation der Erinnerungen* (Peter Lang Verlag, 2001).

the concentration camp was under the control of the SS-WVHA, the prisoners did not perform forced labour for German war production.⁷ Only prisoners in the Star Camp were made to work from the age of fifteen.

In 1944, a process began in which thousands of prisoners died in Bergen-Belsen. The reasons for the mass deaths lay in the fact that, in the course of the dismantling of the concentration camp system from 1944 onwards, Bergen-Belsen fulfilled three additional functions in addition to its reception of “exchange hostages”. Bergen-Belsen served as an “evacuation camp” for prisoners from concentration camps near the front. From the summer of 1944, it also functioned as a transit camp for women and girls, many of them non-Jewish Polish women, who were sent to subcamps for forced labour.⁸ Furthermore, it functioned under the cynical name of a “rest camp” for prisoners classified as sick and unfit for work in concentration camps on Reich territory, which in reality meant that they died by omission at Bergen-Belsen because they were not cared for at all.

In the final months of the war, between January and April 1945, some 80,000 to 90,000 people ended up in the camp.⁹ Due to a lack of capacity, the concentration camp was gradually expanded: additional camp areas were built in the so-called “Prisoners’ Camp II” for men and in the large women’s camp, as well as in the “tent camp” for female prisoners. When the former commandant of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Josef Kramer, took over the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in early December 1944, prison conditions were further tightened. The SS appointed a camp elder, Walter Hanke, and non-Jewish Kapos who had worked in the concentration camp for years took command of the prisoners, who had previously lived under Jewish self-administration. Due to the constant deterioration resulting from the increasing expansion of functions, the Jews in the “detention camp” suffered from inadequate care, extremely cramped conditions, and deteriorating hygienic conditions, which led to the rapid spread of disease. In everyday life, the satisfaction of basic existential needs almost exclusively determined people’s actions and thoughts. When British troops entered the camp on 15 April 1945, they found more than 10,000 unburied corpses.¹⁰

Jewish children and adolescents, but also non-Jewish minors, were among the prisoners in all of the abovementioned sections of the Bergen-Belsen camp complex. The different functions of the various camp areas within the entire Bergen-Belsen camp complex, as well as the individually motivated exercise of power by SS personnel, had a decisive influence on the living conditions of the children and young people housed here. Although the sources of SS provenience describe the conditions, they give no indication of what the reality of the concentration camp was like and how the prisoners responded to these conditions. The prisoners shared the common experience of living in uncertainty. It was completely unclear how long their forced, violent imprisonment and the war would last.

The following study focuses on the memories of Jewish child survivors and their attempts to reconstruct their survival strategies, thoughts, and experiences. They were usually written long after their time in Bergen-Belsen and therefore reflect the survivors’ memories of their time as children.

7 Thomas Rahe, “Bergen-Belsen, Stammlager”, in *Der Ort des Terrors. Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager*, eds. Wolfgang Benz and Barbara Distel (C.H. Beck Verlag, 2008), 187–217.

8 Alexandra-Eileen Wenck, *Zwischen Menschenhandel und “Endlösung”. Das Konzentrationslager Bergen-Belsen* (Schöningh Verlag, 2000), 339–347.

9 Thomas Rahe, “Das Evakuierungslager Bergen-Belsen”, *Dachauer Hefte* 20 (2004): 47–57, 49.

10 Rahe, “Bergen-Belsen, Stammlager”, 187.

The Bergen-Belsen Star Camp

The majority of the more than 4,000 Jews imprisoned in the Star Camp came from the Netherlands and they were imprisoned together for almost two years. In addition, there were at least 400 Albanian Jews as well as women and children who were imprisoned in Bergen-Belsen as relatives of French prisoners of war. In total, around 5,400 people passed through this part of the camp, whose accommodation was moved several times within the Bergen-Belsen camp complex. The daily life of the inmates of the Star Camp was characterised by compulsory roll calls and forced labour, to which prisoners were conscripted from the age of fifteen, meaning that children were exempted from the forced labour. The Star Camp was therefore the only subcamp in the Bergen-Belsen complex in which children were largely unsupervised by adults during the day. Here, too, families were separated by gender, and children up to the age of fourteen generally stayed with their mothers, who therefore figure prominently in the memories of child survivors. Family members could visit each other at night, usually between 7 and 8 p.m.¹¹

In contrast to other concentration camps, the proportion of children among the inmates of the Star Camp was extremely high at 18 per cent. The death rate among children was lower than among adults. About 93 per cent of all registered and deceased prisoners of the Star Camp were older than eighteen years. The proportion of deceased children up to and including the age of fourteen was 4.6 per cent.¹² One child survivor retrospectively surmised that the children had “more resilience” and that this was probably related to the fact that parents, if they were able to, passed on their food rations to their children.¹³ The living conditions of teenagers in the Star Camp were no different to those of the adults and children. Arieh (Leo) Koretz turned sixteen in July 1944 and recorded this date in his diary, which he kept between July 1944 and March 1945:¹⁴ “[w]hat a birthday [...]. My mouth is a bit better, but I still find it difficult to eat. The boils have not changed, the whole camp suffers from them.”¹⁵

Daily Life, Play, and the Adaption of Jewish Child “Hostages” in Bergen-Belsen

Adolescents and children over the age of three had to stand for roll call every day. The only exceptions were the sick and mothers of children under three.¹⁶ Regardless of the weather conditions, the roll calls could last two to three hours, but sometimes took up to nine hours, especially if the count was wrong or someone was missing. Former prisoner Hanna Lévy-Hass reports on one roll call: “[o]r the children who know no joy. Fear, nothing but fear. [...] They hide their heads under some rag, snug-

11 Wiener Holocaust Library, London Bialoglowski, Mrs. W. – Amsterdam. Teaching school at Westerbork 1943–1945, Eyewitness Accounts: Doc. No. P.III.h. No.835. (Westerbork), Reel: 58: 3.

12 Research in the database of the Bergen-Belsen Memorial Archives (BBMA).

13 Interview with Sonni (Sonja) S., 1989 und 1990 in Ramat Gan, BBMA, BT-662: 10.

14 Koretz, Arieh (Leo). 1992. Bergen-Belsen. Tagebuch eines Jugendlichen 11. 7. 1944–30. 3. 1945 (published 1992 in Israel), translation, BBMA: 18.

15 Ibid., 21. As the prisoners suffered from vitamin deficiency, they developed eczema in their mouths.

16 Thomas Rahe, “Aus ‘rassistischen’ Gründen verfolgte Kinder im Konzentrationslager Bergen-Belsen”, in *Kinder und Jugendliche als Opfer des Holocaust*, eds. Edgar Bamberger and Annegret Ehmman (Dokumentations- und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma/Gedenkstätte Haus der Wannseekonferenz, 1995).

gle up to the grown-ups to seek protection against the cold and terror.¹⁷ Children were also at risk of wetting themselves during the roll call. A mother of two small children reported that, in such a situation, several mothers formed a circle around their son, in the centre of which he could urinate.¹⁸ Challenging for the children, however, was having to remain motionless for hours on end. One eleven-year-old girl recalled that her mother fainted during a roll call in winter. As she was not allowed to help her mother up, she had to stand for two hours in the uncertainty of whether her mother had died.¹⁹ After roll call, mothers and fathers went to forced labour, where they worked under SS guard. The children returned to the barracks or remained in the camp. One female survivor remembered that her daughter, who was left alone during the day, repeatedly suffered from the fear that her parents would leave her because of the daily separation.

During the day, many children were running through the camps, where they quickly learned that it was better to avoid the SS. When the SS approached, Moshe N. said, he hid. For him, the children who came into contact with the SS were “stupid”, because they were not protected from beatings by the SS.²⁰ As George Eisen impressively showed in his pathbreaking study on “Children and Play in the Holocaust”,²¹ playing appeared everywhere: in the ghettos and camps, too, so of course also in Bergen-Belsen. There, children “teased” each other, as one boy who was deported from the Netherlands as a child reported about the teasing of the Albanian Jews: “[w]e didn’t understand each other from the beginning, and we teased each other. The children from Albania made fun of us: ‘Holland destroyed’. And the Dutch Jews would say: ‘Albania broken.’”²² Several child survivors also reported that they collected ‘silver strips’ dropped by Allied planes and played with them.²³ However, many of the children also reported an “activity” that they spent hours doing, which was to remove the lice that infested a large proportion of the inmates. In order to avoid illness, mothers repeatedly made sure that the children took care of their personal hygiene. Two boys who lived in the men’s barracks reported that they had “a lot of fun” finding and killing the lice.²⁴

After a few months, hunger was rampant among all the prisoners in the Star Camp area. As a result, the children quickly learnt to “organise” themselves, and several boys developed a trick during the kitchen rounds: “[a]nd we often succeeded [...] some of us came into the kitchen with the empty cans and [then] very quickly threw ourselves on this pile of turnips, under the coat [...] and [then] we chose the right moment and threw the turnips into this camp, where the second group of children was waiting [...] and then we went through the gate without these things [...] these turnips, that was a very important addition to our meal.”²⁵ Other children were delighted to be able to carry empty trays back to the kitchen after the meal, as this gave them a chance to lick up the leftovers.²⁶ However, most of the children also knew that it was important to hide their food so that it would not be stolen by other prisoners.

17 Hanna Lévy-Hass, *Vielleicht war das alles erst der Anfang. Tagebuch aus dem KZ Bergen-Belsen 1944–1945* (Rotbuch-Verlag, 1979).

18 Video interview with Shelley C., 16. 11. 1999, BBMA.

19 Transcript of interview with Francine C., 12. 11. 2000, BBMA, BT-1100: 7.

20 Video interview with Moshe N., 27. 3. 2000, BBMA, BT-452/453.

21 George Eisen, *Children and Play in the Holocaust: Games among the Shadows* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1990).

22 Report by Haim Peles, s.d., Yad Vashem Digital Archives (YVDA), O3.5342.

23 Aluminium strips were dropped by Allied planes to confuse German radars.

24 Video interview with Paul und Rudi O., BBMA.

25 Transcript of interview with Raoul T., 23. 5. 1995, BBMA, BT-933: 10.

26 *Ibid.*, 10.

Several of them had birthdays during their imprisonment, such as Haim-Yair Peles, who on his eighth birthday received pictures painted on cardboard of the presents he would have received if he had been free. Several children sang songs for him that day, and game was organised in which the child who laughed the most received a small doll made of wool from Peles' mother.²⁷

Mothers and Children

Mothers' supportive actions and care play an important role in the testimonies of many child survivors.²⁸ This corresponds to the actual prison situation in which it was the mothers who structured their children's daily lives, maintained some sort of routine, and tried to keep a vestige of "normality" in everyday life. Many of them also slept side by side with the children at night. They taught the children how to organise their meals and looked after their hygiene. Others improvised and sewed clothes for the children out of blankets. Time and again it is emphasised that the shared accommodation with the mothers was of enormous importance. One boy, who was almost twelve years old at the time, summed up his imprisonment in Bergen-Belsen as follows: "[w]ell, that can be summed up as being hungry, that can be summed up as being together with people you didn't know, but with whom you made acquaintance. [The mother] was with us. So that was already [...] something immeasurably important. Being with your mother is worth all the [...] gold in the world."²⁹ Albert, who was twelve years old at the time, gives his personal account: "[w]e children [...] were with our mothers. And that was a protection for us, an essential protection. Our mothers might have known something, but they didn't tell us. But we were so full of trust, because we were with our mothers, that we didn't ask ourselves any questions."³⁰ Mothers tried to keep the children occupied as much as possible. Batsheva M. remembers her mother teaching her to knit with threads from a blanket. When she finished something, it would be unravelled and the girl would knit again.³¹

Henry A. says that, when he was imprisoned, he felt that nothing would happen to him as long as his parents were with him.³² Ultimately, mothers and fathers were unable to protect their children from having to deal with adult problems and decisions at an early age. Especially towards the end of 1944, many were unable to provide their children with sufficient food. One former prisoner reported that "[t]he end was getting worse and worse. Some days the soup was thin [...] there was nothing left. [In the evening, some evenings, there was nothing left. I cried to my mother: 'Mama, Mama, I'm hungry'. She continued: '[i]t was said in the camp that if she slept with the camp elder, Albala, she would get a voucher for soup, and I was so hungry [...] that one day I shouted: 'Mama, sleep with Albala so I can have soup!'"³³

In many cases, however, the children formed close bonds with each other because of the lack of adult presence. Children in the Star Camp experienced that, over time, the adults were no longer able to look after their needs. As noted in an interview on

27 Report by Haim Peles, 7.

28 Diana Gring, "Zwischen 'Familie im Lager' und 'Lagerfamilie': Kinder und ihre familiären Beziehungen in Videointerviews mit Child Survivors des Konzentrationslagers Bergen-Belsen", in *Bergen-Belsen. Neue Forschungen*, eds. Habbo Knoch and Thomas Rahe (Wallstein Verlag, 2014).

29 Transcript of interview with Albert B., 7.9.2000, BBMA, BT-1067: 8.

30 Ibid., 9.

31 Video interview with Batsheva M., 23.3.2000, BBMA.

32 Video interview with Henry A., 20.10.2002, BBMA.

33 The witness remains anonymous at this point, as this episode was not included in her published memoirs.

18 May 1993, held in the Bergen-Belsen Memorial Archives, one former detainee even said that the adults could not be trusted.³⁴ For some children, siblings of the same age or older sometimes took the place of their parents. This was also important for younger children, who could keep each other occupied during the day.³⁵ A twelve-year-old girl lost her twin sister in Bergen-Belsen.³⁶ After her sister died, the girl made a conscious decision that a friend should take her sister's place.

Death Becomes “Normal”

At the Star Camp, many children were confronted with the sight of the dead for the first time in their lives. What this meant to the children and how they dealt with it is best understood through the accounts of contemporary witnesses. In a way, death had become an integral part of the children's everyday lives. Since the children were not forced to work, many of them wandered around the camp during the day, looking for different ways to occupy themselves with games that seemed strange to outsiders. Sara A. remembers the children betting on who would die the next day. Moshe N., who was housed with his mother and sister, saw corpses for the first time in Bergen-Belsen and was forced to learn “how easy it is to die”. From the perspective of an adult, he judges his behaviour as a child as “terrible”, as he became accustomed to the sight of the dead.³⁷ He reports that, after a while, he became an “expert” at judging whether someone was “already dead or not. [It was a game [...]. Today I no longer know how I did it. [...] Terrible [...], I can't believe it [...], it was a game with the dead. [...] We had nothing to do, nothing, we didn't work.”³⁸

However, a witness who was already an adult at the time was also able to observe that everyday life in the camp was reflected in the games played by the children who were not assigned to work. Moshe Nordheim's mother remembers that the children wanted to find out whether someone had already died or not, and held feathers under their noses to test this.³⁹ Francine C., who was eleven years old at the time, recalls that they ran around the camp and found a way of coping with the daily increase in the number of dead: “[w]e walked around, we kicked in the puddles, we counted the dead. I compared the piles of dead, because they were piled up like tree trunks [...]. We also played ‘see the dead, look at them’. Oh, this one's feet are like this, oh, and this one, he's ugly, have you seen this one, he's got twisted hands! That too, that was another horrible game, that's the life of the children in the camp, we went to the latrines, we watched the people.”⁴⁰ Moshe N. explained how children “adapted”: “[c]hildren are like animals [...]. [...] If you put a child in the jungle, a child learns that you can live in the jungle, a child can adapt [...]. That's how we were, we weren't civilised anymore, our parents are still trying [...] to stay a bit civilised [...]. Death or life, the way an animal in the jungle looks at a dead animal, it doesn't make such a big noise because the animal is dead [...] and it goes on, that was the life for me too, as a child, I remember. It brought me a lot of difficulties [when] I came back, [settling] back into normal life.”⁴¹ The constant sight of corpses led children and adults to get used to

34 Interview transcript Sieg M. and Ronnie A., 18.5.1993, BBMA, BT-452/453: Bl. 7.

35 Video interview with Batsheva M.

36 Video interview with Naomi R., 22.4.2004, BBMA.

37 Video interview with Moshe N.

38 Ibid.

39 Video interview with Shelley C.

40 Transcript of interview with Francine C., 7.

41 Video interview with Moshe N.

them as a kind of protective mechanism. This helped them to survive. Another girl recorded: “[w]hen people ask me to describe my camp, I always say it’s [...] the biggest disgust in the world, the biggest rubbish dump in the world. In a rubbish dump you see plastic bottles, you see tins of food, instead we saw corpses.”⁴²

Secret Lessons and Schooling

Many adults, aware of the cruel daily life of the children, sought a way to keep them occupied. The adults’ main motive was probably that the children had nothing to do during the day and were behaving in ways that were typical of camp life. Louis Tas recorded the children’s reactions on 18 June 1944: “[t]he children here are hopelessly wild. The ‘lessons’ are concocted from laziness, incompetence, bigotry and badly processed Zionism. Mams (who is now a teacher) tells how, when the children are bored with their lessons, they ‘rattle off’ a Hebrew song, the words of which they don’t understand.”⁴³ Hanna Lévy-Hass points out in her diary that there were many adults who scolded the children’s behaviour and demanded severe punishments. Lévy-Hass was clearly aware, however, that the atmosphere to which the people were exposed was not conducive to positive reinforcement of the children: “[a]s if there could be any talk of education, as if children could be made to be nice and polite in this monstrously inhuman environment, where nerves are excessively tense, where adults hit, insult and steal from each other, where they shamelessly insult each other in the crudest way, where everything is polluted and distorted.”⁴⁴ Men and women from Star Camp looked after the children, either in groups or individually their own children. Shelley Cohn-Nordheim, for example, set herself the goal of practising arithmetic with her children so that they would not go wild.⁴⁵ She made sure that her son Moshe, eight years old at the time, taught his sister Hebrew letters and reading. In the absence of writing utensils, the children had to memorise what they had learned. Max Hakkert took on a group of six-to-ten-year-olds to teach with five women.⁴⁶ There were fifty to sixty children in each class. Hakkert estimated the number of children at around 1,000, with evidence of 888 children. Hanna Lévy-Hass was also involved in teaching a group of children, about 110 of them, aged between three and fifteen.⁴⁷ A twelve-year-old boy still remembers learning Hebrew letters written on sand in the camp.⁴⁸

The adults’ reports also articulate their own psychological needs and the need to engage with the children. Feelings of inner emptiness or loss and separation from relatives were to be compensated. Taking care of the children was a way of escaping from everyday life. Karl Ochsenmann, also a prisoner in the Star Camp, described the inner state of the prisoners: “[t]he pressure and mockery emanating from these barbarians [the Germans] grew to such an unimaginable anti-humanity that the enslaved were deprived of all joy in their existence. This kind of life made people feel useless. We suffered physically and morally.”⁴⁹ Another former Star Camp pris-

42 Transcript of interview with Francine C., 11.

43 Loden Vogel, *Tagebuch aus einem Lager* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 28. “Mams” is his mother.

44 Lévy-Hass, *Vielleicht war das alles erst der Anfang*, 12.

45 Video interview with Shelley C.

46 Max Hakkert, *The Horrors of Bergen-Belsen* (s. ed., 1945).

47 Lévy-Hass, *Vielleicht war das alles erst der Anfang*, 11.

48 Transcript of interview with Raoul T., 3. 12. 2002, BBMA, BT-933: 9.

49 Report by Karl Ochsenmann, *Jüdische Jugend in den Lagern*, Spring 1946, YVA, <https://collections.yad-vashem.org/en/documents/3549212>, 17.

oner recorded her awareness of her isolation in October 1944: “And now we were once again hot with envy of all those outside, beyond the barbed wire, who have the opportunity to admire human cultural achievements in all the many museums. That is just as enviable [sic] as the envy of the physical food out there in the world, for us who see only ugliness and dirt.”⁵⁰ On 18 November 1944, Lévy-Hass recorded how she found meaning in this task, despite the difficult circumstances: “[i]n spite of everything, the work with the children continues. I cling desperately to even the smallest possibility of gathering the children together and preserving in them and in myself at least a little awake spirit and a minimum of feelings of human dignity.”⁵¹

Classes were held only until the entire Bergen-Belsen camp complex was overcrowded, which made any educational activity impossible. The focus then became on meeting basic existential needs.

The Birnbaum Family’s Orphanage

Under the direction of Helene (Henni) and Otto (Yehoshua) Birnbaum, the Star Camp provided accommodation for orphans or children whose relatives had died in Bergen-Belsen.⁵² The orphans’ area was located in a women’s barrack, with two chambers in the middle that were originally used to store corpses.⁵³ The Birnbaums and other prisoners, including their sixteen-year-old daughter Sonja, looked after around fifty children aged between four and fourteen.⁵⁴ They had already received important support from Frederika Melkman in the children’s barracks in Westerbork. Her husband Joseph wrote in his Hebrew-language memoirs how his wife and their “adopted” child Nicky (Nikkie) were removed from the list of deportees to Auschwitz on the eve of these being deported to the extermination camp, as a result of Mrs Birnbaum’s indirect intervention with the three men of the Jewish Committee in Bergen-Belsen who were responsible for the list to be sent to the SS in preparation for the deportations. She argued convincingly on Mrs Melkman’s behalf: “[w]ithout Mrs Melkman we would not be able to carry out the work in the children’s home.”⁵⁵ The Birnbaum couple did not have to do forced labour for this job, nor were they initially called up.⁵⁶ By exchanging cigarettes and “organising”, the Birnbaums often ensured that the children were fed a little better and were after a while able to move from the mortuary to another barrack.

At the age of twenty, Liselotte Lehrmann arrived on a transport from Westerbork transit camp to the camp, which was mainly made up of orphans. At first, for six weeks, she was responsible for these children as a night watchwoman. She remembers that the children were generally very restless and suffering from their past experiences. She reports: “[t]he nights were anything but peaceful. There was always cry-

50 Wiener Holocaust Library, London, Tagebuch der Frau Zielenziger, 29 September–20 November 1944, Eye-witness Accounts: Doc. No. P.III.h. No.1118 (Bergen-Belsen), entry as of 12 October 1944: 4.

51 Ibid., 38.

52 All five of the Birnbaums’ children (Sonja, Regina, Jacob, Zvi, and Susanna) survived the camps and together wrote a book in memory of their parents: the Birnbaums, *For It Is a Tree of Life* (self-published, s.d.). My heartfelt thanks go to Zvi Birnbaum for the gift of this book.

53 Memories of Joschua Herschel Birnbaum, BBMA, without signature: Bl. 14.

54 Ibid. According to Yehoshua Birnbaum, all of them survived the camp.

55 Willy Lindwer, *Kamp van hoop en wanhoop: getuigen van Westerbork, 1939–1945* (Balans Publishers, 1990). I would like to thank Prof Dan Michman for sending me the book excerpts.

56 Ibid., 17 f.

ing and restlessness. Some children were caught in their hiding places, some came to the camp in other ways, but there was not a single child who was not injured and had not suffered some kind of trauma.⁵⁷ It was often difficult to keep the children calm. With the orphans, all born between 1936 and 1943,⁵⁸ there were Dutch Jews who had been hidden in the Netherlands but were discovered and sent to Westerbork.⁵⁹ From there they were transferred to the “exchange camp” on 13 September, where at least one of the young children was reunited with his parents.⁶⁰ Some forty-eight orphans and three accompanying women were sent to Theresienstadt by the Bergen-Belsen camp administration in mid-November 1944. All the children were ill and had to be quarantined there for the time being.⁶¹

However, many of the children living in the Star Camp also witnessed the slow deterioration and eventual death of one or both of their parents. One former inmate recalls that one day she saw two girls warming themselves over the still warm body of their mother, who had died during the night.⁶² In several cases, the Birnbaums arranged for orphaned children to be transferred from the adult prisoners’ barracks to the children’s barracks. In his notes, Joschua Birnbaum tells of an eight-year-old boy and his father who died in the camp: “[t]he poor man, who may have been a handsome figure in the past, was disfigured by oedema and swelling in his face and was thin to the bone. He couldn’t get out of bed that day until the SS man drove him out with blows from a stick. A few days later he was taken to the crematorium to be burned.” And of the boy’s mother, who was herself undernourished, he wrote: “[h]is mother was ill in the women’s barrack, and he, who had his bed in his father’s barrack, always came to help his mother. His mother didn’t last long either and died in the barracks.”⁶³ Joschua Birnbaum tried to get the boy out of the barracks, but the boy was emaciated and could barely stand on his “skinny little legs”.⁶⁴ In addition, the boy, who was in close proximity to his father’s body, could barely speak because of his weakness. Birnbaum, himself severely weakened by malnutrition, managed to carry the boy into the children’s barrack. He reported: “[w]e cautiously began to feed him some soup from the camp ration. As he wouldn’t eat anything, feeding him was a bit of an educational exercise. It was quite a while before he felt hungry and asked for food himself. [...] In the barracks he didn’t want to get out of bed for a few days, and without turning his face he looked around with his big sad eyes.”⁶⁵

Presumably, the endeavours on behalf of the children strengthened the Birnbaums on a daily basis. In his memoirs, Joschua Birnbaum writes that “[f]or the children in our care, we were prepared to fight the murderers, and thanks [sic] to our physical weakness.”⁶⁶ By early April 1945, more than fifty children were living under the Birnbaum’s care.⁶⁷

57 Memories of Liselotte Anholt-Lehrmann, *Ein Blick zurück* (German translation of the Hebrew book *BeMabat Le’achor*, published 2002 in Israel), BBMA, 5.

58 Daphne L. Meijer, “Unknown Children: The Last Train from Westerbork”, in *Children and the Holocaust*, ed. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2004), 93–100, 97.

59 Thomas Rahe, “Jüdische Waisenkinder im Konzentrationslager Bergen-Belsen”, *Dachauer Hefte* 14 (1998): 31–49.

60 Diary Zielenziger, in WL, P. III. h. No. 1118: 5.

61 Meijer, *Unknown Children*, 94.

62 Video interview with Shelley C.

63 Memories Birnbaum, 16, f. 53.

64 *Ibid.*, 25.

65 *Ibid.*, 26.

66 *Ibid.*, 24.

67 Rahe, “Jüdische Waisenkinder im Konzentrationslager Bergen-Belsen”, 44.

As part of the transport of a total of 7,000 prisoners from the “exchange camp”, the Birnbaums and their orphans were also forced to board the train. Some of them had children with them whose parents had remained seriously ill in Bergen-Belsen. The smallest boy, “Schmuel”, was only seven years old.⁶⁸

15 April 1945: The Liberation of Bergen-Belsen

Between 6 and 10 April 1945, some 6,700 surviving prisoners from the “detention camp” were deported to Theresienstadt. At the same time, many more people from evacuated concentration camps were transported to Bergen-Belsen. One of the trains reached Theresienstadt on 21 April, while the other two were liberated at Farsleben/Magdeburg on 13 April and near Tröbitz/Lower Lusatia on 25 April. The orphanage inmates from the Star Camp were also on the “lost transport” which ended up in Tröbitz in Brandenburg.⁶⁹ According to British estimates, 500 children were in the camp when it was liberated on 15 April 1945.⁷⁰ British troops found more than 10,000 unburied bodies in the main camp. Images of a liberated Bergen-Belsen went around the world and quickly became synonymous with the horrors of the Holocaust. Hadassah Rosensaft, who was transported from Auschwitz to Bergen-Belsen in November 1944, is quoted as saying after her liberation that “[f]or the majority of the liberated Jews in Bergen-Belsen, there was no ecstasy, no joy at liberation. We had lost our families, our homes. We had no place to go, no one to embrace, no one waiting for us anywhere. We had been liberated from death and the fear of death, but not from the fear of life.”⁷¹

On Liberation Day, 15 April 1945, fifteen-year-old Hetty Verolme gave a short interview to a BBC reporter. When asked about her worst experience, she described the following incident. Her father, who had been ordered to work, was wearing a scarf around his neck. Two SS men saw this and took one end of the scarf in each hand and hung him up.⁷² In simple terms, the girl described her vivid memories of her imprisonment at Bergen-Belsen. The medical staff who entered the children’s barracks experienced the following situation: “[a]t first the children were afraid of the doctors, and when they appeared they huddled in a corner and hissed like frightened kittens, but it was not long before the fear gave way to an affectionate and pitiful trust.”⁷³ Questions such as “where are my loved ones?” and “where are my friends and family members?” were of existential importance to Bergen-Belsen survivors. Search⁷⁴ was synonymous with clarification – to know about peoples’ fates, to know what happened, to gain a clear understanding or knowledge of one’s situation – which was not

68 Memories Birnbaum, 28.

69 For the memories of the Birnbaum children, see the online exhibition “Whoever Saves a Life”, <https://verloren-ertransport.de/birnbaum-children.html>.

70 *The Times*, 19 April 1945.

71 “Holocaust Survivor Hadassah Rosensaft Describes the Day She Was Liberated from a Nazi Extermination Camp”, in *In Our Own Words: Extraordinary Speeches of the American Century*, ed. Robert Torricelli, quoted in Menachem Z. Rosensaft, “The End and the Beginning”, in *Children and the Holocaust*, ed. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2004), 117–136, 119.

72 Transcript of interviews in Hetty Verolme, *Wir Kinder von Bergen-Belsen* (Gulliver Verlag, 2004), 338.

73 Dorothy Macardle, *Children of Europe. A Study of the Children of Liberated Countries; Their War-time Experiences, Their Reactions, and Their Needs* (The Beacon Press, 1951), 241.

74 “Search” in general was defined as the localisation of displaced children on a mass basis with the aim of reuniting them with family members or relatives. The “tracing” activities included both the identification of individuals for which the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration had received tracing requests, and the tracing of individuals by the so-called “Child Search and Registration Teams”.

simply related to a mere localisation.⁷⁵ Hope was closely linked to the wish to clarify if family and friends had survived or perished in the Holocaust. That deep hope mobilised an inner strength among survivors, compelling them to move throughout Europe in search of their loved ones. The reunification of Jewish children with surviving relatives was among the first of the priorities of Jewish and non-Jewish transnational operation aid organisations.⁷⁶ The testimonies of Jewish child survivors in the Belsen displaced persons camp, collected in the early post-war period, remain a moving and unique source for understanding children's experiences of the Holocaust and the rehabilitation work carried out for the youngest survivors.⁷⁷ Listening to child survivors is an essential part of understanding the youngest survivors of genocide and the horrors they were defencelessly exposed to, and in accompanying them on their journey to a new life. The children who lived and survived the horrors of Bergen-Belsen are the last living witnesses of the Holocaust. They can still tell us how the Holocaust began, on the streets, in schools, and in kindergartens. We should listen to them to learn lessons for today. The testimonies of child survivors serve as crucial historical evidence, particularly in an era in which Holocaust scholarship faces challenges such as distortion, denial, and revisionism.

75 On the issue of search, see also Tehila Darmon Malka, "I Am Filled with Hope That My Son Is Still Alive: The Search for Missing Children after the Holocaust", *Legacy* 10 (2017): 24–36; Tehila Darmon Malka, "Mi Makir, Mi Yodea? Mihippusei Kerovim Be'Eropa Le'ahar Hasho'a Ve'ad Lamador Lehivus Kerovim", *Israelis* 3 (2011): 47–69, in Hebrew.

76 Verena Buser, *Starting Anew: The Rehabilitation of Child Survivors of the Holocaust in the Early Postwar Years*, eds. Sharon Kangisser Cohen and Dalia Ofer (The International Institute for Holocaust Research/Yad Vashem, 2019).

77 Boaz Cohen, "And I Was Only A Child: Children's Testimonies, Bergen-Belsen 1945", *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History* 12, nos. 1–2 (2006), BELSEN 1945 *New Historical Perspectives*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2006.11087171>.

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Verena Buser is an Associate Researcher in the Holocaust Studies Program of the Western Galilee College, Israel, where she is responsible for the organisation of its on-line lecture series. Her areas of research include childhood during and after the Holocaust, and Zionist *Hachshara* and non-Zionist training for emigration. She has received research grants and awards from the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, the Hadassah Brandeis Institute, the Leo Baeck Institute New York, and the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure (EHRI). Together with Boaz Cohen, in 2016 and 2017 she founded *the Children after War, Holocaust and Genocide* project, www.cwg1945.org. Email: verena.buser@berlin.de

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Yaacov Falkov

Nuancing Hans J. Morgenthau

Anglo-Polish-German Relations from 1940 to 1942 as a Deviation of the Realist Theory

Abstract

Founded by Holocaust survivor Hans J. Morgenthau, the Realist school of international relations theory interprets the behaviour of European countries at the beginning of World War II as an endless tough struggle for each country's physical survival and/or dominance on the continent through a mixture of diplomatic and military means. Some historians, using the analytical categories of the Idealist school opposed to realism, speak instead of an epic clash of supranational military-economic alliances built around conflicting political philosophies. This article, based on archival documents recently discovered by the author, provides a more nuanced picture of the European geopolitical scene from 1939 to 1942. Using the dynamics within the Anglo-Polish-German geopolitical triangle as its main reference point, it shows that, in the discussed context, individual international actors, among them democratic Great Britain and the ostensibly democratic Polish government-in-exile, as well as the entire continental system of international relations, behaved both as "selfish" realists and consensus-seeking idealists, depending on certain geopolitical and military circumstances.¹

Among the German-Jewish refugees who set foot on American soil in the late 1930s was the talented young political scientist Hans Joachim Morgenthau. Like many of his generation, he became preoccupied with the dilemma of choosing between personal survival at any cost and upholding universal moral principles, such as staying close to family members and other fellow tribesmen in hard times of oppression and persecution (Hans's maternal grandmother and some other relatives perished during the Holocaust).² The solution Morgenthau found would form the basis of his magnum opus *Politics Among Nations* (1948), numerous editions of which would bring its author worldwide fame and a reputation as the founding father of the so-called Realist Theory of international relations. Real statesmen in the real world, he professed, must act not in accordance with some abstract "universal moral principles", but in such a way as to ensure the accumulation of "national power" (military, economic, etc.) sufficient for their countries' physical survival and prosperity in the generally unruly and, therefore, highly dangerous international environment.³

It was through this achievement that state actors, even those adhering to diametrically opposed hostile ideologies, were expected to reach a state of "balance of

1 This article is based on the author's research on the Anglo-Polish-German geopolitical triangle from 1939 to 1942. See Yaacov Falkov, *Between Hitler and Churchill: Two Jewish Agents and the Attempt by the British Counterintelligence Service to Prevent a Secret Agreement between the Polish Government-in-Exile and Nazi Germany* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2025).

2 M. Benjamin Mollov, "The Jewish Experience as an Influence on Hans J. Morgenthau's Realism", *Jewish Political Studies Review* 12, no. 1-2 (2000): 113-114, 116, 118-120.

3 Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 5th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 4-15.

power” that would allow them to control the elements of mutual disputes and thereby prevent outbreaks of destructive mutual hostilities or together contain mutual foes. In this context, Morgenthau’s key term was “prudence”. “There can be no political morality without prudence”, he stressed, “that is without consideration of the political consequences of seemingly moral action.”⁴ In other words, for Morgenthau, being a living leader of a living, prosperous country outweighed the imagined imperative to be a “moral” statesman and, in fact, sanctified overt or covert geopolitical arrangements between seemingly incompatible political regimes.

As the ultimate example of a “political realist” among world statesmen, Hans Morgenthau cited the behaviour of Winston Churchill. This British politician ruled his country during World War II and won thanks to a seemingly unnatural military alliance with the Soviet communists, whom he openly despised. Comparing him to Neville Chamberlain, the prime minister of the United Kingdom from 1937 to 1940, Morgenthau wrote: “Sir Winston Churchill’s motives ... were much less universal in scope and much more narrowly directed toward personal and national power, yet the foreign policies that sprang from these inferior motives were certainly superior in moral and political quality to those pursued by his predecessor.”⁵

Given this, Morgenthau’s highly positive vision of Churchill’s legacy as a statesman, the story told in this article would likely have been warmly received by the great international relations theorist. Based on the rich archival evidence uncovered by the author, this article will argue that, from 1940 to 1941, devoid of any abstract moral incentive and pursuing only Britain’s narrow strategic interests, Sir Churchill coldly betrayed and crushed his country’s closest political and military ally – the Polish government-in-exile. The Poles caught Churchill secretly proposing to his Soviet counterpart Iosif Stalin the acceptance of the earlier Soviet annexation of eastern Polish territories in exchange for an anti-German strategic alliance. When the outraged Poles tried to respond to Churchill by acting similarly towards Nazi Berlin, he sent his secret agents to physically neutralise the chief Polish negotiator with the Germans, and he then promoted a quiet coup in the Polish military.

This dramatic development and its far-reaching political and military consequences have been overlooked by the existing historiography of Anglo-Polish strategic relations during World War II. The mainstream narrative describing these relations tends to rightly highlight the Pole’s enormous military and intelligence contribution to the Allied fight against Nazi Germany, arguing that it was only at the end of the war that Poland was betrayed by the West and brought under Soviet rule. “In the end, it would not be enemies, but the friends of Poland who sealed the country’s fate”, wrote the US military historian Kenneth K. Koskodan. He added: “Poland was offered up as a sacrifice by the Allied powers, particularly by a sick American president and a British Prime Minister, each presenting their own war-weary nations and neither willing to stand up to the menacing Soviet empire emerging from the rubble of war-torn Europe.”⁶ Only a few historians have come to the correct conclusion that, for Washington and London, the Poles were “yesterday’s men” already in the fall of 1941.⁷ But even they lost sight of the fact that, from 1940 to 1942, the British and

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Halik Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed: Poland and the Poles in the Second World War* (London: The Penguin Press, 2013), 434–579; Kenneth K. Koskodan, *No Greater Ally: The Untold Story of Poland’s Forces in World War II* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2009), 10.

7 See, for example, Evan McGilvray, *Anders’ Army: General Wladyslaw Anders and the Polish Second Corps 1941–46* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books, 2018), 54–55.

Poles, pursuing *de facto* contradictory strategic goals, silently but actively struggled with each other through means of covert diplomacy and espionage. And the former, being much stronger in every possible sense, forcibly subjugated the latter to their will.

The following text will fill the said historiographical gap. Its findings will be compared to the claims made about the early years of the World War II by Morgenthau's followers and their rivals, inspired by the so-called liberalist camp in the theory of international relations. The latter believe in the maintainability of international stability through supranational institutions/regimes and the economic interdependence of states.⁸ The conclusion will be made that, during the historical period under scrutiny, the entire European system of international relations, as well as its individual members, regardless of their political orientation, exhibited a "quantum" character, behaving at once in realistic and idealistic manners.

In the "Geopolitical Jungle" of the "Not Yet a Real War"

In the fall of 1939, following the partition of Poland by Nazi Germany and the communist Soviet Union, and the Anglo-French declaration of war on the Third Reich,⁹ most European leaders still believed that – to quote Italian dictator Benito Mussolini – neither side involved in the ongoing conflict wanted a new, terrible, and protracted "real war". High hopes prevailed that such a war could have been avoided.¹⁰

The way to fulfil these hopes was active diplomatic manoeuvres. And indeed, in the discussed period, everyone in Europe had been talking to everyone else to improve their own diplomatic and military standing, and this trend became even stronger after the chain of stunning Wehrmacht victories in the spring and summer of 1940. "What we see in Europe today is a jungle": this is how Ivan Maisky, then Soviet ambassador to London, described the frantic diplomacy sweeping the continent. His chief, Andrey Vyshinsky, stated that "international relations are fluid, and may develop".¹¹

Against this backdrop, through open and secret channels, the Germans offered Great Britain, a cessation of hostilities in exchange for London's acceptance of the Nazi "new order" on the continent. The Nazi Führer expressed his readiness to "preserve something of Poland".¹² The envisioned "Polish remnant state" (*polnische Reststaat*), deprived of military forces and an independent foreign policy, could still retain the right to manage its own internal affairs.¹³ This idea was warmly supported by Italian, Spanish, Finnish, and other European conservative and totalitarian regimes.

8 Michael Doyle and Stefano Recchia, "Liberalism in International Relations", in *International Encyclopedia of Political Science*, eds. Bertrand Badie, Dirk-Berg Schlosser, and Leonardo Morlino (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011), 1434–1439.

9 Kochanski, *The Eagle*, 72–75.

10 Robert R. Miller, "The Welles Mission to Rome: February–March 1940. FDR's Diplomatic Initiative to Mussolini", paper presented at the New York Military Affairs Symposium, NYMAS-CUNY, New York City, 27 May 2008, accessed 26 July 2024, <http://bobrowen.com/nymas/Robert%20Miller%20-%20Sumner%20Welles.html>.

11 Gabriel Gorodetsky, *Bein ashlaya le-tarmit. Stalin ve-mivtsa Barbarossa* (Tel Aviv: Maarachot, 1999), 47–49, 113–114.

12 Protocol of Hitler's conversation with the Swedish mediator Birger Dahlerus, 26 September 1939, in *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918–1945* (Series D, 1937–1945), vol. 8, eds. James S. Beddie et al. (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1954), 140–145.

13 Piotr Zychowicz, *Opcja niemiecka. Czyli jak antykomuniści próbowali porozumieć się z III Rzeszą* (Poznań: Rebis, 2014), 29–30.

Before September 1939, they cooperated with the ideologically close Polish Sanation (*Sanacja*) government and later insisted on maintaining diplomatic ties with the Polish government-in-exile.¹⁴ Yet, Berlin's approaches fell on London's deaf ears. British intelligence considered them merely a Nazi tactic to buy enough time to plan and carry out more acts of war.¹⁵

The frustrated Germans promised "to carry on the fight to final victory"¹⁶ and that "there will never again be a Polish state!";¹⁷ their occupying authorities in the central part of Poland that became the General Government (*Generalgouvernement*) carried out mass atrocities against the local population. However, Berlin kept trying to implement the idea of restoring a "Polish remnant state" that would be willing to cooperate with the Third Reich against the Soviets. When a series of attempts by various senior Nazi officials to reach such an agreement with prominent Polish political figures who remained in their occupied homeland failed,¹⁸ Berlin began reaching out to Polish diplomats representing their government-in-exile in various European capitals. One of them, Jerzy Giedroyc, who served in Bucharest, admitted in his memoirs to having such contact, during which the restoration of Polish sovereignty was discussed in exchange for an alliance in the face of the Russian threat.¹⁹

Strategic Partnership with Limited Liability

Meanwhile, in June 1940, following the defeat of France, the Polish government-in-exile under the leadership of General Władysław Sikorski accepted Churchill's invitation to continue its activities on British soil. The British prime minister, determined to protect the kingdom and its empire at all costs, needed Sikorski's military force, numbering tens of thousands of war-hardened soldiers, on the shores of the English Channel, as well as in the Middle East. Besides, it was for the defence of Poland that Great Britain declared war on Germany back in September 1939. Therefore, having Sikorski and his men in London as official allies strengthened Churchill's political position against the still strong appeasement forces in the country.²⁰

Initially, the Anglo-Polish relationship developed positively. Both sides expressed their shared commitment to fight shoulder to shoulder against the Nazi "new order" in Europe and for the restoration of Poland's independence. Polish volunteers in the Royal Air Forces proved themselves to be excellent fighters, contributing to the defence of Britain from Nazi air attacks and suffering terrible losses, disproportionately higher than those of their hosts.²¹

14 Memorandum signed by von Weizsäcker, State Secretary at the German Foreign Office, 23 September 1939, in Beddie et al., eds., *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918–1945*, 125–126; Michał Sokolnicki, *Dziennik Ankerski 1939–1943* (London: Gryf, 1965), 151.

15 William Stevenson, *A Man Called Intrepid: The Secret War 1939–1945* (London: Sphere Books, 1976), 102–103; Weekly Political Intelligence Summary No. 2, Foreign Office, Political Intelligence Department, 10 October 1939, The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), RG-59.006.M-FO371/24054, Scan 00041.

16 Circular from the German Foreign Office, signed by Foreign Minister Ribbentrop, 18 November 1939, in Beddie et al., eds., *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918–1945*, 424–425.

17 Headquarters of the High Command of the Polish Armed Forces in Exile, 5th Dept., quoted from: "Warschauer Zeitung for the period August 4–16, 1940", 16 August 1940, USHMM, RG-59.047, KOL-25-10-A_264.

18 For examples, see Kochanski, *The Eagle*, 97; Zychowicz, *Opcja*, 31–32.

19 Jerzy Giedroyc, *Autobiografia na cztery ręce* (Paris: Towarzystwo Opieki nad Archiwum Instytutu Literackiego w Paryżu, 2006), 91.

20 Kochanski, *The Eagle*, 217–236; Koskodan, *No Greater*, 79–176.

21 Lipsky, an untitled memorandum without an exact date, December 1940–January 1941, Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum (PISM), A.XII.1/66a, 49–50; Anthony Eden to Sikorski, 15 August 1942, PISM, A.XII.1/52B, 17. See also: Roman Tusiewicz, *Historia Polski od A do Z* (Pniewy: Kram, 2005), 379–380.

However, this apparent idyll did not last long. Soon, astounded Polish leaders in exile learned through various diplomatic and intelligence channels that their British colleague and patron was making diplomatic efforts to win over the hated communist Soviet Union as an ally against the Third Reich. Equally shocking was the discovery that the British maintained simultaneous secret contacts with the German anti-Nazi opposition and even with senior officials in Berlin. Polish military intelligence informed its consumers that there were strong Nazi sympathies among some British aristocrats, including Churchill's second cousin, Charles Stewart Henry Vane-Tempest-Stewart, the Seventh Marquess of Londonderry.²²

For their part, the British voiced extreme displeasure at the Poles' reluctance to unequivocally and openly side with London in its conflict with fascist Italy. Rome refrained from declaring war on the Polish government-in-exile, and both sides maintained diplomatic ties even after the fall of France, when Mussolini officially joined Hitler in his war against Britain.²³ In early 1941, the British national security agency MI5 issued a warning about "anti-British propaganda" that representatives of the Polish government-in-exile were distributing to Polish soldiers in the Middle East, urging them to refuse to fight against the Italians.²⁴

"To Come to Terms with the Emergent Reality"

Against the backdrop of the deteriorating Anglo-Polish strategic relationship, voices appeared among the Polish diaspora in the West advocating reconciliation with Hitler's regime. In the second half of 1940, many prominent Poles in their occupied homeland and abroad already knew that Berlin was offering a geopolitical arrangement that would allow the restoration of Polish autonomy over part of the prewar Polish territory. Some seemed to embrace the idea of a new government under the Nazis modelled on Vichy France, believing it would spare them and/or their families from the ever-intensifying Nazi terror in the Generalgouvernement. In December, the British MI5 noted with concern that the press secretary of the Polish embassy in Bucharest – a government official – had expressed the opinion that creating a provisional government in the German-occupied Polish territories was the order of the day.²⁵

In the fall of 1940, when Anglo-Soviet contacts finally became apparent, and the personal Churchill-Sikorski relationship deteriorated into the exchange of openly critical messages, a top official of the Polish government-in-exile – the minister of the interior and Sikorski's right-hand man, Stanisław Kot – initiated a series of contacts with the Germans aimed at clarifying Berlin's true intentions. The chosen location for these rendezvous was Istanbul, the Turkish metropolis on the Bosphorus. Since Kot himself could not leave the British capital without attracting the MI5's attention and therefore raising unwanted questions, he instead sent to Turkey his personal emissary, a Polish citizen of Jewish origin named Samson Mikiciński. Using

22 Raczyński, the Polish Ambassador to London, an untitled report, 8 July 1940, USHMM, RG-59.036, A-12-1-8_0137-9; Raczyński, an untitled report, 19 July 1940, USHMM, RG-59.036, A-12-1-8_0143-4; 2nd Department of the Polish General Staff, "An informational and counterintelligence report for the first half of 1941. The attitude of British society to the Polish question", 13 June 1941, PISM, A.XII.1/38, 7–8.

23 Magdalena Hulas, "Wrogowie naszych sojuszników. Kwestia (nie)istnienia stanu wojny między Polską a Włochami. 1940", *Białostockie Teki Historyczne* 15 (2017): 205–228, <https://doi.org/10.15290/bth.2017.15.10>.

24 Undated draft of a memorandum by Special Operations Executive (SOE), titled "Note on the Kot organisation in the Middle East", The National Archives (TNA), HS 4/213.

25 Undated and untitled report by agent A/H.2, late December 1940, *ibid.*

his official status as personal secretary of the Chilean chargé d'affaires in Ankara and a Chilean diplomatic passport, Mikiciński, a forty-five-year-old well-established businessman, had long been shuttling between the Sikorski government and the Polish underground in the occupied homeland. He rescued and brought to the West close relatives of the Polish émigré leaders, and he delivered correspondence and money necessary for the development of the anti-Nazi struggle.²⁶

Having landed in Istanbul, Mikiciński approached Franz von Papen. This former German chancellor, who had helped bring Hitler to power in 1933, now developed a vibrant diplomatic career as Nazi ambassador to Turkey, contacting American and other Western diplomats. It was through him that, in 1939 and 1940, some of Berlin's peace offers reached the British and Poles. Thus, choosing von Papen as a contact person was a logical decision on Kot's part. Meeting privately in the city on the Bosphorus, the two negotiators – a German aristocrat and a high-ranking Nazi official, and a Jewish businessman from defeated Poland – discussed a possible arrangement between their leaders that could change the course of the war. "Recently, Mikiciński has been holding negotiations here with von Papen", the astonished head of the Ankara station of Polish military intelligence, who had not been warned about the contacts and discovered them only occasionally, updated his superiors in London. He added: "[t]he British are planning to do something about it, fearing that Poland is aiming to negotiate with the Germans."²⁷

A Very British Murder and Its Far-Reaching Consequences

Indeed, the Middle Eastern branches of British intelligence became aware of Mikiciński's delicate mission in Istanbul around November 1940. In their internal secret correspondence, they reacted extremely negatively, accusing Kot and his closest aides in the Middle East of not informing London about "very dangerous" contacts with the enemy. British intelligence analysts doubted who might have given the order and even guessed that Sikorski himself might have been involved.²⁸

Whatever the truth, the discovery of the nature of Mikiciński's activities on Turkish soil immediately prompted planning to neutralise him. This months-long undertaking, surrounded by a veil of strictest secrecy, involved several British special services and, more importantly, was highly sensitive from a (geo)political perspective. After all, this was the official representative of one of the top Polish political figures, at the time London's closest ally, who was now in British crosshairs. It is therefore very likely that Churchill himself supervised the operation. It culminated in mid-January 1941, when its target, a Polish-Jewish businessman negotiating with the Nazi ambassador, was kidnaped in the centre of Istanbul and secretly flown to Mandatory Palestine. "The Turks have given an outstanding performance!", a Cairo-based kidnapping supervisor updated London, signalling Ankara's silent but decisive contribution to the plot.²⁹ And, just a month later, the young British pilot who performed this highly sensitive flight was awarded the highest order given to

26 Top secret report titled "The Paluchowicz Case", copy # 1, 18 July 1941, *ibid.*; undated report titled "Mikiciński Samson", Józef Pilsudski Institute of America (JPIA), Archiwum Osobowe, NZ 154, Sygn. 658.

27 "Mikiciński – information", radio report by the chief of the Turkey station of the 2nd Department of the Polish General Staff to his superiors in London, 25 January 1941, The Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University, USA (HIA), 800/41/0/-/141 Folder 7, Scan 001018.

28 Undated draft of a memorandum by SOE.

29 MX in a letter to M, Cairo, 1 June 1941, TNA, HS 4/213.

RAF personnel for the outstanding performance of non-military tasks in war-time.³⁰

As for Mikiciński, after being brought to Palestine, he was imprisoned in the famous fortress of Acre that had been turned by the British into a huge prison. Around June and July 1941, following several interrogations aimed at extracting information about his contacts with von Papen, he simply disappeared without a trace. Various post-war Polish accounts suggest that he was simply murdered by one of his interrogators and buried in the sands near the fortress.³¹

Amazingly, London decided not to confront Sikorski's government on this issue, neither publicly nor privately, considering the Mikiciński-von Papen connection an "internal Polish affair". When the immediate threat of a Polish-German conspiracy had already been successfully neutralised, Churchill probably chose, for reasons of domestic and international prestige, not to publish the fact of an attempt by Britain's closest ally to cross the line to the German side. Instead, from the fall of 1941, British authorities, including MI5, promoted a multi-stage plan aimed at marginalising General Sikorski as the Polish political and military leader in exile. This goal was achieved in 1942, first by limiting Sikorski's freedom of movement outside the British Isles and putting Polish military counterintelligence under informal MI5 control, and, later, by making another Polish exiled general and Sikorski's harshest critic, Władysław Anders, the most powerful and popular military leader of the Polish diaspora.³²

Conclusion: Discovering the "Quantum" Nature of International Relations in the Early Years of World War II (and Beyond)

The eight decades that have passed since the end of World War II have witnessed an intense intellectual contest between the adherents of Morgenthau's Realist Theory and its various later versions, on the one hand, and their multiple opponents, on the other. Concerning the European and global situation from 1939 to 1941, prominent realists – Henry Kissinger, Morgenthau's academic colleague and close friend, among them – argued that by that time European countries had not yet accepted America's legacy of collective security and international arbitration, sticking instead to the old habit of securing the balance of power through diplomatic manoeuvres; that even as Britain became more receptive to the US idealistic agenda, it lacked experience in pursuing policies on that basis;³³ and that in any case, after the fall of France in June 1940, American idealism gradually gave way to a more realistic stance, according to which "Hitler had gone so far beyond any acceptable norm of morality that the battle against him assimilated the triumph of good over evil into the struggle for naked survival".³⁴

The opponents of this interpretation of the events of 1939 to 1941, inspired by the so-called liberalist school in the theory of international relations and its offshoots, insisted that the entire World War II, including its initial period, must be interpreted

30 "Air Ministry, 21st February 1941," *London Gazette*, 21 February 1941, 1077, <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/35083/supplement/1077/data.pdf>.

31 Roman Buczek, *Człowiek do złotych interesów* (Warsaw: Rój, 1991), 170–171; Ladislas Michniewicz, *Opération Haïfa. Les espions ne se pardonnent pas* (Tournai: Casterman, 1969), 203–206.

32 McGilvray, *Anders' Army*, 41–88.

33 Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (London: Touchstone Books, 1995), 376.

34 *Ibid.*, 389.

as an epic clash of conflicting political and social ideas and values physically carried out by two hostile “concerts” of major powers, mammoth supranational military-economic structures joined by “junior” state partners. The alleged ultimate goal of this clash was not a “selfish” rebalancing of political and military power on continental and global scales, but rather a far-reaching restructuring and reorienting of the entire international system.³⁵

Regarding the anti-Nazi alliance (the so-called “Big Three” allies) it was stressed that, steadily developing since early 1941, it rested upon Anglo-American collaboration in the geopolitical, diplomatic, military, intelligence, economic, and technological fields. This collaboration was so close that the “arch-realist” Churchill surrendered to Roosevelt’s more idealistic vision of future healthy European and global spaces in which new moral, political, and economic factors might come into play.³⁶ Accordingly, a chance was given to the unprecedented relationship between the alliance’s seemingly incompatible Anglo-American and Soviet parts. These were glued together not only by a shared strong desire to see the destruction of Nazi Germany as an “ultimate enemy”, but also by the hope in Washington and London that economy would beat ideology, and Moscow’s desperate need to rebuild the shattered western part of the Soviet Union would convince the Soviets to cooperate with their potential Western donors, discarding any thoughts of confrontation.³⁷

Likewise, the Tripartite Pact between Germany, Japan, and Italy – also known as the Axis Powers – has been portrayed by the liberalism-influenced historiography of World War II as a phenomenon far beyond the rigid theoretical mainframe of balance of power. Although classical liberals attribute the ability to establish peaceful unions solely to liberal republics, the pact too was said to be a peaceful union based on ideas: similar political philosophies; a common strong, highly emotional rejection of world communism, Stalin’s Soviet Union, the British empire and Roosevelt’s United States of America; as well as a shared belief (at least at the leadership’s level) in the importance of mutual cultural and economic ties (including the exchange of vital raw materials and cutting-edge war technologies).³⁸

The research on which this article is based provides us with a picture of the international relations in the World War II early years that is more nuanced than those presented by the described approaches. First, it shows that, between the collapse of Poland in 1939 and the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, all the European state actors, major and small alike, behaved in a typical “Morgenthauian” manner. The improvement of their national power, and thereby physical survivability, was expected to be achieved through militarisation and/or creating or joining international alliances, notwithstanding the potential allies’ political orientation. Major powers

35 For example, see Stephen J. Lee, *The European Dictatorships, 1918–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 196.

36 For examples, see David French, “British Military Strategy,” in *The Cambridge History of the Second World War*, vol. 1, eds. John Ferris and Ewan Mawdsley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 38–43; Thomas Mahnken, “US Grand Strategy, 1939–1945,” *ibid.*, 189, 197–199, 203.

37 Martin H. Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall, and the Soviet Union, 1941–1945* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 168.

38 For examples, see Jason Dawsey, “A Shared Enmity: Germany, Japan, and the Creation of the Tripartite Pact”, The National WWII Museum, New Orleans, 10 December 2021, accessed 21 July 2024, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/germany-japan-tripartite-pact>; Jost Dülffer, “German Strategy in the Tripartite Pact during the Second World War”, The National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS), Japan, 29 September 2010, accessed 21 July 2024, <https://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/event/forum/pdf/2010/06.pdf>; Ken Ishida, *Japan, Italy and the Road to the Tripartite Alliance* (Nottingham: Nottingham University Press, 2019), 192–195; Rotem Kowner, “When Economics, Strategy, and Racial Ideology Meet: Inter-Axis Connections in the Wartime Indian Ocean”, *Journal of Global History* 12, no. 2 (2017): 228–250, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740022817000067>.

could choose to exclude some similar state actors from their geopolitical manoeuvres (see Britain's fundamental refusal to accept German peace offers), while this was impossible for smaller states. The latter openly or secretly contacted anyone they considered relevant to ensure their safety although, after the collapse of France in June 1940, most of these actors showed their preference for Berlin rather than London. That said, in the period under scrutiny, the European geopolitical scene did not fall into chaos, as the famous neo-realists, such as Kenneth Waltz, might have expected.³⁹ On the contrary, the continent's conservative and totalitarian regimes, including in the newborn Vichy France, began consolidating and advocating the creation of a formal pan-European anti-communist bloc. With this ideal in mind, the Italians even declared their readiness to host an international "peace conference". These two clear geopolitical trends of the discussed period – the ideological "flexibility" of all European states and their readiness to make broad alliances even at the cost of limiting their own ambitions – can teach us that there are historical and geopolitical situations in which state actors, liberal and conservative alike, would exhibit both realist and idealist behavioural patterns, with no apparent contradiction between them.

Second, the position of the Poles in the described realistic-idealistic context also turns out to have a dual nature. An integral element of the European conservative-totalitarian non-communist milieu, they found themselves in a state of long-term fierce military conflict with this milieu's leading actor, Nazi Germany, although without being ostracised by their other ideological comrades. This peculiar historical precedent may testify that sometimes, amidst an idealist process of arranging geopolitical spaces through peaceful means of international rules, agreements, and mechanisms, states are being compelled to use purely realistic tools against some of this process' participants.

Another important takeaway from the discussed Polish case is that the motives of a small state actor to enter into a strategic alliance with a bigger and stronger one (here Britain) may be of a mixed nature – both realistic (the desire for strong political and military patronage, described by Morgenthau and his followers) and idealistic (the ambition to join a post-war world-changing international coalition). Eventually, though, they can yield a disappointment and trigger a purely realistic revenge, such as the decision of a senior figure in the Polish government-in-exile to launch secret talks with the Germans.

Third, the behaviour of the British towards the Poles, Americans, and Soviets from 1940 to 1942 shows that, despite being a democratic Western country supposedly defending universal Western values, as well as despite the presumed growing influence of American idealism on its foreign policy, in the discussed period Great Britain perfectly embodied the "Morgenthauian" model. To outwit Germany in the European geopolitical arena, it turned not only to friendly capitalist Washington but also to ideologically alien communist Moscow, to which it promised, as a reward for possible cooperativeness, official recognition of the Soviet annexation of eastern Polish territories that had occurred in September 1939. Not a single Polish official was informed of this "generous offer" or asked for their opinion on the matter. Moreover, when the Poles finally discovered such a treacherous move by their supposedly closest ally and tried to behave in the same way, Churchill's secret services acted swiftly to limit the freedom of Polish diplomatic and military actions and did not hesitate to

³⁹ For Waltz's idea of a chaotic international environment determining the behaviour of its individual members, see Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2010).

even physically eliminate the official envoy sent by the Polish government-in-exile to meet the Germans. An important deduction from this pivotal historical event is that there are contexts in which even a well-established democracy could add to its usual idealistic *modus operandi* on the international stage some extremely realistic tools to be applied to both geopolitical rivals and partners (especially “junior” ones).

Finally, about the role of the Germans in the discussed historical drama, the fact should be stressed that, from 1939 to 1941, amidst the fiercest battles on the Western Front and even at a time of their obvious strategic advantage, they kept trying to come to terms with the British, whom Hitler and his close entourage openly admired as a “brotherly Aryan people”. The dowry promised to London for its compliance was at least a partial restoration of the Polish state, the destruction of which the Nazis considered one of their greatest achievements. What is more, during the short periods of preparations for the offensives in France and the Soviet Union, when the Poles suddenly became a potentially useful ally against the Soviets, the Germans did not hesitate to approach them directly with clear proposals for reconciliation and further strategic cooperation with the Reich and its partners in building a “new socialist Europe”. This may indicate the ability of Nazi Germany in particular, and other such strongly realist states in general, to become “situational idealists” from time to time.

To sum up, overall Morgenthau’s Realist Theory seems applicable to the description of both the dynamics of the European geopolitical scene from 1939 to 1941 and the specific relations within the Anglo-Polish-German geopolitical triangle. However, upon closer examination it turns out that we are dealing with a more nuanced phenomenon. The historical evidence at our disposal leaves no doubt that the entire continental system of international relations, as well as its individual members, regardless of their political orientation, exhibited at once realistic and idealistic behavioural patterns, depending on certain geopolitical and military circumstances. Future academic study will have to examine whether such a “quantum” nature was also characteristic of international relations in other periods of human history.

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Yaacov Falkov is an Israeli-Latvian historian. He received his PhD in military and intelligence history from Tel-Aviv University. While researching the intelligence activities of Soviet partisans and their reporting on the Holocaust, he was a Visiting Scholar at Oxford University, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and the World Holocaust Remembrance Center and Archive Yad Vashem. Falkov is the author and co-author of three books and numerous other publications on the Holocaust and the anti-Nazi resistance in Eastern Europe, as well as on the history and theory of Soviet and Eastern European partisans, diplomats, and spies. Falkov teaches at Tel Aviv University and Reichman University in Israel, and he advises two Holocaust museums in Israel and Latvia.

Email: yaacov.falkov@gmail.com

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Daniela Ozacky Stern

From Victims to Fighters

Jews in the Belarusian Partisan Forests

Abstract

This article examines the transformation of Jewish victims into active fighters during the Holocaust, focusing on those who escaped from ghettos to join partisan units in the forests of Belarus. The study highlights the psychological shift from helplessness to empowerment experienced by these individuals, exploring their motivations, challenges, and strategies for survival and resistance. Using the Jewish partisans of the Narocz forest as a central case study, the research draws on survivors' testimonies to provide insights into the complex dynamics of this transition.

The chapter investigates the decision-making process behind escaping to the forests, the dangers involved, and the moral dilemmas faced by those leaving family members behind. It examines the acquisition of military skills, adaptation to harsh living conditions, and the formation of new communities within partisan units. Additionally, the study explores the role of revenge as a motivating factor and the impact of these experiences on post-war Jewish identity and collective memory.

Analysing these narratives contributes to a more nuanced understanding of Jewish agency and resistance during the Holocaust, challenging simplistic portrayals and highlighting the multifaceted nature of survival in extreme circumstances.

Jewish fighters played a significant role in the Belarusian partisan movement during World War II, demonstrating exceptional bravery, determination, and tactical prowess. They carried out effective sabotage operations, derailing German trains, sabotaging bridges to hinder enemy movements, conducting lengthy ambushes, and even executing acts of vengeance against Nazi collaborators. This article examines the transformation of Jews from victims to fighters, focusing on their experiences in the partisan movement in Belarus during the Nazi occupation. In the relentless struggle against the oppressors, against the prevailing injustice and humiliation, the Jews developed their defensive power. In addition to the common task of fighting the Nazis, the Jewish partisans bore two additional functions: revenge and rescue.¹ This unique position of Jewish partisans sets them apart in the broader context of resistance and partisan movements during the war.

The Nazi extermination policy in Belarus was implemented rapidly, demonstrating a brutal example of German cruelty. The Holocaust in Belarus unfolded in two primary phases: an initial wave of killings from June to December 1941, followed by a second phase from spring 1942 to late 1943. The first phase of the mass extermination was primarily executed by Einsatzgruppe B, a mobile death squad under the Army Group Centre's supervision. Other participants included police battalions and the Wehrmacht. Men were often targeted first, weakening the remaining population's ability to resist later actions. Most Jews in Belarus lived in small communities, and the Nazis employed the "Holocaust by bullets" method – mass executions

1 Shalom Cholawsky, "Jewish Fighting in Ghettos and as Partisans", *Moreshet Journal* 49 (1990): 29.

near victims' homes. Local police and German gendarmes would gather Jews, transport them to nearby locations, and execute them, aiming to create "Jew-free" areas. Initially, the Nazis attempted to keep these mass killings confidential. They deceived victims until the last moment, claiming they were being sent to work. Executions typically occurred on the town outskirts, with victims shot into large pits and buried. In some instances, Jews were forced to dig their own graves before being killed.²

1942 was a pivotal year for Belarusian Jews, with most ghettos in West Belarus destroyed. By the year's end, only about 30,000 Jews survived out of a prewar population of 375,000. Jews everywhere faced movement restrictions, forced labour, constant degradation, and uncertainty. Stripped of rights, they endured daily losses. Various forms of resistance emerged, both passive and active. Some escapees joined partisan groups, continuing the fight from the forests.³

Jews who reached the forests and sought to join the partisans faced numerous difficulties and challenges. A shortage of weapons forced them to struggle for acceptance into fighting units without weapons or with minimal armament. They wandered from unit to unit, facing dangers in the forest from non-Jewish partisans and local populations, who viewed Jews as objects of triple hatred: as Jews, as communists, and as "robbers". Jews arrived at the forests alone, in small groups, or as organised groups, mainly members of underground movements active in the ghettos. They split into combat units and family camps. This division was primarily based on whether a Jew arrived in the forest with or without a weapon.

The Book of the Jewish Partisans states that a Jew's arrival in the forest did not automatically grant them partisan status. Only when they received a weapon did they undergo a profound change, both physically and mentally. They began to see themselves as self-reliant and in control again. A Jewish fighter had to prove himself in battle, be constantly ready, and establish trustworthy and respectful relationships with their fellow fighters. If a Jewish partisan failed, they bore collective responsibility in the eyes of their non-Jewish comrades. Their failure was considered to be a "Jewish" fault.⁴ This added pressure highlights the complex interplay of individual and collective identity of the Jewish partisan experience.

The following pages contribute to the broader field of Holocaust studies by highlighting the agency and resilience of Jewish victims who transformed into active resisters. This article explores the physical and psychological challenges they faced, their motivations, and the strategies they employed to survive and fight back. By examining partisans' experiences, we gain a more nuanced understanding of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust and the multifaceted dynamics of survival in extreme circumstances.

Becoming Partisans

The partisan movement in Belarus was significant, and the topographical conditions helped partisan activity to grow and develop. Jewish participation in the resistance was notable despite many challenges. There is no exact count of how many

2 Waitman Wade Beorn, *Marching into Darkness: The Wehrmacht and the Holocaust in Belarus* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2014), 92–118.

3 Yitzchak Arad, *History of the Holocaust: The Soviet Union* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2004), vol. 1, 60; Shalom Cholawsky, *Resistance and Partisan Struggle* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem and Moreshet, 2001), chap. 1.

4 M. Gefen, C. Grossman, Y. Segal, A. Kovner, and R. Korczak, eds., *The Book of the Jewish Partisans* (Merchavia: Sifriat Poalim, 1958), 20–22.

Jews were able to escape the ghettos, but it is estimated that about 25,000 Jews managed to flee the various ghettos in western Belarus. Each of these escapees had the potential, as part of their personal survival strategy, to join existing partisan groups.⁵ It is hard to determine the number of Jews among the partisans who operated in Belarus. Who is included in being classified as a partisan? Are the Jews who stayed in family camps included? Also, the Soviet policy of suppressing knowledge of one's Jewish origin makes it difficult to determine the correct number.⁶

The insurgent nature of Jews who fled the ghettos to the forests in western Belarus was shaped mainly by their life experiences in imprisonment. The daily life inside the ghetto had a profound impact on its inhabitants, exacting a tremendous toll on their physical and mental well-being. It was characterised by constant excruciating threats to one's life and the lives of one's loved ones, continuous pain and mourning of loss, unrelenting pressure designed to instil despair and weaken any form of resistance, and the nasty psychological tactics employed by the Germans to maintain a facade of hope through deception, falsehoods, and the cultivation of an atmosphere of uncertainty.

Jews fled ghettos in the western parts of Belarus, and most of them were young men and women with the best ability to survive in the swamps and forests. They knew they needed to be physically fit to be accepted into various partisan groups. Some escapees tried to join forces and create Jewish fighting units, but most attempted to contact and join Soviet groups that already existed and were much better equipped and armed. Those who were accepted often suffered from varying levels of antisemitism and often tried to hide their Jewish identity as much as possible. Jews who spoke fluent Russian or Ukrainian, or those able to conceal their Jewish identity altogether, changed their names to non-Jewish ones to conform with the group.⁷

Reuven Leonid escaped to the Kolodino forests in April 1942 and joined the partisan unit of Ivan Ivanovich. Ivanovich gave him a rusty gun and asked if he knew how to use it. Leonid said yes, although it was the first time he had held a gun in his life. Ivanovich continued, "you are not allowed to part from this gun unless you die, and now go and clean it." Leonid thanked him and described this moment as the happiest he had experienced since escaping his town, Olshany: "finally, I felt myself as a fighter", he recalled.⁸

Yisrael Barstitzki, who joined the Kirov detachment near the town of Liskovo in Belarus, recalls that he was thrilled to become a partisan: "for the first time in my life, I received a gun with 16 bullets, even though it was rusty. They told me: 'This is your wife; you must sleep with her and never be apart from her during the day ...' I kissed the gun and thanked the commander who gave it to me."⁹ He continues to describe the first days in the partisan unit: "it's hard to say that we Jews were received with open arms and warm welcomes." There were snickers and antisemitic remarks directed at the new Jewish partisans. They were accused of arriving without weapons, of handing over money, gold, and diamonds to the Germans, and of being a superfluous element in the forest rather than fighters. Indeed, Jews in the partisan units were forced to prove themselves in battle.¹⁰

5 Cholawsky, "Jewish Fighting in Ghettos and as Partisans", 23.

6 For a discussion on the number of Jewish partisans, also see Yitzchak Arad, *Under the Red Banner: USSR Jews Fighting Against Nazi Germany* (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, 2008), 390–392.

7 Leonid Smilovitsky, "Jews and Poles in the Belorussian Partisan Movement, 1941–1944", *Moresheet Journal* 63 (1997): 88.

8 His testimony in Alexander Bogen, Abraham Biber, and Kopel Kolpanitzky, eds., *Memories of Partisans: Anthology* (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, 2006), 190.

9 His testimony in *ibid.*, 87–88.

10 *Ibid.*

Personal accounts provide vivid insights into the transformative moment when Jews effectively changed from victims to fighters. Yaakov Greenstein, who survived the killings in the Minsk ghetto and escaped to the forests of Stare Siolo, recounts that when they reached the forest “we were beside ourselves with joy. We didn’t feel any fatigue.” They gazed in amazement at the forest after not having seen or touched vegetation for two years in the ghetto, and they felt free. “I never knew the forest could be so beautiful ... We sprawled on the ground and rolled in the moss.” He recalled that they felt as if they had been reborn and had arrived in a new world.¹¹ Such testimonies demonstrate the psychological impact of joining the partisan movement and the sense of empowerment it provided.

This transition was fraught with challenges, including a lack of weapons, hostility from non-Jewish partisans and local populations, and the burden of their recent traumatic experiences, plus the constant worry about their families who were left behind – old parents, siblings, and sometimes even children. The moment of arrival in the forest often marked a profound transformation in the Jews’ self-perception, as recounted in survivor testimonies like that of Yaakov Greenstein.

Jewish partisans, both men and women, played crucial roles in the resistance movement against the Nazis. They conducted sabotage operations, derailed German trains, ambushed enemy forces, and even carried out acts of vengeance against Nazi collaborators. Jewish women also emerged as courageous and dedicated fighters, taking an active role in partisan operations. They served as scouts, participated in ambushes, conducted diversionary tactics, sabotaged enemy vehicles, and planted mines on railways, disrupting the transporting of supplies and troops. Their contributions were invaluable, and many of these remarkable women were awarded medals of honour for their bravery and sacrifice. Zhenya Eikhbaum stands out as an exemplary figure among these Jewish women partisans in Belarus. She fearlessly engaged in combat against German garrisons and sabotage missions, planting explosives and disrupting enemy operations. Her exceptional valour was recognised with the rare honour of being granted an automatic weapon, typically reserved for male partisans. Tragically, she fell in battle just one day before the liberation of the area, on 23 March 1944.¹² Sarah Rubinovich-Shiff is another example of a Jewish female partisan who, among many combat operations she undertook in the Belarussian forests, also executed a collaborator with the Germans as she received orders to do so from her partisan commanders.¹³

In late 1941, the Bielski brothers and their relatives moved between villages and towns, finding refuge with the aid of friendly farmers. Their parents had fallen victim to a tragic *Aktion*¹⁴ in the Nowogródek ghetto in December 1941. By May 1942, the surviving family members congregated in a nearby forest and resolved to form a partisan camp. Tuvia, the eldest sibling and a natural leader, was appointed commander. His main objective was to expand the camp’s population, believing that safeguarding the lives of the remaining Jews was crucial despite the difficulties in obtaining adequate food for many people. As more Jews who had escaped from ghettos joined, the partisan “family camp” grew, expanding the community under Tuvia’s guidance.¹⁵

11 Ibid., 157–159.

12 *Partisans of Belarus* (s.l.: The Partisans’ Organization Publishing House, 2012), 200–201.

13 Sarah Rubinovich-Shiff, testimony, 1964, Yad Vashem Archive, 03-2997.

14 An *Aktion* was a Nazi operation to round up Jews from ghettos either for immediate murder at killing sites or for deportation to death camps.

15 Tuvia Bielski (1906–1987) commanded a partisan unit in western Belorussia during World War II. After his parents were murdered by the Nazis in 1941, he and three brothers escaped to nearby forests, where he led the Bielski family camp, helping to save approximately 1,230 people. Post-war, Bielski immigrated to Israel, then

Lazar Engelstern writes in his memoir that, in the winter of 1943, while he was in the Lida ghetto, he had just one thought: how could he find a way to get out of the ghetto and join the partisans in the forest? Liaisons were sent to the ghetto by Tuvia Bielski to take out Jews to the forest, and Engelstern joined them. After several days of rough journey, they arrived at their destination. “When we arrived at the base, a panorama of huts spread across a large area of cleared-out forest appeared before us. I observed Jews – men, women, and children – who were not wearing yellow patches and were smiling and in good spirits.”¹⁶ The Bielski base was located in the Naliboki forest, a large forest complex in northwestern Belarus. The area is full of evergreen forests and large swamps, which makes it easier to hide.

Shalom Zorin led a second major family camp in the Naliboki forest. Located near the village of Stare Sioło, about thirty kilometres west of Minsk, it sheltered approximately 800 individuals. These family camps represented a unique form of resistance, combining survival and active opposition to Nazi forces in Belarus.¹⁷

Jews fled to the surrounding forests from ghettos and labour camps. During the years of German occupation in Belarus, from 1941 to 1944, Jews chose to flee to the forests mainly during violent *Aktionen* carried out in the ghettos. The question arises: what caused certain people to choose the option of escape while fleeing towards the unknown, to live in the harsh conditions of the forest, and this following weighty moral dilemmas they were forced to confront? One of the difficult dilemmas was choosing to escape while leaving behind family members – parents, siblings, spouses, and even children. From the testimonies, we learn that there were youngsters who chose not to flee but to stay with their families, even when they knew they were facing almost certain death. On the other hand, others chose to flee and leave their loved ones in the ghettos with pangs of conscience. They did not recover from these moments of decision and carried a heavy burden of guilt.

Fleeing for Life: Jewish Escapes to the Narocz Forest

The case of twenty-one Jews who escaped from the Vilna Ghetto to the Narocz forests on the night of 23 to 24 July 1943 serves as a compelling microcosm of the broader Jewish partisan experience in Western Belarus during the Holocaust. This instance exemplifies the perilous transition faced by numerous Jews who, driven by the imperative of survival, fled from the ghettos to join partisan units in the forests. By examining this specific group’s experiences, we gain valuable insights into the challenges, motivations, and transformative processes undergone by Jewish escapees as they transitioned from ghetto inhabitants to active resistance fighters. This case study thus provides a nuanced lens through which to analyse the multifaceted nature of Jewish survival strategies and the emergence of armed resistance in the face of Nazi persecution in occupied Belarus.¹⁸

The Narocz forests are located north of the district city of Wilejka, on the Belarus-Lithuania border, and include the large Koziany forest complex. In these forests,

to the United States in 1956, settling in New York. He was posthumously buried in Jerusalem. On the Bielski brothers partisan camp, see Nechama Tec, *Defiance: The Bielski Partisans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

16 Lazar Engelstern, testimony, 1971, Yad Vashem Archives, O.3-3608.

17 On the Zorin family camp, see, for example, Fania Libfraynd, testimony, 1975, Yad Vashem Archives, O.3-3837, and Arad, *Under the Red Banner*, 347–350.

18 On this group’s escape, see, for example, Chaim Lazar, *Destruction and Resistance* (New York: Shengold Publishing 1985), 75–78.

there were many towns, each home to hundreds to thousands of Jews. The area is characterised by swamps separated by large, dry islands. Since large parts of the area were far from the main transportation arteries and lacked railways or roads, the topographical conditions were suitable for partisan warfare.

Fyodor Markov was born in 1914 in a village in the Postawy area. Before the war, he was a teacher at the Jewish school in the town of Švenčionys. In 1934, influenced by his Jewish wife, he joined the Communist Party and was imprisoned for his party activities. On 26 August 1941, he was sent to his prewar area of operation to organise a partisan movement in the district. In the fall of 1941, Volodka Saulevich, a Red Army officer, joined him and became his confidant and right-hand man. Markov's group united with the group of Grigory Kryukov, an active communist from the Danilovich area.¹⁹ In May 1942, Markov's group merged with Sergei Fronko's group, which operated in the Postawy area. Markov's battalion grew, and it was joined by officers and soldiers from the Red Army who had escaped captivity. The Voroshilov Brigade cooperated with the Lithuanian partisan movement under the Jewish command of Jurgis (Henoeh Ziman), whose headquarters were stationed in the Narocz forests in 1943. The first partisans in Markov's unit were young people from the surrounding towns, including a group of Jewish escapees from Švenčionys who were his former students.²⁰

The United Partisan Organisation (FPO) in the Vilna Ghetto²¹ contacted Markov, who offered to bring members of the underground to the forest. It is interesting to see the changed dynamics that made young underground members decide to go out of the ghetto and become partisans, not as they originally planned. "We opposed and explained that our primary goal was to incite an armed struggle within the ghetto, to try to retaliate and avenge the Nazis for their actions, and only then, if members survived, to try to break out to the forest and continue the struggle from there", Shlomo Kanterovich recounts in his testimony. "But in reality, something different happened that disrupted all our plans and preparations. Something that decisively influenced the continuation of our activities within the ghetto."²² This occurred on 16 July 1943 and is known as the "Wittenberg Affair". During this affair, the head of the FPO underground, Yitzhak Wittenberg, a communist, was extradited to the Gestapo after a denunciation and found dead the next day.²³ After this difficult episode and the failed attempt by FPO members to rally the masses to start an uprising in the ghetto, the underground decided to begin sending groups of its members to the forests to join the partisans.

"The incident opened our eyes to see reality as it was. The masses in the ghetto would not easily follow us. We analysed the situation and concluded that we needed to change our approach. This was not the way", Nissan Reznik, a member of the FPO headquarters, testified years later.²⁴ He further argued that the Germans carried out actions cunningly: sometimes against children, sometimes against the elderly or women. Thus, the general public, mainly those who worked, was not included in the action and did not "rush" to identify with the underground. This undermined the individual's resilience and caused the FPO to continually postpone the decision to

19 Kryukov fell into German hands, and in July 1941, before he was executed, he escaped from prison.

20 Moshe Shutan, testimony, 1993, Fortunoff Video Archive, HVT-3384.

21 On 21 January 1942, an underground was established, the FPO, which was tasked with preparing the ghetto uprising, training youth for military action, acquiring weapons, carrying out sabotage operations and, when the time came, preventing the Germans from liquidating the ghetto.

22 Shlomo Kanterovich, "With the Partisans in the Narocz Forests", *Edut* 1 (1987): 93.

23 More on Itzhak Wittenberg's affair in Yitzhak Arad, *Ghetto in Flames: The Struggle and Destruction of the Jews in Vilna in the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1980), 311–320; Lazar, *Destruction and Resistance*, 95–98.

24 Nissan Reznik, "The Movement in the Vilna Ghetto and the Lithuanian Forests", *Massuah* 1 (1973): 59.

start an uprising within the ghetto. “It is our duty to leave the ghetto for the forests to join the partisans and fight there with weapons in hand. In the ghetto – it was impossible”, said Reznik.²⁵ They started preparing.

In the early morning of 24 July 1943, the first group of twenty-one FPO people left the Vilna Ghetto for Narocz. Commander Yosef Glazman, a member of the FPO headquarters, led them. The group left under the guidance of Shike Gertman, an emissary of Markov, and his partner Chaika. The FPO command equipped the group members with weapons: grenades, pistols, and a machine gun. The weapons were disassembled and distributed among them, hidden on their bodies. The command wanted to equip the first group they sent to the forest as much as possible so as not to come empty-handed to Markov. They hoped for a friendly welcome.²⁶

“We felt like prisoners who had been set free. In the first grove we came across, we decided to pause, take out and assemble the hidden weapons, remove the yellow patch – the symbol of oppression and humiliation, and be free people again”, Kantorovich recounted.²⁷ “When we sat in the grove and were divided into two groups, I took all the ghetto documents from my group members and buried them in the ground. The commander of the second group took the documents and put them in his pocket”, Chaim Lazar testified.²⁸

When they arrived at New Wilejka disguised as a brigade of woodcutters, fourteen Jews who worked there joined them. As they approached the village of Lavořiškės, about twenty-five kilometres from Vilna, they had to cross a bridge over a river. Glazman sent five scouts to check what was happening beyond the bridge. As they crossed the bridge, shots were heard from three directions. “We were only 50 meters away from the bridge. Confusion arose in our ranks”, Lazar recalled.²⁹ All five scouts were killed on the spot, along with other group members. “It was my first baptism by fire. The experience was terrible. We were in shock. We were still in the euphoria of leaving the ghetto, so the blow was even harder”, Kantorovich recounts.³⁰ “It was night, and we were standing by a farmer’s yard fence, waiting for a signal that we could move, when suddenly – as if the sky had burst open – a barrage of gunfire from all sides. Most of us had never heard gunfire in our lives. The fire was getting closer, and we started to retreat and run back to the grove. We scattered”, Lazar adds.³¹ Only thirteen people remained out of the original thirty-five group members. The two guides informed the survivors that they should split into groups of two to three people, and each group should try to make its way independently. “We opposed this”, Kantorovich recounts,

we had no idea how we should go. We didn’t have a map or compass. We wanted to stay together in the situation that befell us after the disaster. We continued to penetrate deeper into the forest, but at some point, under the cover of darkness, the two liaison men disappeared. They simply abandoned us. It’s hard to describe in words the effect this treacherous act had on us. We started to shine flashlights into the forest, shouting and calling for them to come back, but to no avail, they disappeared as if the earth had swallowed them.³²

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Chaim Lazar, testimony, 1997, USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive, 30235.

²⁷ Kantorovich, “With the Partisans”, 95.

²⁸ Lazar, testimony, USC.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Kantorovich, “With the Partisans”, 95.

³¹ Lazar, testimony, USC.

³² Kantorovich, “With the Partisans”, 96.

Kantorovich continues:

We were exhausted, hungry, and still under the impression of the previous events. At dawn, we found a hiding place in a grove and decided to rest and spend the day there. In the afternoon, a farmer happened to be there, and we stopped him and interrogated him about what was happening in the area. From him, we learned details about our incident: It turned out that the villagers had weapons they received from the Germans, and since they couldn't alert the Germans, they decided to ambush us themselves. This is why there was no manhunt for us the next day. This time, we held onto the farmer and forced him to help us cross the Vilnelė river. We continued, and only at dawn did we thank him and pay him with the little money we had left. We kept moving forward, despite daylight, until we found shelter.³³

Three members with an "Aryan" appearance were sent on behalf of the group to knock on the doors of local farmers and ask them about the way leading to the partisans. The tragedy of the group members did not end there. The Germans found some of their documents on Izka Matskevich's body and demanded that the Judenrat of the Vilna Ghetto hand over family members of those whose documents were found. They were murdered in Ponar.³⁴

Shortly after Glazman and the group survivors arrived at Markov's partisan base in Narocz, another group of twenty-eight people from the Vilna Ghetto arrived in the forest, guided by partisans Shlomo Yechilchik and Mordechai Feigel, also natives of Švenčionys. In this group, there were Jews who had arrived at the Vilna Ghetto after the liquidation of the Grodno Ghetto, aiming to join the underground there and escape with them to the partisans. To their astonishment, they encountered a refusal from the FPO members to take their people to the forest. The Grodno group fundamentally rejected the idea of rebelling in the ghetto and continued to search for ways to escape. "We who had experienced all this firsthand knew that any such plan was doomed to failure. Not only failure to mobilize the masses of the ghetto but a failure of the underground itself", says Eliahu Yezhurski.³⁵

Zvi Lifshitz, who was another member of the Grodno group, describes the day of his departure from the Vilna Ghetto to the Narocz forests:

We gathered at 5:30 in the Judenrat courtyard at 6 Rudnitska Street. We left through a side gate ... Through the city, we walked as a group of workers, we passed towards the Provinsk suburb, then we saw that we were in great danger. Before us was a small pine grove, and we decided to enter it. We sat until dark and continued ... Our goal was to advance along the 'Black Road' that led towards the forest. All the people in the area were a potential danger to us. We were not allowed to ask them for directions. The complication arose from the fact that the guides didn't know this section of the road ... Our journey was long because we had to rely only on ourselves ... when we approached a certain village at midnight, we heard a shout in Russian, 'Stop! Who's there?' we answered that we were partisans from Vilna. They asked that two people approach them. I and another approached, and it turned out they were Jews ... Our joy is indescribable. Finally, we felt free and liberated from fear.³⁶

During September 1943, more and more members of the Vilna Ghetto underground arrived in Narocz, exhausted from the long roads and depressed from the

³³ Ibid, 97.

³⁴ *The Book of the Jewish Partisans*, 74–75.

³⁵ Eliahu Yezhurski, testimony, Moreshet Archive, A.282.

³⁶ Zvi Lifshitz, testimony, Yad Vashem Archive, O.3-1566.

failure to start a rebellion in the ghetto. “Survivors arrived without weapons, and anyone who was a partisan knows what it means to be without a weapon in the forest”, argues Yezherski.³⁷

In her testimony, Mira Verbin recounted her arrival, along with a group from the Vilna ghetto, to the Narocz forests:

Suddenly, a horseman with a huge black hat passes by and greets us in Russian. We thought we had fallen into paradise. Everything was green and beautiful around us: tall trees, breathtaking scenery; it was towards evening. He said how wonderful that you’ve come ... We were very happy. Some girls even kissed him. We came to a guard who said – ah, it’s you? Finally, you’ve arrived, I’m going to notify you. We reached the headquarters, and the commander came out and said, ‘Finally, you’ve come? Where have you been until now? Now that they’re liquidating you, you’ve come?’ We were stunned; we didn’t know what they wanted from us. This was the first blow.³⁸

Thus, it seems that the initial elation of arriving at the forest and the “dream” of joining the partisan ranks was quickly replaced by distress and an unsympathetic, even antisemitic, reception from the non-Jewish partisans.

The First All-Jewish Partisan Unit

Due to these difficult feelings, a desire arose among the Jews to establish their own independent units in the forests, also out of aspiration for acts of vengeance against the Germans and the rescue of Jews from ghettos and camps and to credit these struggles to the Jewish account. The *Nekama* (Revenge) Battalion was an independent Jewish partisan unit established at the end of 1943 in the Narocz forests. At its peak, the battalion numbered about 250 Jews, who went on operations and fought. Among them, the number of women was significant. Many of the escapees from the Vilna Ghetto joined the Nekama Battalion.³⁹

Chaim Lazar tells about the establishment of Nekama: Yosef Glazman began to establish a partisan unit. He persuaded Markov and met with the commander of the Lithuanian partisan movement, Genrikas Zimanas, who was known as “Jurgis”.⁴⁰ Jurgis promised to assist in establishing a Jewish unit and to supply weapons. At the beginning, the Jewish battalion numbers 70 people. Markov appointed Butinas as commander, a Jewish communist from Lithuania who had recently arrived in the forest from Moscow.⁴¹ The battalion was divided into two groups and was the first Jewish fighting unit in the Narocz forests. After a few days, a swearing-in ceremony was held in the presence of the commanders of the various partisan battalions in Narocz.

We swear not to rest or be quiet until we drive the enemy from the soil of Belarus. Brigade commander Markov gave an enthusiastic speech and talked about the Jewish tragedy. He concludes by saying: ‘Who else but you should fight the Nazi enemy and avenge the blood of your spilled brothers

³⁷ Yezherski, testimony.

³⁸ Mira Verbin, testimony, 1993, Fortunoff Video Archive, HVT-3536.

³⁹ See Sara Bender, “Life Stories as Testament and Memorial: The Short Life of the Neqama Battalion, an Independent Jewish Partisan Unit Operating during the Second World War in the Narocz Forest, Belarus”, *East European Jewish Affairs*, 42m no. 1 (April 2012): 1–24.

⁴⁰ On his character, see Dov Levin, “Ziman (Zimanas): The Lifestyle of a Jewish Communist Leader in Lithuania”, *Shvut* 1 (1972): 95–109.

⁴¹ Butinas’s name was Zerach Ragovsky, a Lithuanian who was parachuted into the forests from the Soviet rear.

and sisters. Try to be good fighters, brave and loyal. We will help you with all the means at our disposal: instructors, weapons, instructions ...' He suggests that our battalion be called 'Nekama.' We are a bit resentful that a non-Jew is preaching to us about revenge ... In high spirits, we return to the camp. Full of hope. The reception of the partisans made an impression on us. We are equals among equals.⁴²

The transition from ghetto resistance to forest partisan groups was a significant shift for many Jews, driven by changing circumstances and the urgent need for survival and becoming active fighters. These partisan units, such as Nekama, often operated within larger resistance movements, necessitating collaboration with non-Jewish groups and navigating complex political and social dynamics. The experiences of Jewish partisans highlight themes of resilience, the struggle for recognition and equality within resistance movements, and the psychological impact of loss and the fight for survival.

Summary

This article has focused on Jewish victims who were confined in ghettos and managed to escape, becoming fighters in partisan units in the forests of Belarus, which was an important theatre of partisan warfare. When examining their experiences through survivors' testimonies, several insights emerge. They experienced a psychological transformation, a profound shift from helplessness to empowerment. This transformation was crucial for their mental survival and ability to fight back. They had to quickly learn military skills to become effective fighters, including weapons training and forest survival tactics. By becoming fighters, these individuals regained a sense of control over their lives and fate, which had been stripped away during their persecution in the ghettos.

In survivor's testimonies, one can find fascinating stories about what they experienced in those moments of escape from ghettos to forests. For each one, the story is different. The decision to escape, the planning, the act itself, and the memory that remained from the escape – and which they tell in testimonies – are at the basis of our understanding of Jewish coping during the Holocaust. Escaping to the forests was one of the few rescue options available to Jews in the ghettos. Few could carry it out, and it contained many dangers, as shown in this chapter. The decision to escape almost always required leaving family members behind in a state of uncertainty and danger. Indeed, this fact caused many Jews to abandon the idea of escaping to the forest. Among many survivors who fled from ghettos, feelings of guilt remained until the end of their lives for having left parents, siblings, and other relatives in the ghetto and for the uncertainty about what happened to them.

The transition from ghetto life to forest fighting presented numerous challenges, requiring adaptation to harsh living conditions and the moral complexities of armed resistance. Partisan units often provided a new sense of community for these fighters, replacing the destroyed Jewish communities they had left behind. Joining armed groups was often seen as the best chance for survival in hostile environments, with the forests providing cover and resources. Many of these Jews were driven by a desire for retribution against their oppressors and against collaborators who harmed Jews, which, while complex, often provided a powerful motivating force.

⁴² Lazar, *Destruction and Resistance*, 120.

Interestingly, the stories of civilians-turned-fighters have become an important part of collective memory and national narratives about resistance and survival, playing a significant role in shaping post-war Jewish identity and Holocaust history. Though small in number, partisans and ghetto fighters became a model for future generations in Israel, changing the perception of Jews going to their death “as sheep to the slaughter”, and setting a model of the Jewish national ethos of bravery. Thus, they entered the Israeli pantheon and became a model of resistance.⁴³

⁴³ Boaz Cohen, “Holocaust Heroics: Ghetto Fighters and Partisans in Israeli Society and Historiography”, *Journal of Political & Military Sociology* 31, no. 2 (2003): 197–213.

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Daniela Ozacky Stern is a scholar of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust and World War II. She is a lecturer in the Holocaust Studies Program at Western Galilee College, Israel. Ozacky Stern earned a PhD in Jewish History at the University of Haifa, studying the Jewish partisans in Lithuania and Belarus during the Holocaust. She earned a master's degree from the School of History at Tel Aviv University, where her thesis dealt with Nazi propaganda led by Joseph Goebbels. This thesis was published as a book. Ozacky Stern conducted post-doctoral research at Yad Vashem and was a European Holocaust Research Infrastructure fellow at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. In 2024, she was an Archive Fellow at the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University. Her publications deal with Jewish partisans in Eastern Europe, the Vilna Ghetto, and Holocaust documentation. She is the book review editor of the *Jewish Culture and History* journal.

Email: danielaozacky@gmail.com

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Yaron Pasher

Britain, the Holocaust, and Strategic Priorities

A Complex Legacy

Abstract

British policy concerning European Jews during World War II was shaped by a complex interplay of imperial priorities, military strategy, and humanitarian considerations. For better or worse, the British had a profound impact on the fate of European Jews throughout the war. While certain initiatives highlighted Britain's capacity for moral action, other policies reflected the tensions between strategic imperatives and the urgent needs of Jewish refugees. This article examines Britain's multifaceted engagement with the Jewish question during the war, illustrating the geopolitical challenges that shaped policy decisions. By assessing these complex dynamics, it provides a nuanced understanding of Britain's role in one of history's darkest chapters.

British Actions Before the War

The Evian Conference of July 1938 was a critical moment in the international response to the refugee crisis precipitated by Nazi policies. Convened in Evian-les-Bains, France, representatives from thirty-two nations gathered to discuss the plight of Jewish refugees fleeing Germany and Austria. The British delegation at the Evian Conference claimed that the territories of the Empire were already too dense for settlement, were not suitable for settlement by Europeans, or did not allow settlement for political reasons. Britain further stipulated that its participation in the conference came with the precondition that no negotiations regarding Mandatory Palestine would be entertained within the meeting's framework. British representatives also cited their country's economic crisis, high unemployment, and lack of capacity to absorb immigrants as additional barriers.¹ In addition, Britain encouraged other nations to shoulder the responsibility while steadfastly avoiding any commitments that would strain its own imperial resources.² By prioritising geopolitical stability over humanitarian action, Britain's stance at Evian foreshadowed the dilemmas that would characterise its wartime responses to the Jewish question. The inaction at Evian sent a clear signal to Nazi leaders, suggesting that international opposition to their anti-Jewish policies would remain limited.

In response to the Kristallnacht pogrom of November 1938, Britain launched the Kindertransport initiative, which ultimately saved around 10,000 Jewish children from Nazi-occupied territories. This effort, though limited in scope, marked a significant humanitarian gesture by the British government. The program allowed Jewish

1 National Archives Kew, PRO, FO 7031/9 Pt 3, "Evian Conference Proceedings", July 1938.

2 Louise London, *Whitehall and the Jews, 1933–1948: British Immigration Policy and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 70–72.

children to enter Britain, provided that private sponsors or organisations guaranteed their care and financial support.³ This unprecedented act of rescue by a world leader could support the argument that Neville Chamberlain, under whose administration the programme was implemented, deserves recognition as Righteous Among the Nations. However, archival records and analyses reveal that his government approved the programme primarily in response to overwhelming public and political pressure following Kristallnacht, rather than as part of a broader humanitarian vision.⁴ The programme's limitations in excluding adults and relying heavily on private funding and sponsorship reflected the government's broader reluctance to address the full scale of the refugee crisis. Moreover, the 1939 White Paper, which strictly limited Jewish immigration to Palestine, underscored Britain's geopolitical priorities over its moral responsibilities.⁵

British Interests and Intelligence on Nazi Atrocities in the First Phase of the War

In 1940, the Madagascar Plan emerged as a central element of Nazi policy, proposing the mass deportation of Europe's Jewish population to the island of Madagascar. Originally conceived in the 1930s, even before Adolf Hitler's rise to power in Germany, the plan gained traction among key Nazi policymakers, including Himmler, Göring, Ribbentrop, and Julius Streicher.⁶ The idea of deporting Jews to Madagascar resurfaced during the early successes of the German military campaign against France. The swift and decisive German victories created a temporary window of opportunity, as France's defeat made Madagascar, a French colony, potentially accessible. However, the plan's feasibility relied on more than military success. Control of Madagascar required Britain's agreement or acquiescence, as its dominance over sea routes to the Indian Ocean was crucial for implementing such a large-scale deportation.⁷ British intelligence became aware of the Madagascar Plan through intercepted communications and intelligence reports. They regarded the plan as both impractical and a strategic threat. Madagascar's location on the flank of British trade and reinforcement routes off the eastern coast of Africa made its potential use by Germany a significant danger to British bases in North Africa and the Mediterranean.⁸ For the Nazis, the failure of the Madagascar Plan coincided with their shift toward the "Final Solution", abandoning deportation in favour of extermination.⁹

Following the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, British intelligence began receiving credible reports of Nazi atrocities against Jews. Intercepted communica-

3 National Archives Kew, PRO, FO 371/24085, letter from the Home Office, Aliens Department, 30 August 1939.

4 Yad Vashem Archives, O.75/3282, correspondence regarding reception in England of Simon Markel and Greta Dukat.

5 National Archives Kew, PRO, FO 371/24085, British Foreign Office, 23 November 1938; Jennifer Craig-Norton, "Contesting Memory: New Perspectives on the Kindertransport" (PhD diss., University of Southampton, 2014), 12–16; London, *Whitehall and the Jews, 1933–1948*, 13–14.

6 Richard Breitman, *The Architect of Genocide: Himmler and the Final Solution* (Knopf, 1991), 61; Arno J. Mayer, *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?: The "Final Solution" in History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 195–197.

7 National Archives Kew, PRO, CAB 121/622, "Correspondence on Madagascar Plan", 1940.

8 Yad Vashem Archives, O.51/115, Ernst Wormann on Rademacher's message of cancelling the Madagascar Plan, 14 February 1942.

9 Yad Vashem Archives, M69/9254, "Pan-arische Bewegung Vorschlag zur Gruendung eines Judenstaates auf Madagascar".

tions, escapee testimonies, and resistance network reports painted a grim picture of systematic persecution and mass murder. By November 1941, the British Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Stafford Cripps, reported that approximately 1.5 million Jews had “disappeared” in Nazi-occupied Poland. Further corroboration came in January 1942 with a telegram from Vyacheslav Molotov, the Soviet foreign secretary, which detailed mass executions in the Kiev region, apparently referring to the Babi Yar massacre. These accounts compelled British officials to confront the reality of Nazi extermination policies, though their responses remained cautious.¹⁰ By mid-1942, information such as the “Bund Report” and the Riegner Telegram had provided extensive evidence of the Holocaust. Eduard Schulte’s testimony, transmitted via Gerhart Riegner, the representative of the World Jewish Congress in Geneva, revealed Hitler’s plans for the systematic extermination of European Jewry. British officials received these reports with scepticism, reluctant to accept the unprecedented scale of Nazi crimes without further verification.¹¹

The sinking of the Struma in February 1942 epitomised the tragic consequences of Britain’s restrictive immigration policies during the Holocaust and created public relations challenges for the British government. The Struma, a ship carrying over 769 Jewish refugees from Romania, sought asylum in Mandatory Palestine but was detained in Istanbul due to British enforcement of the White Paper of 1939. Despite appeals from Jewish organisations and Turkish authorities, Britain denied entry to the refugees. Shortly after the vessel was towed back to the Black Sea, it was torpedoed by a Soviet submarine, killing all but one passenger.¹² The Struma disaster provoked widespread condemnation, especially from Jewish communities in Britain, Washington and the Yishuv in Palestine. This tragedy further intensified anti-British sentiment within the Yishuv, contributing to a growing radicalisation among segments of the Jewish community.¹³ The assassination attempt on High Commissioner Harold McMichael in 1944 by members of the Lehi underground organisation can, in part, be traced to the frustration and anger stemming from events like the Struma which they found him responsible for.¹⁴

In response to escalating atrocities in Europe, the Biltmore Conference, held in New York in May 1942, marked a significant turning point in Zionist strategy during World War II for the coordination of efforts to address the Jewish crisis. The conference brought together Zionist leaders to reevaluate their objectives, and the centrepiece of the conference was the “Biltmore Declaration”, which formally endorsed the establishment of a Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine. This declaration underscored a strategic pivot within the Zionist movement, orchestrated largely by David Ben-Gurion, to prioritise American support over British alignment.¹⁵ Ben-Gurion’s

10 Shlomo Aronson, *Hitler, the Allies, and the Jews* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 112–113. For more on Cripps and Eden’s visit to Moscow on November 1941, see Gabriel Gorodetsky, *Stafford Cripps’ Mission to Moscow, 1940–1942* (Cambridge University Press, 1984), 269–276.

11 Yad Vashem Archive, O.33/10200 Samuel Scheps Correspondence regarding the Riegner Telegram; P.34/4019698 Stephen Wise collection; M.10.ARI/937, The Bund Report.

12 Yad Vashem, O.11/65, “Megilat Struma (The Struma Scroll)”, published by the Association of Romanian Immigrants to Eretz Israel, Jerusalem, 1942; O.41/619/7021374, Lists of Jewish passengers on the “Struma” ship.

13 “Struma: Telegram to the High Commissioner, Jerusalem, From: Boyd, Colonial Office, Palestine Desk”, 5/3/1942, “Shiva for the Struma Disaster: Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Histadrut, Tel Aviv, March 1, 1942”, in Yaakov Sharett, ed., *Political Struggle 1942 January–May: An Anthology of Speeches and Documents from Moshe Sharett*, vol. 1, part 1 [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Moshe Sharett Heritage Association, 2014), 213–237.

14 Bernard Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe, 1939–1945* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, Tel Aviv 1979), 123–134.

15 Ken Stein, “The Biltmore Program”, *Center for Israel Education* (February 2011).

advocacy in the United States for Zionist self-determination capitalised on America's emerging global influence and the growing political power of American Jewry. His foresight in aligning with American Zionists, while strategically distancing the movement from Britain's increasingly hostile stance, proved instrumental in reshaping Zionist policy.¹⁶ For Zionist leaders, the Biltmore Declaration became a rallying cry, galvanising support for statehood as the only viable solution to the Jewish plight. The horrors of the Holocaust imbued the movement with a renewed sense of urgency, as leaders recognised that the survival of European Jewry required a sovereign Jewish state.¹⁷ The abandonment of the Jews at the onset of this drama impelled Ben-Gurion to take an "activist" stance towards the British. The Biltmore Program became a de facto foundation stone even though it had been conceived before the full gravity of the Holocaust was known.¹⁸

In August 1942, Churchill, accompanied by Cripps, still the British ambassador to the Soviet Union, travelled to Moscow primarily to strengthen Allied cooperation with the Soviet Union.¹⁹ The discussions revolved around operational military strategies, particularly the delay in opening a second front in Europe and the forthcoming Allied invasion of North Africa, Operation Torch. Both leaders emphasised the need to defeat Nazi Germany as the overriding priority. Churchill acknowledged Nazi crimes during his discussions with Stalin, but this acknowledgment was framed within broader denunciations of Nazi brutality rather than specific mentions of Jewish suffering.²⁰ Stalin's interest in Nazi atrocities was generally tied to Soviet losses and the treatment of Soviet citizens under German occupation. Stalin expressed outrage at Nazi crimes in general but did not specifically focus on the Jewish genocide during these talks.²¹

Beginning in October 1942, the Battle of El Alamein marked a pivotal moment in the North African campaign. The British triumph ended a period that was later referred to as the "200 Days of Dread" by the journalist Haviv Canaan, who coined the term in his 1974 book on the topic. For the Yishuv in Palestine, this victory brought an end to months of fear and uncertainty, during which the possibility of a Nazi invasion loomed large.²² The "200 Days", spanning from the spring to the autumn of 1942, saw the Yishuv gripped by anxiety as Axis forces advanced dangerously close to the borders of Palestine. The rapid progress of Rommel's forces through North Africa posed a direct threat to the Jewish population in British-controlled Palestine. Jewish leaders feared that a Nazi invasion would result in mass deportation or extermination, mirroring the horrors unfolding in Europe. In response, emergency preparations were initiated, including the development of defence strategies such as the "Plan of the North", also known as "Masada on Mt. Carmel". This plan, referencing the ancient Jewish stronghold of Masada, envisioned a final stand in the Haifa area

16 David Ben Gurion, *Bamaaracha*, vol. 4 [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1957), 43–44.

17 National Archives Kew, CO 733/444/17, Biltmore Resolutions: reactions in World Zionism; ACC/3121/C/14/023, Biltmore Resolution: British and American messages and resolutions of support for a Jewish Home in Palestine especially British Zionist support for American Zionists.

18 Shlomo Aronson, *David Ben-Gurion and the Jewish Renaissance* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 168–172.

19 Martin H. Folly, *Seeking Comradeship: Winston Churchill's Quest for a Warrior Alliance and His Mission to Stalin, August 1942* (London: Brunel University, 2007), 267–269.

20 Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol.4: *The Hinge of Fate* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950), 478–479.

21 National Archives Kew, CAB 65/27/34, The Prime Minister – Visit to the Middle East and Moscow, August 1942.

22 Chaviv Cna'an, *200 Days of Anxiety: Palestine Facing Rommel's Army*, Tel Aviv [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Mol-Art, 1974), 172–176.

should the British retreat in the face of a German advance.²³ These preparations reflected the Yishuv's growing awareness of the existential threat posed by the Axis powers and its determination to ensure its own survival. The British victory at El Alamein not only averted an immediate existential threat but also reinforced the Yishuv's confidence in Britain's capacity to counter Nazi advances.²⁴

In November 1942, a rare opportunity arose as the British government orchestrated a diplomatic exchange that resulted in the rescue of seventy-eight Jewish individuals from Nazi-occupied Europe. These Jews, primarily women and children holding British mandatory passports, were exchanged for sixty-nine German Templers – members of a Protestant sect residing in Palestine. This exchange was among the few direct British efforts to save Jewish lives during the Holocaust, if not the only one. The rescued Jews arrived in British-mandated Palestine, bringing with them detailed testimonies of Nazi atrocities. Their accounts described the dire conditions in Warsaw and Piotrków, as well as the systematic deportations to extermination camps such as Treblinka, Sobibor, and Auschwitz. They also provided critical information about deportations from Western European cities, including Berlin and Vienna, to Nazi-controlled areas in the East.²⁵ This operation was significant both for its humanitarian impact and the intelligence it provided, but further revelations were yet to come. In October 1942, Jan Karski, a member of the Polish underground, undertook a daring mission to deliver firsthand accounts of the Holocaust to Allied leaders. Having witnessed the horrors of the Warsaw Ghetto and a Nazi transit camp, Karski provided vivid and harrowing descriptions of the systematic extermination of Jews.²⁶ Karski's mission brought him to London, where he met with senior British officials, including Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden. Despite the urgency of Karski's accounts, British leaders received his reports with scepticism, regarding the details of Nazi crimes as difficult to substantiate. British reluctance stemmed partly from the unprecedented scale of the atrocities Karski described and concerns over potential accusations of exaggeration or propaganda.²⁷ Despite this restraint, Karski's testimony underscored the urgency of the situation, pressuring Britain to consider some form of action.

On 17 December 1942, the Allied governments issued a joint declaration condemning the Nazi regime's systematic extermination of Jews. Drawing on intelligence gathered from diplomatic reports, underground networks, and escapee testimonies, the declaration represented the first coordinated acknowledgment of the Holocaust by the Allies. It marked a significant moment in Allied wartime rhetoric, even though concrete rescue initiatives remained limited.²⁸ Eden presented the declaration before the House of Commons, describing Nazi atrocities as “a crime without a name”.²⁹ The

23 National Archives Kew, HW 1/717, Government Code: Signals Intelligence Passed to the Prime Minister, Messages and Correspondence. North Africa: Panzer Army report for July 9, El Alamein; Uri Brenner, ed., *Facing the Threat of a German Invasion to the Land of Israel, 1940–1942* (Ramat Gan: Yad Tabenkin, 1981), 95–112.

24 Gerhard L. Weinberg, “Two Separate Issues? Historiography of World War II and the Holocaust”, in *Holocaust Historiography in Context*, eds. David Bankier and Dan Michman (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2008), 386–388.

25 Dina Porat, “First Testimonies on the Holocaust? The Problematic Nature of the Conveying and Absorbing Them, and the Reaction in the Yishuv”, in *Holocaust Historiography in Context*, eds. David Bankier and Dan Michman (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2008), 438–439; Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe*, 186–187.

26 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of the Republic of Poland, “The Mass Extermination of Jews in German Occupied Poland, Official Government-documented Alert about the Holocaust and Genocide of Poles Addressed to the Wartime Allies” (New York, London, and Melbourne: Hutchinson & Co., 1942).

27 Yad Vashem Archives, P.42/5083566, Jan Karski Collection.

28 National Archives Kew, RG-59/740.00116, “Allied Joint Declaration Text”, 17 December 1942.

29 “Persecution of the Jews: Allies Declaration”, *UK Parliament – Commons Sitting*, HL Deb, 17 December 1942, vol. 125, cc607-12.

declaration pledged to hold Nazi perpetrators accountable and condemned the extermination of Jews as a barbaric act. However, it fell short of committing to specific rescue initiatives, as Britain and other Allied governments emphasised that military victory over Nazi Germany remained their priority. Nonetheless, the declaration laid the groundwork for future war crimes trials, including the Nuremberg Trials, by establishing a framework for holding perpetrators accountable.³⁰

British Responses to Atrocities: Action amid Awareness

The Casablanca Conference, held in January 1943, marked a pivotal moment in Allied wartime strategy. Convened by Churchill and Roosevelt, the conference was notable for the absence of Stalin, who was unable to attend due to the ongoing Battle of Stalingrad and the swift timetable, which made the journey from Moscow to Morocco impractical. The timing of the conference was strategically significant.³¹ The Americans and British, wary of a repeat of the 1917 Brest-Litovsk Treaty, when the Soviets signed a separate peace with Germany during World War I, sought to preempt any potential overtures from Stalin to negotiate with Hitler. The unprecedented attrition of both German and Soviet forces at Stalingrad heightened these fears, amplifying concerns that Stalin might end the Eastern Front conflict on terms favourable to the Soviet Union but detrimental to Allied unity. Therefore, they seemed comfortable with his absence from the conference.³²

To solidify Allied policy and create a *fait accompli*, the Casablanca Conference swiftly adopted the doctrine of “unconditional surrender”. This resolution ensured that no peace negotiations with the Axis powers would occur, either collectively or separately, and reinforced the Allies’ commitment to the complete defeat of Nazism and Fascism.³³ However, by precluding the possibility of negotiated settlements, the policy had direct implications for Jewish rescue efforts. Negotiations with Nazi leaders to save Jewish lives became virtually impossible under this framework.³⁴ Churchill’s single-minded determination to pulverise and punish Germany played directly into the hands of Joseph Goebbels and Stalin. The Nazi propaganda minister exploited the Allied demand for unconditional surrender, along with the vindictive Morgenthau Plan, to convince Germans that surrender would mean annihilation for their nation, thus fuelling a determination to fight to the death. Meanwhile, Eisenhower later argued that the demand for unconditional surrender at Casablanca prolonged the war by years, costing countless lives. The destruction of Germany, to which Churchill was deeply committed, created a power vacuum in Europe that Stalin inevitably filled.³⁵

In April 1943, the Central Leadership of the Movement of Working Classes in Poland sent an urgent appeal to the British Labour Party, detailing the systematic

30 Martin Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies* (New York: Holt, 1981), 93–105.

31 Yaron Pasher, “Ideological Logistics: Between the Final Solution and the German War Machine”, *Bishvil Hazikaron* no. 38 [in Hebrew], *Journal for Holocaust Education and Studies* (2021), Yad Vashem, Jerusalem: 30–31.

32 Liddell Hart-Military Archives, Kings College London, Allan Brook 6/1/1, *Casablanca Conference January 1943: Papers and Minutes of Meetings*, edited and printed by the office of the combined Chiefs of staff 1943, Paper 156: “Suggested Procedure for Dealing with the Agenda of the Conference”; Paper 162/2: “Draft Telegram from the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Great Britain to Premier Stalin”.

33 National Archives Kew, DEFE 2/1013, Strategy for 1943 laid down at the Casablanca Conference.

34 Richard Overy, *Blood and Ruins: The Last Imperial War, 1931–1945* (London: Allan Lane, 2021), 268–269.

35 Patrick J. Buchanan, *Churchill, Hitler and the Unnecessary War: How Britain Lost Its Empire and the West Lost the World* (New York Crown, 2008), 405–407; Robert Sherwood, *The White House Papers of Harry L. Hopkins*, vol. 2: *January 1942–July 1945* (London: Eyre and Spottiswood, 1949), 665–695.

atrocities perpetrated by the Germans in occupied Poland. They described the displacement and mass murder of Polish peasants and Jews, including the massacre of 1.5 million Jews and the horrors of extermination camps such as Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Majdanek. The letter criticised Allied warnings of post-war retribution as insufficient to deter German barbarity, urging immediate and decisive action, including reprisals against German civilian centres to hold the German population accountable for Nazi crimes.³⁶ Clement Attlee, leader of the British Labour Party, responded with sympathy and admiration, commending the Polish resistance for its courage and steadfastness in the face of brutal oppression. He reaffirmed Allied solidarity and the strategic importance of the air raids on German cities, emphasising the contributions of Polish airmen to the war effort. However, the indifference and inaction to the suffering in Europe were not confined to the Conservative Party; Labour's response, while empathetic, reflected the same constraints of prioritising military strategy over direct humanitarian intervention, revealing a broader pattern in British wartime policy.³⁷

In April 1943, the British and Americans convened the Bermuda Conference to address the worsening refugee crisis caused by the escalating atrocities of Nazi persecution. Held in the isolated location of Hamilton, Bermuda, the conference occurred against the backdrop of a turning tide in the war, particularly following the Soviet victory at Stalingrad and increasing public pressure in Britain and the United States to rescue Jewish refugees. However, the conference was organised more to calm public opinion rather than produce meaningful action.³⁸ The conference opened on 19 April 1943, ironically the same day as the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, underscoring the urgency of the refugee crisis. Yet, the timing only amplified its disappointing outcomes. Despite expectations for decisive action, the conference marked the culmination of efforts by senior officials in Britain and the United States to thwart a move towards more effective action to save European Jewry. British and American delegations approached the discussions with predetermined constraints. Richard Law, leading the British delegation, emphasised logistical challenges, particularly the alleged shortage of ships to transport refugees. The British flatly refused to amend the restrictive immigration quotas imposed by the 1939 White Paper, citing geopolitical concerns about destabilising Palestine and the broader Middle East.³⁹ Moreover, no Jewish organisations were allowed to participate in the conference, a deliberate decision to distance the proceedings from external pressure. Closed-door sessions lasted for nine days, concluding without any concrete measures to alleviate Jewish suffering.⁴⁰ The Bermuda Conference's location itself reflected the Allies' reluctance to address the issue transparently. Held far from major population centres, it was "intended to distance the conference from the press and public opinion", ensuring minimal scrutiny.⁴¹

The Transnistria Ransom Plan, proposed in December 1942, reflected both the desperate plight of Jews deported to the Romanian-controlled region and the com-

36 National Archives Kew, FO371/34550, letter from the Central Leadership of the Movement of Working Classes in Poland to Attlee.

37 National Archives Kew, FO 371/34550, 14 April 1943, letter from Attlee to the Central Leadership of the Movement of Working Classes in Poland in response to their request for action.

38 David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust 1941–1945* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 104–106.

39 Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe*, 159–163.

40 Michael Makowsky, *Churchill's Promised Land: Zionism and Statecraft* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 189.

41 National Archives Kew, CO 323/1846/14, "Conference in Bermuda: proceedings, April 1943".

plex geopolitical constraints that hindered their rescue. Romanian officials signalled their willingness to release 70,000 surviving Jews from the death trap of Transnistria after 180,000 Jews had already perished, in exchange for a substantial ransom and arrangements for safe emigration.⁴² The plan, though initiated by Romanian authorities, was quickly thwarted when the Germans, under whose influence Romania operated, opposed the scheme upon learning of it. However, it was not only the Germans who halted the plan. Britain and the United States, meanwhile, refused to cooperate, adhering to policies prohibiting negotiations with Axis powers and the transfer of funds into occupied territories, a stance directly shaped by the Casablanca Conference resolution of “unconditional surrender”. British officials were also concerned about violating the 1939 White Paper quotas. Consequently, the plan collapsed by March 1943, leading to the abandonment of hopes for large-scale rescue operations from the region.⁴³

The Allies’ response to the “Auschwitz Protocols” of Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler remains one of the most controversial moral and strategic failures of World War II.⁴⁴ Reaching Allied leaders on 26 June 1944 from British representatives in Bern, discussions within the British and American governments focused on the feasibility of bombing Auschwitz or its railway lines, as appealed for by Jewish organisations.⁴⁵ While Jewish leaders, including members of the World Jewish Congress and figures such as Chaim Weizmann and Moshe Shertok (Sharett), petitioned for military intervention, allied officials rejected these appeals.⁴⁶ The United States Department of War, in a letter dated June 1944, argued that such an operation would “divert resources from the broader war effort” and questioned its military effectiveness.⁴⁷ However, Martin Gilbert and other historians have noted that Allied bombers regularly targeted industrial zones in close proximity to Auschwitz, with photographic reconnaissance clearly showing the gas chambers.⁴⁸ While Churchill expressed support for proposals to bomb the camp, the British Air Ministry and the United States’ military ultimately opposed such actions. In Gilbert’s assessment, the failure to bomb Auschwitz reflected indifference rather than operational constraints. The refusal to act was compounded by fears of collateral damage and concerns about being accused of prioritising Jewish lives over the broader war effort. As Barbara Rogers has argued, declassified documents show that British intelligence knew of Auschwitz’s function as early as 1942, which challenges Gilbert’s earlier conclusions that the camp’s role remained a secret until 1944.⁴⁹

The assassination of Lord Moyne, the British minister of state in the Middle East, on 6 November 1944, marked another pivotal moment in British-Zionist relations. Moyne, a close associate of Winston Churchill, had been a staunch enforcer of Britain’s restrictive 1939 White Paper, which severely limited Jewish immigration to Pal-

42 Tuvia Friling, *Arrows in the Dark: David Ben-Gurion, the Yishuv Leadership, and Rescue Attempts During the Holocaust*, vol. 1 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 196.

43 *Ibid.*, 202–204; Dina Porat, *An Entangled Leadership: The Yishuv and the Holocaust 1942–1945* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, Tel Aviv, 1986), 309–311, 317–320, 328.

44 Rudolf Vrba, *I Escaped from Auschwitz* [in Hebrew] (Haifa: Haifa University Press, 1998), 290–321. See full Auschwitz Protocols by Vrba and Wetzler.

45 Martin Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies* (New York: Holt, 1981), 231, 290–292.

46 Yehuda Bauer, *Jews for Sale? Nazi-Jewish Negotiations, 1933–1945* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2001), 240–241.

47 Zohar Segev, “Rethinking the Dilemma of Bombing Auschwitz”, *Jewish Quarterly Review* 111, no. 2 (2021): 267.

48 John S. Conway, review of Martin Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, *American Historical Review* 106, no. 3 (2001): 1071–1072.

49 Barbara Rogers, “British Intelligence and the Holocaust: *Auschwitz and the Allies* Re-Examined”, *The Journal of Holocaust Education* 8, no. 1 (1999): 89–106.

estine. For segments of the *Yishuv*, particularly militant factions like Lehi (the Stern Gang), Moyne represented the embodiment of British obstruction to Jewish rescue and statehood during the Holocaust.⁵⁰ Lehi operatives Eliahu Bet-Zuri and Eliahu Hakim ambushed Moyne outside his Cairo residence, fatally shooting him and his driver. The assassins were quickly apprehended, tried, and executed by Egyptian authorities.⁵¹ Moyne's killing prompted a sharp reaction from Churchill, who privately expressed profound anger at what he termed "an odious act of ingratitude", particularly given Britain's wartime sacrifices. The minutes from a war cabinet meeting on 20 November 1944 reflect that the "Prime minister raises the Question whether it is really wise that the drastic action for Lord Moyne's assassination calls, should be directed against the whole Jewish community in Palestine".⁵²

However, the context of Moyne's assassination is inseparable from the desperation surrounding the Holocaust and Britain's refusal to reconsider immigration policies. During one of Joel Brand's negotiations over Eichmann's "Blood for Goods" proposal – the Nazi scheme to exchange up to one million Jews for trucks and goods which rolled into creating the Kastner affair, Moyne reportedly questioned "[w]hat can I do with a million Jews? Where can I put them?" This dismissive stance, relayed by Brand, became emblematic of Britain's perceived indifference to the plight of European Jews, further fuelling tensions within the *Yishuv*. Moyne's death also led to a notable shift in Churchill's tone toward Zionist issues. Publicly, Churchill condemned the assassination and urged the execution of the perpetrators, yet the event prompted him to reconsider Britain's position on Jewish affairs. It appears Churchill's correspondences following Moyne's death reflected increasing frostiness, with his rhetoric on Jewish matters becoming more cautious and restrained. By early 1945, Churchill's focus remained squarely on military objectives, sidelining Holocaust-related issues despite emerging reports of genocide from eastern Europe.⁵³

The Final Stages of War

The British-*Yishuv* paratrooper missions of World War II exemplified a complex partnership forged by overlapping yet divergent wartime objectives. Between 1943 and 1944, the British trained and dispatched thirty-seven Jewish paratroopers from the *Yishuv* into Nazi-occupied Europe. Figures such as Hannah Szenes, Haviva Reik, and Enzo Sereni became iconic for their bravery, despite the high-risk nature and ultimately limited success of these missions.⁵⁴ From the British perspective, these missions served practical wartime purposes: by using the paratroopers' knowledge of eastern European languages, they were engaged in gathering intelligence in enemy-occupied territories, establishing connections with local resistance groups, and aiding downed Allied pilots. Intelligence operations in occupied Europe were

50 Yaakov Sharett, ed., "Meeting of the Limited Zionist Working Committee, Jerusalem, 24/9/1942", *Moshe Sharett: Political Struggle 1942 June–December: An Anthology of Speeches and Documents*, vol. 1, part 2, 418–420.

51 National Archives Kew, FO 954/5D/688m Egypt: Foreign Office telegram to Cairo No 230. From Prime Minister and Secretary of State both assassins of Lord Moyne must be executed.

52 National Archives Kew, PRO, Premiere 4/51/11.

53 Richard Breitman, *Other Responses to the Holocaust: US Intelligence and the Nazis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 45–71; Makowsky, *Churchill's Promised Land*, 216–219; National Archives Kew, PRO: PREM 4/52/3, Dr. Weizmann and Jewish Agency 1941 Apr.–1945 Jun., *Private Correspondence Between Churchill and Eden*, 18 January 1945.

54 Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe*, 240–241.

critical for the broader Allied strategy, particularly as Britain sought to maintain contact with partisan movements disrupting German logistics.⁵⁵ For the Yishuv, these missions embodied both humanitarian and national aspirations. Paratroopers were tasked with establishing ties with Jewish communities, assessing the fate of European Jews, and encouraging resistance efforts.⁵⁶ Above all, these missions reveal the meticulous intelligence Britain possessed about the tragedy unfolding in Nazi-occupied territories.

Following the paratroopers' mission, the establishment of the Jewish Brigade in 1944 marked a significant moment in the relationship between Britain and the Yishuv during World War II. Approved by Churchill after persistent lobbying by the Yishuv leadership, the brigade became the first Jewish military unit officially recognised under British command. Its creation served dual purposes: meeting British wartime needs and advancing Zionist aspirations for Jewish recognition and statehood.⁵⁷ Beyond its military contributions, the brigade played a key humanitarian role. After the war, brigade members were active in the Brichah movement, facilitating the escape of thousands of Holocaust survivors from displaced persons camps across Europe and their illegal immigration to Palestine. These efforts demonstrated the Yishuv's dual commitment to Jewish rescue and state-building.⁵⁸ Unfortunately, by the time the brigade was established, its 5,000 members only witnessed the final moments of the war in northern Italy at Trieste, where they successfully subdued a German Wehrmacht division.⁵⁹ This outcome inevitably raises questions about what more could have been accomplished had the British approved its establishment earlier in the war.⁶⁰

Returning to the Casablanca Conference resolutions, the "unconditional surrender" policy, which eliminated any prospect of separate peace agreements with Nazi Germany, was driven by a desire to avoid post-war ambiguity or compromise. This policy had significant implications for subsequent military and humanitarian negotiations, creating a strict diplomatic framework that precluded formal engagements with Nazi officials, even when opportunities arose to weaken the German war effort or save lives.⁶¹ Against this backdrop, Operation Sunrise emerged in early 1945 as a clandestine initiative involving SS General Karl Wolff and American OSS officer Allen Dulles. Wolff, as Himmler's deputy and supreme SS and police commander in Italy, offered to negotiate the surrender of German forces in northern Italy to the Western Allies.⁶² While the proposal promised substantial strategic gains by hastening the collapse of Nazi resistance, it posed a serious dilemma for the Allies. Engaging with Wolff, a high-ranking Nazi implicated in war crimes, risked undermining the Casablanca principle and alienating the Soviet Union, which remained excluded

55 Judith Tydor Baumel, "The Heroism of Hannah Senesz: An Exercise in Creating Collective National Memory in the State of Israel", *Journal of Contemporary History* 31, no. 3 (1996), 522–524.

56 Porat, *An Entangled Leadership*, 404–405, 413–417.

57 National Archives Kew, CO 733/468/5, Jewish Fighting Force: formation of a Jewish Brigade Group; Dr Weizmann's proposals.

58 Yehuda Bauer, *Flight and Rescue: Brichah* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Moreshet, 1970), 304–306.

59 National Archives Kew, WO 170/4488, Jewish Brigade: H.Q., 1945 Jan.–June.

60 Ben-Gurion, *Bamaaracha*, vol.3, 173–178; Tom Segev, *Palestine under the British* (Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 365–366.

61 "Mr. Alexander C. Kirk, Political Adviser on the Staff of the Supreme Allied Commander, Mediterranean Theater, to the Secretary of State," "The Acting Secretary of State to the Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Hariman)", in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, vol 3: European Advisory Commission, Austria, Germany*, eds. William Slany et al. (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1968), 722–724.

62 Martin Moll, "Lingen, Kerstin von, SS und Secret Service. „Verschwörung des Schweigens“ – Die Akte Karl Wolff", *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte* 128, no. 1 (2011): 273–276.

from these negotiations.⁶³ While pragmatic military interests compelled them to consider Wolff's surrender proposal, they remained bound to the Casablanca principle of unconditional surrender, complicating any formal engagement. Ultimately, the negotiations proceeded covertly, achieving the German surrender in Italy on 2 May 1945. However, Operation Sunrise's success came at a cost. Wolff's cooperation during the negotiations insulated him from full accountability for his role in Nazi atrocities, as post-war efforts to prosecute him as well as Albert Ganzenmüller, the undersecretary of transport in Germany and head of the Reichsbahn, were obstructed by political and intelligence considerations tied to the Cold War.⁶⁴

Conclusion

British policy during World War II played a pivotal role in shaping the fate of European Jews, as it navigated the competing demands of imperial interests, military strategy, and humanitarian responsibility. Central to this policy was the White Paper of 1939, which severely restricted Jewish immigration to Palestine, effectively closing one of the few escape routes available to Holocaust victims. This stance reflected Britain's broader commitment to maintaining stability in the Middle East, even as evidence of Nazi atrocities mounted. The Madagascar Plan, while never realised, further illustrates Britain's critical role in thwarting Nazi demographic ambitions. British control of sea routes made the plan infeasible, highlighting how imperial interests indirectly influenced Nazi policies and the eventual shift to the Final Solution. Yet, Britain's reluctance to confront Nazi policies head-on was solidified at the Casablanca Conference in 1943, where the resolution of unconditional surrender precluded negotiations with Axis powers, effectively eliminating opportunities for rescue efforts like the Transnistria Ransom Plan or Joel Brand's "Blood for Goods" proposal. While Britain occasionally demonstrated moral action, such as through the Kindertransport, its broader policies, rooted in strategic priorities and imperial considerations, left European Jews with few avenues for escape or survival. These choices underscore the profound consequences of political inaction in the face of humanitarian catastrophe, highlighting the far-reaching consequences of prioritising strategy over humanitarian aid.

63 Kerstin von Lingen, "Conspiracy of Silence: How the Old Boys of American Intelligence Shielded SS General Karl Wolff from Prosecution", *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 22, no. 1 (2008): 74–77.

64 Staatsarchiv München, Staatsanwaltschaften 34865/75 fol. 888 ff; Prozess gegen Karl Wolff; Zeugenvernehmung von Albert Ganzenmüller.

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Yaron Pasher has been a faculty member at Western Galilee College since 2017, teaching in the Holocaust Studies program as well as in the Departments of Interdisciplinary Studies and Logistics in the School of Management. Since 2023, he serves as a visiting lecturer at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina, in the Center for Judaic, Holocaust, and Peace Studies within the Department of History. Pasher specializes in the comparative history of the Second World War and the Holocaust, integrating modern Jewish history, strategic thought, and wartime logistics in the 19th and 20th centuries. He was a fellow at the International Institute for Holocaust Research at Yad Vashem (2013–2014) and held a fellowship with the Claims Conference (2014–2016). His book, *Holocaust versus Wehrmacht: How Hitler's "Final Solution" Undermined the German War Effort*, was published by the University Press of Kansas in 2015. Currently, he is working on a book focused on Albert Ganzenmüller and the Reichsbahn and is co-editing a special volume commemorating the 80th anniversary of the German invasion of the USSR. Since 2012, Pasher also serves as Chief Editor of Status Magazine: *The Journal for Management and Strategic Thought* (Hebrew).

Email: YaronP@wgalil.ac.il

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