

## Hitler and the Pogrom of November 9/10, 1938

Stefan Kley

More than sixty years after the event, our knowledge of the *Kristallnacht* pogrom is marked by a remarkable discrepancy. Thanks to postwar trials and numerous detailed studies, we have an accurate picture of the events that transpired in many localities; yet we are still uncertain about many aspects of the crucial decision-making process that led up to the pogrom.

In particular, there are substantial differences in the way Hitler's role and possible motives are presented and analyzed in the literature. Helmut Krausnick<sup>1</sup> and Hermann Graml<sup>2</sup> assumed that Hitler was centrally involved — though they do not explore the question of what may have motivated him. In contrast, Raul Hilberg disregarded the persona of the dictator and viewed the violence as an abortive yet intrusive attempt by the SA and the propaganda machine to play an active role in the process of the destruction of German Jewry.<sup>3</sup>

In recent works, Dieter Obst<sup>4</sup> and Phillippe Burrin<sup>5</sup> have highlighted the decisive part of Reich Propaganda Minister Goebbels. Burrin argues that Goebbels took Hitler unawares and that Hitler had given the go-ahead solely for limited demonstrations so as to assuage the inflamed emotions of the radicals. In Uwe Dietrich Adam's view, Hitler, in November 1938, succeeded, at the instigation and with the support of his chief propagandist, in overcoming the standstill in anti-Jewish policy that had resulted from a lack of decisiveness and

---

<sup>1</sup> Helmut Krausnick, "Judenverfolgung," in Hans Buchheim, et al., *Anatomie des SS-Staates* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1994), p. 588; in English: Hans Buchheim, et al., *Anatomy of the SS-State* (London: Collins, 1968).

<sup>2</sup> Hermann Graml, *Reichskristallnacht. Antisemitismus und Judenverfolgung im Dritten Reich (Dt. Geschichte vom 19. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart)* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1988), p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985), p. 38.

<sup>4</sup> Dieter Obst, "*Reichskristallnacht*". *Ursachen und Verlauf des antisemitischen Pogroms vom November 1938* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1991), pp. 78 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Philippe Burrin, *Hitler und die Juden. Die Entscheidung fuer den Voelkermord* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1993), pp. 59-60; in English: Philippe Burrin, *Hitler and the Jews: The Genesis of the Holocaust* (London: Edward Arnold, 1994).

from bureaucratic inertia.<sup>6</sup> Adam contends that Goebbels was the driving force behind events, but that Hitler was only too happy to agree to the initiative as he was irritated over the strong position Jews continued to enjoy in the economy. Adam thus presented a comprehensive explanation that addressed both the question of Hitler's participation and possible motives.

As early as 1953, Gerald Reitlinger recognized how closely interlocked these two questions were.<sup>7</sup> As he was unable to discern any clear motivation in Hitler's case, he conjectured that the real instigators were the radicals, apprehensive that their hopes might founder in the wake of the Munich Agreement concluded with Great Britain in September 1938.

This paper reexamines the decision-making process with regard to these two aspects. Since, for generally familiar reasons, the decision-making processes in the Nazi state cannot simply be extracted from records and transcripts, it is necessary to proceed *from the events themselves*. Do these support the thesis that the dictator was centrally involved? Do other individuals appear on stage who were pursuing their own plans and agendas? Did they exert an influence on Hitler, or did he see himself under the pressure of actual or presumed material constraints? Finally, based on the more narrow or broader political context, are there any signs pointing to possible motives on Hitler's part? Although it should go without saying, let me stress that, like all previous attempts at explanation, the results of my inquiry can only be hypothetical: a supposition that brings established and familiar facts together in a new light, while proceeding from and elaborating on a specific interpretation of the National-Socialist system of rule.

The chain of events that would furnish the pretext for unleashing the *Reichskristallnacht* pogrom had already reached a first dramatic high point two weeks earlier. At the end of October, the Gestapo had arrested almost 17,000 Jews of Polish nationality living in Germany, deporting them to no-mans'-land on the border between the two countries. These unfortunate souls had become the object of a macabre poker game between Berlin and Warsaw.

---

<sup>6</sup> Uwe Dietrich Adam, *Judenpolitik im Dritten Reich* (Duesseldorf: Droste, 1972), pp. 204 ff.; and idem, "How Spontaneous Was the Pogrom?," in Walter H. Pehle, ed., *November 1938. From 'Kristallnacht' to Genocide* (New York: Berg, 1991), pp. 73-94.

<sup>7</sup> Gerald Reitlinger, *The Final Solution: The Attempt to Exterminate the Jews of Europe 1939 – 1945* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1968), pp. 12-13.

For some time, the German government, with some modicum of success, had been pursuing a policy of expelling Jews who were still Polish nationals, even though they had been resident in Germany for a number of years — indeed, in many cases, had even been born in Germany. The government in Warsaw had decided in October to put a halt to this, stripping these Jews of their Polish citizenship by means of administrative chicanery. This move prompted the Gestapo to initiate the deportations mentioned: the deported victims were left for days out in the open in the pouring rain near the Polish border town Zbaszyn until most were finally interned in a Polish camp.

Among the deportees was the Grynszpan family from Hanover, except for their seventeen-year-old son Herschel, who, at the time of these events, was staying with an uncle in Paris. News of the fate of his relatives prompted the youngster to a deed of desperation: in order to call world attention to the injustices, he entered the German embassy in Paris on November 7, a pistol concealed in his pocket. He asked to be taken to the office of the third secretary, Ernst vom Rath, and then proceeded to pump two bullets into the unsuspecting diplomat. Grynszpan did not resist when arrested by the French police. Despite being immediately operated on, Ernst vom Rath succumbed to his wounds on the afternoon of November 9.

In the two days after the shooting, several synagogues were set ablaze in Germany in the districts of Kurhesse and Magdeburg-Anhalt. There were also violent attacks on Jewish businesses and homes.

Hitler was in Munich when he received word, on November 9, about the death of the diplomat.<sup>8</sup> That day was the anniversary of the November 1923 Beer Hall *Putsch*, commemorated annually by the *Fuehrer* and his old-time comrades. At noon they had marched together to the Feldherrenhalle, and the traditional celebration of camaraderie at which the old “party stalwarts” got together took place that evening in the Old Town Hall.

Hitler had just sat down at the table when a messenger entered and whispered to him the news of vom Rath's death. According to an eyewitness,

---

<sup>8</sup> These events have been described by numerous authors. Unless otherwise indicated, I follow the descriptions given by Hermann Graml, Uwe Dietrich Adam, and Dieter Obst.

Hitler then engaged in an “extremely intense discussion”<sup>9</sup> with Goebbels, and the program that had been planned for that evening was altered. Instead of his customary address to the gathering, Hitler left for his apartment on Prinzregentenstrasse. Goebbels spoke in his place and announced to those assembled the news of the diplomat’s death. Then he reported on the anti-Jewish manifestations that had erupted in Kurhessen and Magdeburg-Anhalt, adding that Hitler, after hearing his ideas, had decided that the party should do nothing either to help prepare or organize such demonstrations. However, he added, should such outbursts take place spontaneously, no attempt ought to be made stop them.<sup>10</sup>

The meaning of this message was immediately clear to the *Gauleiters* and SA leaders present. While still at the Old Town Hall, they went to the phones, issuing instructions to their subordinate offices. During the course of the night, Goebbels himself dispatched messages by teletype to the district propaganda offices throughout the length and breadth of the Reich.

This was not the first time Goebbels had acted to instigate anti-Jewish violence. He had been one of the prime movers behind the anti-Jewish boycott of April 1, 1933. In the summer of 1935, and again in the summer of 1938, he had staged violent riots in Berlin. The triggering of a nationwide pogrom undoubtedly represented a qualitatively new stage in his antisemitic activity, yet for the knowledgeable it could not paper over the fact that his position at this critical juncture had been palpably damaged by an affair in his private life. His liaison with the Czech actress Lida Baarova had spawned problems in his marriage, reaping not only the malicious rebuke of numerous critics in the party and government but also the *Fuehrer’s* disapproval. A more salient factor was Hitler’s dissatisfaction with the professional performance of his propaganda chief. It was quite obvious that Hitler held Goebbels responsible for the lack of readiness for war among the population that had been evidenced during the Sudeten crisis. Consequently, Goebbels was not merely isolated; he also had to

---

<sup>9</sup> Statement by von Eberstein, Munich chief of police, August 6, 1946. *Internationaler Militaergerichtshof. Der Prozess gegen die Hauptkriegsverbrecher (Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal: Official Text)*, 42 vols. (Nuremberg: International Military Tribunal, 1947-49) (hereafter: IMT), vol. XX, pp. 320 f.

<sup>10</sup> Report of the Supreme Party Tribunal of the NSDAP to Goering, February 13, 1939, *IMT*, vol. XXXII, pp. 21 f. (PS 3063). The following data is also given there.

be apprehensive about the level of backing forthcoming from Hitler, on whom he was now more dependent than ever. Thus, Goebbels was not just a notorious antisemitic activist. He had ulterior motives to try hard to regain the *Fuehrer's* trust by intensified effort.

While the role of the propaganda minister is thus clear, that of Himmler and the police apparatus remains in many respects uncertain. According to the statement of one of his close associates, Himmler was not informed about the events until 11:30 P.M. at Hitler's apartment.<sup>11</sup> From there the two men planned to go to Odeonsplatz, where the solemn swearing-in ceremony for new SS recruits was scheduled to take place at midnight. Apparently while still at Hitler's residence, Himmler sent instructions to the Gestapo chief Mueller in Berlin as to what the SS and Gestapo should do. While it was impressed upon the SS that they should not participate in the violence, the Gestapo was given orders to arrest "especially wealthy" Jews and to place them in concentration camps.<sup>12</sup> Twenty-five minutes later, at 11:55 P.M., Mueller sent out his first terse instructions to the regional Gestapo offices throughout the Reich. At 1:20 A.M., Heydrich, head of Security Police and SD, followed that up with a second detailed directive. Finally, in the early hours of November 10, Himmler dictated a remarkable statement, typed by one of the associates accompanying him, in which he demonstratively sought to distance himself from the riots.<sup>13</sup>

In the statement signed and personally sealed by the *Reichsfuehrer-SS*, Himmler alleged that Goebbels, "in his hunger for power and blockheaded stupidity," had launched the whole action on his own, to the surprise of all. As strange as this statement may seem, it probably is in keeping with the truth to the extent that Himmler had indeed been taken by surprise by the events. Had he known about them earlier or even been implicated in their planning, it is certain the Gestapo would not have been informed so late, at a point when the violence was already raging. On the other hand, the fact that their chief's lack of awareness did not condemn the police to inactivity indicates that those involved were basically geared to the possibility of mass arrests across the Reich.

---

<sup>11</sup> Sworn Testimony of *SS-Hauptsturmfuehrer* Schallermeier, July 5, 1946, *IMT*, vol. XLII, pp. 510 ff.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*; and telegrams from Mueller and Heydrich to Gestapo Regional and Local Offices (*Stapo-Leitstellen und Stapostellen*), November 9/10, 1938, *IMT*, vol. XXV, pp. 376 ff.

<sup>13</sup> Schallermeier testimony, *IMT*, vol. XLII, pp. 510 ff.

Yet for a number of Himmler's associates, the idea of a nationwide pogrom was not novel. A SD memo "On the Jewish Problem," at the beginning of 1937, had argued forcefully in favor of anti-Jewish riots, since only such violence could demonstrate to the Jews that it was hopeless for them to remain in Germany.<sup>14</sup> In his capacity in the SD Central Office as the expert for monitoring Zionist activities, the author of that memo, one Adolf Eichmann, was intensively involved in considering ways to spur Jewish emigration.

Yet the SD had been pursuing a different track, because shortly afterward Eichmann's then superior, Wisliceny, had stressed that the "Jewish Question" could "be solved only centrally and by legislative means."<sup>15</sup> In the subsequent period, the SD and Gestapo had followed precisely that line of approach. In Austria, by contrast, the SD had employed police terror to carry out an extremely successful policy of expulsion: large sums of money were extorted from the Jewish local communities by arresting their functionaries. These funds were then used to finance emigration. Heydrich had in fact threatened to call in the Gestapo to quell Austrian Nazis rioting against the Jews.<sup>16</sup> The 1937 SD memo by Eichmann commented on the excesses organized by Goebbels in Berlin in the early summer of 1938, warning that it was necessary to concentrate all means to encourage mass emigration. In part also to demonstrate the leading role of the Gestapo in Jewish policy, Heydrich had then had some 1,500 Jews arrested in Berlin.<sup>17</sup>

When the riots later erupted in Kurhessen on November 7 — violence customarily regarded as the prelude to the *Kristallnacht* pogrom — Heydrich once again made no secret of his objections.<sup>18</sup> Significantly, the SD annual report for 1938 had still praised the mass arrests and legal exclusion of Jews from the economy as means of forcibly pressuring them to emigrate. At the same time, it regretted the consequences of the senseless destruction of

---

<sup>14</sup> Michael Wildt, ed., *Die Judenpolitik des SD 1935-1938* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1995), p. 33 and doc. 9.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41 and doc. 11.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52 f.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56. The Gestapo: Geheimes Staatspolizeiamt was the National Headquarters of the Gestapo, which was absorbed into the Reichssicherheitshauptamt in September 1939 [ed.].

<sup>18</sup> Obst, *Reichskristallnacht*, pp. 69 f.

property.<sup>19</sup> At the end of 1938, Heydrich was unambiguous in demanding that the Gestapo and SD be invested with sole authority when it came to Jewish policy. He espoused a strategy aimed at expulsion, utilizing the tactics of mass arrests and police terror — but, significantly, *not* resorting to riotous street violence. It is possible that Heydrich and Himmler were in any case contemplating harassment of the German Jews through a nationwide wave of mass arrests and were surprised (and perhaps even irritated) after Goebbels, who in effect had upstaged them, forced them to take action.<sup>20</sup>

In his statement, Himmler went so far as to claim that even Hitler had been taken aback by the events, although from what transpired at the Old Town Hall, it is evident that just the opposite is true. It may be that Goebbels had authored the initiative, but Hitler had at least agreed — thus providing the green light for the operation. Goebbels was neither inclined nor in a position to make decisions of this scope and gravity on his own; that became evident the following day, when he even sought his *Fuehrer's* blessing for the decree to halt the violence.<sup>21</sup>

Actually, neither of the two news items that had reached the meeting hall on the evening of November 9 had come as any surprise to Hitler. He had been kept fully informed about vom Rath's critical condition already on November 7, when he dispatched his own personal physician, Brandt, together with the head of surgery at the university hospital in Munich by plane to Paris specifically for this purpose.<sup>22</sup>

The press carried reports on November 9 about the violent excesses that had been organized in the state of Hesse by the Nazi party top echelon there. That same day, Heydrich provided Lammers, head of the Reich Chancellery,

---

<sup>19</sup> Heinz Boberach, ed., *Meldungen aus dem Reich 1938-1945* (Herrsching: Pawlak, 1984), p. 26.

<sup>20</sup> Leni Yahil voices the same suspicion and points out that, after the Munich Agreement, Jews from Russia were placed in concentration camps and were not released until they declared their willingness to emigrate immediately. Yahil links the expansion of the Dachau, Buchenwald, and Sachsenhausen camps in the late summer of 1938, with possible plans of Himmler and Heydrich to apply the same procedure on a larger scale. Leni Yahil, *Die Shoah. Ueberlebenskampf und Vernichtung der Europaeischen Juden* (Munich: Luchterhand, 1998), pp. 166, 168; in English: Leni Yahil, *The Holocaust: The Fate of European Jewry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990-1991).

<sup>21</sup> This is evident from a protocol of the Bavarian State Chancellery, based on a telephone message from Goebbels to Bavarian Interior Minister Wagner, November 10, 1938, Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, MA 106 412. Goebbels described matters in a similar way in an excerpt from his diaries dated November 10, 1938, published in *Der Spiegel* (No. 29, 1992).

<sup>22</sup> Obst, *Reichskristallnacht*, p. 71.

with a detailed picture of events.<sup>23</sup> So whatever the exact content of Hitler's decision, it was in any event not spontaneous but rather the product of certain specific calculations. This suggests that it was Hitler rather than Goebbels who was probably behind the original initiative. That hypothesis is also supported by Goebbels' choice of words: he did not simply assert that he had suggested the operation to Hitler but rather made use of the curious formulation that Hitler had made his decision after hearing Goebbels' "presentation" (*auf seinen Vortrag*).

Yet it remains uncertain whether Hitler — whatever he may have ordered, or only condoned in specific detail — really did this of his own free will. It is feasible that he believed he was under pressure from his irate supporters. And that would mean that in the vaunted *Fuehrerstaat*, things could happen that were not in keeping with the *Fuehrer's* will.

One fact that could be mustered in support of this assumption is that radical party members, enraged by the alleged responsibility of the Jews for the worsening of the international climate, had engaged repeatedly in anti-Jewish violence during the summer of 1938. Yet there had always been isolated attacks against Jews, and the party leaders had repeatedly sought to curb such excesses by means of decrees. There had also been previous serious disturbances, yet Hitler had repeatedly taken steps to ensure that this did not exceed certain set limits. Thus, as early as the end of March 1933, he had given the party the go-ahead for carrying out an anti-Jewish boycott, but had made sure from the outset that the action agenda, contrary to what the radicals wanted, would be limited to a single day. He had also admonished participants that there must not be any attacks against individuals.<sup>24</sup> In the summer of 1935,<sup>25</sup> and again in the summer of 1938,<sup>26</sup> he ordered a halt to Goebbels' anti-Jewish campaigns, but not immediately. In December 1938, he opposed Heydrich's recommendation that Jews be marked by a special distinguishing

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>24</sup> Guenther Plum, "Wirtschaft und Erwerbsleben," in Wolfgang Benz, ed., *Die Juden in Deutschland 1933-1945. Leben unter nationalsozialistischer Herrschaft* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1988), p. 277. Hitler's dominant role is amply reflected in the diary entries of his propaganda minister; see Elke Froehlich, ed., *Die Tagebuecher von Josef Goebbels. Saemtliche Fragmente. Teil I. Aufzeichnungen 1924-1941*, vol. 3 (Munich, New York, London, Paris: K.G. Sauer, 1987), pp. 298, 400 f. (March 26, 1933 and April 1, 1933).

<sup>25</sup> Burrin, *Hitler und die Juden*, p. 46.

<sup>26</sup> Wildt, *Judenpolitik des SD*, p. 57

badge, pointing to the danger of renewed acts of violence.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, in November 1938, the immediate threat of war had receded. On the basis of his most recent successes, Hitler was at a new high point in public popularity and had less reason for concessions to the more radical elements in the party and the SA than ever before.

Likewise, only at first glance can Hitler's personal hatred of the Jews provide some sort of explanation. Naturally, Hitler's antisemitism is well-established beyond the shadow of a doubt, yet he had repeatedly emphasized that his animus was of a special type, scientific so to speak, differing radically in methods and aims from traditional antisemitism. In particular, he had come out repeatedly and unambiguously against pogroms,<sup>28</sup> and had remained faithful, as we have seen, to this aversion to public acts of violence.

A more persuasive assumption would appear to be that Hitler had agreed to Goebbels' suggestion because he wanted to utilize the situation in the wake of the pogrom to crank up measures for stripping the Jews of their wealth. In support of this view is the fact that decrees were issued already on November 12, ousting the Jews completely from economic life and saddling them with the payment of an "atonement penalty" (*Suehneleistung*) in the amount of one billion Reichsmarks.

Yet one must not forget that it was specifically Hermann Goering, who Hitler had appointed to carry out these measures, who voiced sharp criticism of the disturbances. In his capacity as plenipotentiary for the Four-Year Plan, Goering was charged with the task of translating Hitler's plans for rearmament into reality and, given the desolate state of finances in the Reich, he had long been greedily eyeing the remaining Jewish assets. However, the events of the night of November 9 did not make his task any easier. On the contrary, they made it even more difficult than it had been. In the course of the riot, "Aryan" property had also been destroyed, and repairing the damage would consume raw materials and hard currency that Germany could ill afford, seeing they were in

---

<sup>27</sup> David Bankier, "Hitler and the Policy-Making Process on the Jewish Question," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1988), p. 6. Bankier likewise notes that when Hitler gave his approval for the special Jewish badge, he also ordered new precautionary measures designed to prevent any repetition of violence against Jews in the population.

<sup>28</sup> Eberhard Jaeckel and Axel Kuhn, eds., *Hitler Saemtliche Aufzeichnungen 1905-1924* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1980), pp. 88 f. (September 16, 1919), pp. 119 f. (April 6, 1920), p. 128 (April 27, 1920), pp. 175 f. (August 7, 1920).

short supply everywhere in the German economy. In addition, it was anticipated that the reaction abroad would be disgust and that such public revulsion would have a highly negative impact on German export trade. Thus, when Goering informed the relevant authorities about the planned measures on November 12, he left no doubt as to what he thought of Goebbels' activities: "I'm sick and tired of these demonstrations. They don't harm the Jew, they harm *me* in my capacity as the final court of appeal for the economy."<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, it is important to note that, by the autumn of 1938, Aryanization of the German economy had reached an advanced stage: the "final stage" to grab up Jewish businesses considered to be interesting propositions, as Avraham Barkai has appropriately phrased it, was now in full swing.<sup>30</sup> The theft by the state of remaining Jewish assets had likewise been decided on long before. Hitler himself had given the signal for this two years before, when he called, in his memo on the Four-Year Plan, for a law that would make Jews collectively responsible for the damage inflicted on the German economy by the actions of individual Jews. It was only because various authorities had second thoughts that the implementation of this measure was temporarily delayed. Nonetheless, at the end of April 1938, Jews were ordered to declare their full assets. And from the beginning of November, draft plans for the November 12 measures already existed in the Economics Ministry. This also helps to explain how it was possible to issue the decrees so soon after the anti-Jewish disturbances. Thus, from the perspective of these state bandits, it was certainly only natural to seize on the murder in Paris as a pretext for fleecing the German Jews of their wealth — especially since they had just concluded these very preparations, and everything suggests that they would have shortly made use of these planned measures in any case. Yet the question remains: why was the pogrom needed? It would only serve unnecessarily to complicate the seizure of property and capital and reduce the spoils of plunder.

One possible answer is that Hitler had his doubts about the determination of his men and thus initiated the violence in order to put the hesitant bureaucrats

---

<sup>29</sup> Stenographic copy of a discussion on the Jewish Question with Goering on November 12, 1938, *IMT*, vol. XXVIII, pp. 499-540, here p. 500.

<sup>30</sup> Avraham Barkai, "The Fateful Year 1938: The Continuation and Acceleration of Plunder," in Pehle, ed., *November 1938*, pp. 95-122, quote p. 113. The following data are also from Barkai.

under pressure.<sup>31</sup> Yet this presupposes that Hitler would have had no knowledge of the progress achieved by recent Aryanization measures and was likewise totally oblivious of the upcoming planned measures. After all, Hitler (purportedly likewise in talks with Goering) had said the riot was the product of widespread dissatisfaction in the population regarding the continuing dominance the Jews still had in commercial life.<sup>32</sup> This could mean that Hitler also wished to goad Goering to act, even though the latter, as recently as mid-October 1938, had called for Jews to be ousted immediately from the economy.<sup>33</sup> In actuality, it must have been clear to Hitler that *Reichsmarschall* Goering had more interest than anyone in grabbing up Jewish assets and that he certainly did not have to be dragged to the hunt. All this renders the hypothesis that Hitler played off his aides against one another in order to spur them to extremely radical action, highly improbable — even if not totally impossible.

In addition, it is doubtful whether Hitler ever made any connection between the economic situation and the pogrom. The basis for this supposition were Goering's statements at Nuremberg.<sup>34</sup> He obviously was attempting there to present himself as the moderate opponent of Goebbels and to blame him for masterminding the plundering of the Jews in the wake of *Kristallnacht*. To that end, he was quick to fabricate a supposed heated discussion between himself and Goebbels in the Reich Chancellery. In the course of that exchange, Hitler was alleged to have come to the aid of his hard-pressed propaganda minister and advanced the argument cited above.<sup>35</sup> Yet in reality, no such discussion had taken place in that time frame at the Reich Chancellery. It could not have, since neither Hitler nor Goebbels was in Berlin during the time period in question.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> This explanation is given in Adam, "How Spontaneous Was the Pogrom?," p. 93.

<sup>32</sup> Statement by Goering, March 14, 1946, *IMT*, vol. IX, pp. 313 f.

<sup>33</sup> At a discussion in the Reich Aviation Ministry, October 14, 1938, *IMT*, vol. XXVII, pp. 160-164.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 32.

<sup>35</sup> Goering's claims are convincingly refuted by Obst, *Reichskristallnacht*, pp. 89 ff. Obst points to the fact that, even in connection with Hitler's salutations to participants in the discussion chaired by Goering on November 12, 1938, Goering referred solely to a letter Hitler had sent and a telephone conversation he had had with him.

<sup>36</sup> This is evident from Hitler's itinerary for the period November 6-30, 1938, Institut fuer Zeitgeschichte, F 19/13. According to a diary entry by Goebbels, he had a conversation with Hitler in the Osteria in Munich on November 10. That meeting is confirmed by a note from the Bavarian State Chancellery dated November 10, Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, MA 106 412. However, Engel's diary mentions that Goebbels was present at Hitler's lunch table in Berlin on November 10. There he supposedly presented a spirited defense of the pogrom operation, apparently without bringing up any economic arguments. See Hildegard v. Kotze,

The only communication was a telephone conversation between Hitler and Goering during which Hitler ordered Goering to carry out the planned economic measures (or in which those orders were merely confirmed).<sup>37</sup>

Right after the pogrom, various individual districts and states, acting on their own authority, proceeded to Aryanize Jewish businesses. Hitler, speaking with Goebbels on the afternoon of November 10, was inclined to let these matters take their course. After clearing with Goebbels, for example, Bavarian Interior Minister Wagner issued the decree that all Aryanizations in Bavaria would now require formal approval from the *Gau*-level district authority. In addition, he secretly let it be known that Hitler was not interested in introducing central regulation of all Aryanizations by the government in Berlin.<sup>38</sup> Goering, on the other hand, had decided long ago that profits from Aryanization should be channeled into the coffers of the state and not be squandered on providing for “incompetent party members.”<sup>39</sup> He now took the initiative and likewise contacted his subordinate heads, gaining agreement for convening the November 12 conference. As is well known, it was decided at that conference that the Reich Economics Ministry would take overall charge of Aryanization.<sup>40</sup> This effectively parried the claims of the party representatives, and Goering was basically correct later on when he asserted in Nuremberg that, on November 10, Goebbels had attempted to snatch up Jewish assets and had been prevented from doing so by Goering's intervention. Thus, Hitler had initially given Goebbels cause for hope, only to proceed in the end to meet Goering's demands.

---

ed., *Heeresadjutant bei Hitler 1938-1943. Aufzeichnungen des Major Engel* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1974), pp. 42 f. The dating in Engel's diary was added subsequently and is thus often inaccurate.

<sup>37</sup> Obst, *Reichskristallnacht*, pp. 89 ff.

<sup>38</sup> This was in the discussion when Goebbels obtained Hitler's approval both for the pogrom itself as well as the order to terminate the operation; protocol of the Bavarian State Chancellery, based on a telephone message from Goebbels to Bavarian Interior Minister Wagner, November 10, 1938, Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, MA 106 412. Wagner's orders were probably based on instructions from Goebbels, who terms these in his diary “secret decrees.” Reproduced in *Der Spiegel*, no. 29 (1992), p. 128.

<sup>39</sup> Conversation in the Reich Aviation Ministry, October 14, 1938, *IMT*, vol. XXVII, p. 163.

<sup>40</sup> Order reproduced in Hans-Juergen Doescher, ed., “*Reichskristallnacht.*” *Die Novemberprogrome 1938 im Spiegel ausgewaehlter Quellen. Eine Dokumentation herausgegeben von H.-J. Doescher* (Niederkassel rund um den Druck, 1988), p. 135. In the discussion on November 12, Goering had made it clear that the Aryanization of all large-scale firms was his personal prerogative and that, in all other cases, government trustees would have to be involved, and any surpluses from sale should be deposited in the state treasury. *IMT*, vol. XXVIII, pp. 501 f.

If then there was no discussion whatsoever between Hitler, Goering, and Goebbels in Berlin, this means that at no time did Hitler broach economic considerations as a motive for the pogrom. If anyone did, it was Goebbels — and then only after he had been sharply criticized and felt obliged to respond by launching a counterattack against the economic policy-makers Goering and Funk.<sup>41</sup> Thus, the version of popular anger over the uncurbed activities of Jews in the economy, if broached at all, had not only originated later on, but stemmed from Hitler's propaganda minister, who felt it imperative to defend himself against the deluge of criticism — not from Hitler.

To state matters clearly, the question of Hitler's motives is bound up solely with the disturbances the night of November 9 — not the wave of mass arrests at the hands of the Gestapo or the measures to plunder Jews of their wealth decided upon on November 12. As a rule, these three quite different events are seen as a unity; yet as the description here has shown, they are not in any way intertwined insofar as their origin is concerned. The state plundering of Jewish assets was a measure that had been long planned and was on the drafting boards of several ministries under Goering's overall authority. The mass arrest of prominent Jews was likewise one of the long-standing options in Himmler's bag of terror.

The staging of spectacular street disturbances was part of the preferred repertoire of radical party functionaries such as the Berlin *Gauleiter* Goebbels. From the vantage point of those directly involved, there was no nexus between these events other than that of temporal coincidence: this is highlighted by the fact that both Goering and Himmler felt that Goebbels' pogrom operation had not helped their plans progress but, rather, had acted to impede them.<sup>42</sup> Currents converged because, between November 9 and 11, each of the three had been given a green-light by Hitler. For Goering, that affirmation had been especially easy, since Hitler had in any case long been pressing for the expropriation of the

---

<sup>41</sup> In the course of the day, Goebbels had received a phone call from Economics Minister Funk who took him severely to task; statement by Funk, May 6, 1946, IMT, vol. XIII, pp. 131 f. According to Funk, Goebbels justified himself by referring to the economics minister's lack of activity. It is possible, however, that Funk had agreed beforehand with Goering on what he would say in this statement in Nuremberg. Goering purportedly had also told Goebbels "in no uncertain terms just what he thought"; statement by Goering, March 14, 1946, IMT, vol. IX, pp. 313.

<sup>42</sup> During their discussion on November 12, 1938, Goering and Heydrich attempted for the first time to coordinate their different strategies.

Jews. If Hitler at this juncture was aiming at a policy geared to expel the Jews, Himmler also probably found he had an easy job of it. In any event, the concept of a rational Jewish policy espoused by the SD must have appealed to the dictator. Yet we must still clarify just how Goebbels and the exponents of violent, hooliganistic antisemitism were able to find an opportunity to riot.

Perhaps Hitler gave his propaganda chief a free hand simply because of his anger over the murder of vom Rath. But of all possible motives, this is the least probable. Only a few months before, he had demonstrated just how indifferent he was to the fate of his diplomats when he devised the plan to have the German ambassador in Prague murdered by German agents and then put the blame on the Czechs.<sup>43</sup> However, one point is noteworthy in particular: Hitler did not make any statement whatsoever about the assassination in Paris. Had he been genuinely moved by the murder, he would have had ample opportunity during the day's beer festivities to give free rein to his feelings. Yet while the German propaganda machine was already busy firing salvos at the perpetrator Grynszpan and the purported manipulators behind him, Hitler's only public contribution to the discourse was a terse two-line condolence telegram sent to the bereaved parents of the murdered diplomat.<sup>44</sup>

During the time frame in question, Hitler made two speeches. In both he dealt, albeit in different ways, with the conclusions he had drawn from these most recent events in the foreign-affairs arena. On November 10, he intimated to representatives of the German press that the "pacifist record has now been played out," and the Germans had to be raised quickly to a more intense level of war-readiness.<sup>45</sup> It may well be that Hitler's wish for a more aggressive attitude in the population was also related to how the Germans felt about the Jews; in this case, as Leni Yahil and Sarah Gordon suspect, the pogrom was indeed in significant measure a kind of signal meant for internal consumption.<sup>46</sup> But at this juncture, the external impact — more precisely, the attempt to provoke Britain—

---

<sup>43</sup> Gerhard L. Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany. Starting World War II 1937-1939* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 339, notes 93 and 94.

<sup>44</sup> Max Domarus, ed., *Hitler. Reden und Proklamationen 1932-1945. Kommentiert von einem deutschen Zeitgenossen* (Neustadt a.d. Aisch: Schmidt, 1962), p. 971.

<sup>45</sup> Wilhelm Treue, "Rede Hitlers vor der deutschen Presse (10. November 1938)," *Vierteljahrshefte fuer Zeitgeschichte* 6 (1958), pp. 175-191.

<sup>46</sup> Yahil, *Die Shoah*, p. 171; and Sarah Gordon, *Hitler, Germans and the Jewish Question* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 178.

was of greater salience from the *Fuehrer's* perspective. Thus, down in the Buergerbraeukeller two days earlier, he had thundered in an impassioned polemic against the British opposition politicians Winston Churchill and Duff Cooper, characterizing them as war-mongers lurking behind the peaceable Neville Chamberlain. He accused them of having one chief aim: to unleash a new world war. By reiterating again and again that Great Britain was a democracy, which meant that Churchill could become prime minister at any time, he presented the conflict between the two countries as an unavoidable consequence of British machinations.<sup>47</sup>

Naturally, these attacks may have also served to gear German public opinion to the prospect of a new war. Yet they functioned equally to make clear to the British just how irreconcilable the Berlin government was. Since the Munich Conference, such attacks became a recurring part of the daily agenda. Already in his speech in Saarbruecken on October 9, and once again in Weimar on November 6, Hitler had launched a fierce attack on Churchill, Duff Cooper, and Eden. The following day the German press was handed corresponding directives: Churchill had “to be vehemently attacked ... that was now an urgent necessity.”<sup>48</sup>

In the German embassy in London, there was dismay and consternation; diplomats were insistent in cautioning that there should be no further attacks on the British opposition. Those could only serve to make Chamberlain's policy of understanding more difficult.<sup>49</sup> Yet that warning appeared only to goad Hitler's aggressiveness even more.

That was an astonishing development. The peaceful surrender of the Sudeten was in large part due to Neville Chamberlain's personal engagement and diplomacy. After the agreement reached in Munich, he had persuaded Hitler to sign a declaration in which both sides vowed to resolve all outstanding differences by peaceful means. This appeared to herald a new beginning in German-British relations. Yet Hitler subsequently would leave no stone unturned in order to vitiate this promising new start.

---

<sup>47</sup> Domarus, ed., *Hitler. Reden*, pp. 966-69.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 954 ff., 963; BA ZSg 110/10 (Slg. Traub); press directive, November 7, 1938.

<sup>49</sup> Ambassador Dirksen to Foreign Office, October 11 and 15, 1938; and report by press officer Hesse, October 11, 1938. *Akten zur Deutschen Auswaertigen Politik* (ADAP) (Baden-Baden: Imprimerie Nationale, 1951), Series D, vol. IV, nos. 250, 251, 252.

The decisive blow against the British policy of understanding came in March 1939, with the Wehrmacht occupation of Bohemia and Moravia. This decision went straight back to Hitler: only a short time after the Munich Conference, he had urged his military leaders to continue to maintain their state of readiness for smashing the “Czech rump state.”<sup>50</sup> In the winter of 1938/39, no one in the dictator's closer circle was able to understand why there was any reason to realize the original plan. After Munich, the government in Prague had come to terms with its existence as a German satellite and was prepared to bow to all German demands.<sup>51</sup>

German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop especially tried to persuade Hitler of the advantages of such a solution. Naturally, he recognized that breaking the Munich Agreement would ultimately steer Germany onto a collision course with Great Britain, a development Ribbentrop wished, at least at this juncture, to avoid. But Hitler was eager for the confrontation, because he believed the Munich Conference, which had cheated him out of the planned war against Czechoslovakia, was a defeat. He was still evidently annoyed with Chamberlain in the run-up to September 1, 1939, when he confided to his top military brass that he feared nothing more than at the last minute “some bastard” could thwart his plans by suggesting to mediate.<sup>52</sup> Of course, in the summer of 1939, that fear was totally unfounded, because, in the meantime, the Berlin government had heaped up such a multitude of sins that Chamberlain, even if he had wanted to, would not have been able to play the mediator between Germany and one of its threatened neighbors.

---

<sup>50</sup> Order by the *Fuehrer* and Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht, ADAP, D, vol. IV, no. 81.

<sup>51</sup> The Czech government was prepared to make the following specific concessions: to take a neutral position, to lean toward Berlin in foreign policy, to renounce building new fortifications and reduce the size of the army in accordance with German wishes (amounting to virtually complete dismantling), to accommodate the Czech armaments industry to the needs of the Wehrmacht, to grant transit rights for the Wehrmacht, to improve the situation of the remaining ethnic Germans, and to adopt anti-Jewish policies. This also fulfilled the wishes put forward by Goering and the Wehrmacht Supreme Command. Writing in mid-October, Goebbels noted with satisfaction in his diary: “[Prague] will become our best vassal.” And Goering stated: “Czechs and Slovaks will become German dominions.” See Froehlich, ed., *Die Tagebuecher von Joseph Goebbels*, Teil I, vol. 3, p. 526 (October 18, 1938); and the discussion with Goering on October 14, 1938, *IMT*, vol. XXVII, p. 163.

<sup>52</sup> Speech by Hitler to the supreme commanders in Berchtesgaden on August 22, 1939, ADAP, D, vol. VII, no. 192. There is also a corresponding statement in Franz Halder, *Kriegstagebuch*. ed. Hans Adolf Jacobsen, vol. I (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1962), p. 11 (August 14, 1939).

In the weeks and months after Munich, Hitler's primary concern was to ensure that relations between Germany and Britain worsened in order to guarantee that when the next major crisis erupted, war would be a certainty. That is why he railed unceasingly against Britain and ordered the Wehrmacht to destroy the rump Czech state. To many the order seemed mysterious, but they could not know that for Hitler, Bohemia and Moravia were not the real issue; what he wanted was to lay down the gauntlet to Britain. In that regard, the march to Prague was indeed particularly effective.

This then was the international situation when the deadly shots rang out in Paris, and Goebbels found he had been given an opportunity to settle accounts with the hated Jews. When the decision was made, Hitler was preoccupied with preparations for the upcoming war. On October 21, he had given the military the task of “disposing of the rump Czech state.” On the 24th, he had warned the army commander-in-chief to take energetic measures against defeatism in his own ranks.<sup>53</sup> On November 6 and 8, he had held anti-British diatribes; and, on November 10, he was to order a new course in public opinion. This time a nationwide pogrom seemed highly opportune in Hitler's eyes. In February 1936, he had played down the murder of Wilhelm Gustloff — who had been, after all, one of the old Nazi party stalwarts, head of the National-Socialist organization of Germans in Switzerland — at the hands of the Jewish assassin David Frankfurter. The reason was the upcoming re-occupation of the Rhineland on March 7, 1936 (Operation Winter Exercise) and the 1936 Berlin Summer Olympics — for which public opinion abroad must not be upset unnecessarily. In November 1938, in contrast, such consequences were not only immaterial but had become for Hitler the very be-all and end-all of the operation.<sup>54</sup>

At first glance, such an explanation may appear surprising since it links two events that would seem to be totally unrelated. For Hitler, however, there was now perhaps a double nexus — not only tactical, but also ideological. In *Mein Kampf*, and again in his *Zweites Buch* (1928), he had asserted there was a

---

<sup>53</sup> In a discussion with Brauchitsch, Supreme Commander of the Army; see David Irving, *Hitlers Weg zum Krieg* (Munich: Herbig, 1979), p. 303.

<sup>54</sup> On the consequences, see *inter alia* the report dated November 17, 1938, by Dirksen, the German ambassador in London. It is stated there that the British government's desire for a resumption of talks with Berlin had been postponed for the present as a result of the pogrom. He noted that those willing to come to an understanding were now despondent, and Chamberlain's position had been damaged; ADAP, D, vol. IV, no. 269, p. 289.

power struggle in England between the “Anglo-Saxon Englishness” and “Jewry.” At the end of 1938, he probably had reached the conclusion that the scales were tipping in favor of the latter; in this case, it was possible both to provoke English Jewry by attacking their “co-racialists” in Germany and to punish them for the insubordinate behavior of their government.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, several British diplomats were clear-sighted enough to suspect the link. Robert Vansittart, an undersecretary in the Foreign Office, surmised that Berlin had staged the pogrom with the secondary aim of stirring up heated controversy between the German and British press.<sup>56</sup>

The charge d'affaires in the British embassy in Berlin, Ogilvie-Forbes, was very forceful in cautioning his government against intervening actively in any manner in the events transpiring in Germany.<sup>57</sup> In light of the fact that German propaganda was alleging the presence of British “wire-pullers” behind the scenes in connection with the Paris assassination, it would, he argued, be viewed in Germany as a confirmation of these accusations should Britain decide to dispatch a special representative to Berlin. And that could spark new violence against both Britons and Jews. He was obviously apprehensive lest a British intervention provide the prelude to an overt German-English crisis. And perhaps Hitler would indeed have exploited such a chance to deal the final death blow, before the eyes of an incensed German public, to the policy of appeasement. One month later, the diplomat compared Hitler to a tiger who had been cheated out of his prey in the September crisis but was still poised, ready to spring. Relying on a reputedly reliable source within German governmental circles, Ogilvie-Forbes warned that Hitler was intent on fomenting trouble with Britain. He expressly categorized the pogrom as being part of that context: “The persecution of the Jews and the press campaign against England, both of which

---

<sup>55</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Munich: Eher, 1939), p. 720; Gerhard L. Weinberg, ed., *Hitlers Zweites Buch. Ein Dokument aus dem Jahr 1928* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1961), p. 223. See also Andreas Hillgruber, “England in Hitlers aussenpolitischer Konzeption,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 218 (1974), pp. 65-84, quote p. 71.

<sup>56</sup> Memo from Vansittart, December 13, 1938, quoted in Joseph Henke, *England in Hitlers politischem Kalkuel 1935-1939* (Boppard: Boldt, 1973), p. 203.

<sup>57</sup> Ogilvie-Forbes to British Foreign Secretary Halifax, November 10, 1938. *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939*, Third Series, vol. III (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1950), no. 299, pp. 266 f. The previous day, Halifax had asked Ogilvie-Forbes to state his position on the call by Chaim Weizmann, president of the World Zionist Organization, who had urged the British government to dispatch a representative to intercede personally with Hitler on behalf of the Jews in Germany; *ibid.*, no. 297, p. 264.

the Chancellor is personally conducting, are symptomatic of his frame of mind.”<sup>58</sup>

The connection between the pogrom and Hitler's foreign-policy plans becomes more plausible if one ponders the conditions under which he had to implement his aims. First of all, it is necessary to recall that the war Hitler now desired was not merely against an eastern neighbor, in this instance Poland, but would be a great European-wide war between Germany and the Western powers. This, too, may initially seem surprising, since it has been commonly maintained that, in 1939, Hitler wanted, if at all possible, to avoid war with the Western powers. Yet it is quite probable that, already by 1938, he was prepared to consider fighting a war against France and Britain.<sup>59</sup>

After the Munich Conference, the readiness to wage such a war if necessary changed into a resolute will to bring that war about. This can be deduced not only from the policies he was now pursuing; it is also reflected in a number of statements made by Hitler to Mussolini, Ciano, and Hungarian Foreign Minister Csaky between September 1938 and September 1939. The tenor of those remarks was that war with the Western powers was inevitable and that the Axis powers had to choose the most favorable moment to strike—which meant as soon as possible, as long as Hitler and Mussolini were still young, and Western countermeasures had not been completed.<sup>60</sup> These statements were far clearer and unequivocal than what Hitler told his own top echelon. And that points up what Hitler's true problem was — creeping fear. Not only was the German population frightened by the chilling prospect of a new European war, but the

---

<sup>58</sup> Ogilvie-Forbes to British Foreign Secretary Halifax, December 6, 1938, *ibid.*, no. 403, p. 388.

<sup>59</sup> This is evidenced by his military and diplomatic preparations in the summer of 1938: together with Hungary, he wished to bring Czechoslovakia to its knees within the span of a few days and then to relocate his troops to the west. Meanwhile, by means of activity in the Alps, Italy was to delay French reaction for the decisive interval; see my description in Stefan Kley, *Hitler, Ribbentrop, und die Entfesselung des Zweiten Weltkriegs* (Paderborn: Schoeningh, 1996), pp. 62 f.

<sup>60</sup> The following individual statements are relevant: to Mussolini, September 28, 1938, ADAP, D, vol. II, no. 415; to Csaky, August 8, 1939, *ibid.*, vol. VI, no. 784; to Ciano, August 12, 1939, see Galeazzo Ciano, *Tagebuecher 1939-1943* (Bern: Scherz, 1946), pp. 122 f.; three letters to Mussolini, August 26/27, and September 3, 1939, ADAP, D, vol. VII, nos. 307, 341, 565. In the letter to Mussolini dated August 27, he let it be known that he “would deploy troops in the West ... sometime this winter, by the spring at the latest.” The “Thoughts on Discussions by the Army with Italy” (*Gedanken fuer Wehrmachtsbesprechungen mit Italien*, ADAP, D, vol. IV, no. 411), written in November 1938, also dealt centrally with the division of tasks among the Axis powers in the event of a large-scale war in Europe.

German leadership echelon was as well, extending all the way into the innermost sanctum around Hitler. That is why he was unable simply to declare the war he so strongly desired: he had to goad and provoke the adversary as long as necessary until he finally declared war on Hitler — or, more accurately, on Germany.

That may also sound surprising. If Hitler, as his propaganda untiringly asserted, was indeed a strong dictator, alone at the helm guiding his people's fate, then he ought to have been able simply to call the tune: to dictate the realization of his aims and make sure those orders were carried out. The response to this objection is: (1) that Hitler's power also brushed up against limits when he aimed at seemingly unrealistic objectives, which even his faithful followers believed were unachievable; and (2) that he understood how to surmount these limits by deftly concealing his plans and being deceptive about his own role. That is why he did not spell out his aims in full, or revealed them only partially. That is why he received his aides on an individual basis — in order to give them only the instructions they required for their limited task area. That is why he pursued his goals traversing such confused paths that his helpers and intimates sooner or later lost track and were unable to comprehend the entire picture.

The unleashing of the November 9 pogrom was a case in point. His motives sprang from a domain that seemingly had so little to do with the whole affair that no one guessed the real connection.<sup>61</sup> He gave instructions to Goebbels so discreetly that no one else knew the exact contents of his orders. Then he departed from the stage so as to be able to distance himself later on from the

---

<sup>61</sup> In conclusion, the interesting circumstance worth noting is that Gerald Reitlinger suspected the connection early on. In a footnote he stated: "If the pogroms were staged in order to challenge Western opinion and to stop Hitler coming into line with the Munich spirit of appeasement, the result could not have been better"; see Reitlinger, *The Final Solution*, p. 14. But apparently Reitlinger immediately rejected the idea by expressing it in the unreal past subjunctive. Moreover, he did not view Hitler as a manipulator but, rather, as the victim of evil machinations, behind which he suspected Ribbentrop's hand. It is no longer possible to determine Ribbentrop's actual role. The only relevant datum is contained in a work that has to be excluded as a source due to its apologetic bias; namely, Fritz Hesse, *Das Spiel um Deutschland* (Munich: List, 1953); cf. Helmut Krausnick, "Legenden um Hitlers Aussenpolitik," *Vierteljahrshefte fuer Zeitgeschichte* 2 (1954), pp. 217-239. Given his general position, however, as discussed above, Ribbentrop could not have had any interest in the event. It is also difficult to imagine how he might have been able to intervene in the course of events. At any rate, in July 1938, he had requested Goebbels, for reasons of foreign policy, to show moderation in dealing with the Jews of Berlin; see Froehlich, ed., *Die Tagebuecher von Joseph Goebbels, Teil I*, vol. 3, p. 473 (July 6, 1938).

action. During the night Himmler received the orders for nationwide mass arrests; the following day, he ordered Goering to strip the Jews of their assets. It may be that, in reality, the three adjuncts played a more active role, presenting their own suggestions to Hitler. The essential point, however, was that none of them acted *on his own*: they sought the *Fuehrer's* legitimating stamp of approval for their plans, thus transferring the decision (and responsibility) in effect to him.

It was also important that they never had a joint consultation together with Hitler; thus, not one of them could obtain a clear picture of what the others were doing and thinking. It was characteristic that Himmler quite seriously believed the pogrom had taken Hitler himself by surprise.<sup>62</sup> The myth of the good but occasionally unknowing *Fuehrer* was more than just a key mechanism to secure mass loyalty, it also shaped the relations between Hitler and his top leadership echelon.

All this was likewise quite confusing for those who, after the fact, have attempted to illuminate the events. For a long time, the *Kristallnacht* pogrom appeared as if it were one station on the twisted road to the “Final Solution.” In Hitler's eyes, it was far from that. From his perspective, it was a kind of detour — yes, perhaps even a wrong track, which, for quite different reasons, he felt it necessary to pursue. Yet viewed over the longer term, he behaved in a highly consistent manner. The pogrom was a step down the path to armed conflict, a war that would, above all else, also become a war to destroy the Jews.

Translated from the German by William Templer

**Source: *Yad Vashem Studies*, Vol. 28, Jerusalem (2000), pp. 87- 113**

---

<sup>62</sup> Goering indicated similar ideas in testimony given in Nuremberg; see statement by Goering, March 14, 1946, *IMT*, vol. IX, pp. 313 f.