The Wehrmacht and the War of Extermination against the Soviet Union

JÜRGEN FÖRSTER

The war against the Soviet Union is rightly called the “most monstrous war of conquest, enslavement and extermination” in modern times.\(^1\) Ernst Nolte’s 1963 judgment has lost none of its validity even in view of the genocide in Cambodia under the Pol Pot regime. The totally different character of the German-Soviet war—in comparison to the “normal European war” waged against France—can only be explained by Hitler’s attempt to realize his long-cherished aims in the East. These were to gain Lebensraum (living-space) for the German nation and at the same time to destroy the “Jewish-Bolshevik mortal enemy.” Military action for the sake of conquest and political and police measures to safeguard the acquired living-space were two different aspects of one single great war of extermination, in which also the Wehrmacht was to play a specific role. It is certainly a travesty of the truth to maintain that only the four Einsatzgruppen (Action Groups) of the Security Police and the Security Service liquidated Jews and Communist functionaries. The Wehrmacht too participated in the extermination of the “Jewish Bolshevism.” Nonetheless, the general public in

\(^{1}\) Ernst Nolte, Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche, Munich, 1963, p. 463
the Bundesrepublik still tends to differentiate neatly between the military campaign against the Red Army and the simultaneous mass murder of the Jews, communists and prisoners of war. There is just no other way to explain the extremely intense and generally negative viewers' reaction to Report, a political program on "Crimes of the German Wehrmacht in World War Two," screened on German television on December 11, 1979.² Despite clearly drawn differentiations, the editor was accused of partiality and deliberate defamation of the German soldier. Painful as the confrontation with this part of the German past may be for the older generation, and even if the expression "the unconquered past" (unbewältigte Vergangenheit) has become a source of irritation for them, the historian must strive for clarification. "History breaches the walls of self-deception which we are constantly constructing by confronting us with the past, without constraints or distortions."³ For many combatants and their contemporaries the memory of the summer of 1941 was distorted. This because National-Socialist propaganda emphasized outrages perpetrated by the Red Army (particularly during its advance into Germany) and the sufferings of German soldiers as Soviet prisoners of war thus over-shadowing the actual conduct of the "warfare" as practised by the Wehrmacht itself. Subsequently, the Cold War not only prevented any modification of this picture of the enemy, but also provided justification for the German attack on June 22, 1941.⁴

German contemporary history has for too long been preoccupied with the "German Catastrophe" (F. Meinecke) and has

thus overlooked the Holocaust. Not before the sixties was the racial-ideological base of Hitler's concept of the war in the East, and the close connection between the military campaign and the war against the Jews described. This may be a reason too why the National-Socialist euphemistic terms for the extermination process are still being taken by some Germans at face value. So, for instance, around a table of regular patrons drinking in Bürgstadt, the role of the mayor, Ernst Heinrichsohn, in the deportation of French Jews to Auschwitz earned the following cynical comment: "He merely sent the Jews off to work which did them good."

Hitler's war against the Soviet Union stemmed from his Lebensraum concept, which combined expansion to the East with the extermination of Bolshevism and the annihilation of Judaism. As considerations of social Darwinism, racism, food supply and power politics were inextricably intertwined, it would be pointless to try and reconstruct the order of precedence governing Hitler's decision. In 1940/41 the strategic necessity of safeguarding the sphere of influence acquired vis-à-vis the Anglo-Saxon naval powers and of limiting the existing dependence on the Soviet Union, were combined with the reali-


7 Badische Zeitung, No. 274, 27.11.1979, p. 3.

zation of Hitler’s actual objectives. The conquest of the European part of the Soviet Union, regarded as essential for attaining blockade-defensible world power status, simultaneously provided the opportunity to initiate the annihilation of Judaism. For Hitler, Jewish power and Bolshevism were identical. Hitler’s specific hatred of Jews can be pinpointed to a precisely dated trauma. While differing radically from other forms of religious, social or competitive anti-Semitism, these forms could still be utilized for satisfying his obsession.

Hitler’s concept of the War in the East comprises four elements:

1. procuring colonial territory for German settlers;
2. annihilation of the “Jewish-Bolshevik” leadership stratum, including its so-called biological root—the millions of Jews in East Central Europe;
3. decimation of the Slav masses and their domination by four German “viceroy}s”—the Reich Commissars;
4. exploitation of the economic resources in the conquered countries to safeguard the planned Germanic Empire against any form of blockade.

The conquest of Russia would restore world power status to the Reich and enable it to challenge even the United States, so Hitler thought.9 In the middle of July 1941, when Hitler and the military command believed they had overcome the Red Army, Hitler announced his destructive plan for the East in the terse formula: “Control, administer, exploit.”10 The “giant cake” was to be conveniently cut up; however, apart from a few end-slices to be conceded to Finland and Rumania, Germany was to be the only beneficiary. This would at last provide the “healthy” ratio between the number of Germans and Ger-

10 IMT XXXVIII, pp. 86–94.
man Lebensraum. In the East a "Garden of Eden" was to be created for the Germans. Even measures of "shooting, transfer of population, etc." ready for implementation, were to continue, although this concept of a "New Order" for the Soviet Union was to be carefully camouflaged. In addition to the extermination of "Jewish Bolshevism," the extensive exploitation of the occupied territories in favor of the Wehrmacht and the German population implied the death by starvation of millions of Soviet citizens, civilians and prisoners of war.

From the end of February 1941 onwards, when military preparations for Operation Barbarossa were already far advanced, Hitler hinted—first within a small circle of his advisers and then before a wider public—at his decision to conduct the approaching campaign as a racial-ideological war of extermination. On March 3, 1941 Hitler rejected the OKW's (High Command of the Armed Forces) "Guidelines for Special Fields to Directive No. 21 (Barbarossa Case)," issuing concrete directives for a new draft. The approaching campaign was to be more than just an armed struggle, it would also lead to a struggle between two Weltanschauungen. The Soviet Union must be demolished, and the "Jewish-Bolshevik intelligentsia" that had oppressed the nation must be "liquidated."  

Jodl gave instructions as to how the guidelines were to be altered. Military administration was to be restricted to the area of operation—the combat zone and the rear areas of the armies and the army groups. "The necessity for immediate liquidation of all Bolshevik bosses and commissars" would entail use of the SS in the area of operations in addition to the army's Secret Field Police. Military courts should be excluded from these spheres. Two days later the new draft was already passed on to the High Command of the Army (OKH) for comment. The Army command accepted that Himmler was entrusted

with "special tasks" in the operations area, even though since Poland they had known what this signified. As in 1939 the OKH was happy to be permitted to concentrate on military matters and not to be held answerable for the National-Socialist program of extermination.12 With "turning a blind eye" no opposition could possibly develop against the OKW's "Guidelines for Special Fields" of March 13, and thus the "agreement between the army and the SS" of March 26 could be drawn up. This thinking appears to have been characteristic of the majority of the conservative commanding officers. By way of illustration we cite a discussion between the commander of Army Group Center, Field-Marshall von Leeb, and the commander of the rear area, General von Roques on July 8, 1941:

Roques... complains about the wholesale shooting of Jews in Kovno (thousands) by local Lithuanian Schutzverbände [auxiliary police] at the instigation of the German police. We have no control over these measures. All that remains is to keep one's distance. Roques aptly supposed that the Jewish Question could hardly be solved in this manner. It would most reliably be solved by sterilizing all Jewish males.13

In the agreement between the army and the SS, the military command might initially have believed that it would not be held responsible for this "cleaning-up" in the new Lebensraum.14 Hitler was determined, however, to convert the Wehr-

14 This was the formulation of the objectives of the SS in Poland, directed against Jewry, the intelligentsia, the clergy and the aristocracy, Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, ed., Generaloberst Halder, Kriegstage-
macht as well into an instrument in the racial-ideological war of extermination and thus erase the boundary between military and political-ideological warfare. This intention became known on March 30, 1941, in a major address in the Reichskanzlei to over two hundred commanding officers and chiefs of staff of the units taking part in Barbarossa. Hitler stated openly that he did not want to see the impending war against the Soviet Union conducted according to customary military principles, but as a "war of extermination" against an ideology and its adherents:

Clash between two ideologies... Bolshevism equals a social criminality. Communism [is a] tremendous danger for the future. We must get away from the standpoint of soldierly comradeship. The Communist is no comrade, either before or after. It is a war of extermination... We do not wage war in order to conserve the enemy... The extermination of the Bolshevik commissars and Communist intelligentsia... The battle must be conducted against the poison of decay. It is not a question of military courts. The leaders must know what is involved. They must take the lead in this struggle! The troops must defend themselves with the methods with which they are attacked. Commissars and secret service personnel are criminals and must be treated as such. The troops should not get out of control of their leaders. The leader must give the orders in accordance with the feelings of the troops. The leaders must make sacrifices and overcome their scruples.\(^{15}\)

As early as February 10, 1939, in an as yet relatively unknown speech to the army field commanders, Hitler had defined his projected war for Lebensraum as "purely a war of ideologies, that is to say, absolutely a nation's (Volks) and a racial war."\(^{16}\) He had further demanded that in addition to Supreme

\(^{15}\) Halder, KTB II, Stuttgart 1963, p. 336f.

\(^{16}\) Bundesarchiv Koblenz (BA), NS 11/28, BL 86 ff. Jochen Thies first drew attention to this speech, though in a different context: Archi-
Commander of the Wehrmacht, he be regarded as supreme ideological leader to whom, as officers, they owed allegiance for better or for worse. His clear-cut demand that the entire officer’s corps form “his very last guard” towards achieving ideologically slanted objectives is significant for the relationship between Hitler and the army, especially when viewed against the background of his “prophecy” on January 30, 1939:

If international Jewry inside and outside Europe should succeed once more in plunging the nations into another war, the consequence will not be the bolshevization of the earth and thus the victory of Judaism, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe!\(^{17}\)

Hitler’s intentions as announced on March 30, 1941 evoked the usual routine reactions by the Wehrmacht and the army command with the participation of the relevant departments and sections. The guidelines of March 13 had, after all, already conveyed special orders governing the conduct of soldiers and the functions of military courts. Without any protest, officers and officials of the OKW and OKH drew up the orders, later to be termed “criminal,” which were to prove decisive in determining the character of the war in the East:\(^{18}\) “Decree concerning the Exercise of Military Jurisdiction and Procedure in the Barbarossa Area and Special Measures of the Troops


in Russia" of May 13, 1941; "Guidelines for the Conduct of Troops in Russia," of May 19, 1941; and "Guidelines for the Treatment of Political Commissars" of June 6, 1941. All later assertions that participants had been acting according to orders, or had even moderated given objectives, are pure fiction. It was precisely because officers and officials in the top command recognized the decline of international military law into a function of political expediency, that they acknowledged the necessity of cloaking the decreed measures as preventive reprisals. The unrestricted shooting of civilians by military personnel was justified, for instance, on the basis of post-1918 German history or in connection with military security. The army commanders and their legal advisers thus became "Hitler's partners in crime."\(^{19}\)

The "guidelines for the conduct of the troops" declared Bolshevism to be the deadly enemy of the National-Socialist German nation. "It is against this destructive ideology and its adherents that Germany is waging war." This battle demands "ruthless and vigorous measures against Bolshevik inciters, guerillas, saboteurs, Jews and the complete elimination of all active and passive resistance."\(^{20}\) The allusion equating Bolshevism with Judaism did not fall on barren ground in the army. For example, as early as May 2, 1941, General Hoepner, Commander of Panzer Group 4 until his recall in the winter of 1941, and later an active member of the military resistance, in a deployment directive, stated the consequences of Hitler's speech of March 30, 1941:

The war against Russia is an important chapter in the German nation's struggle for existence. It is the old battle of the Germanic against the Slav people, of the defence of European culture against Muscovite-Asiatic inundation, and the repulse of Jewish Bolshevism. The objective of this battle must be the demolition


\(^{20}\) My italics.
of present-day Russia and must therefore be conducted with unprecedented severity. Every military action must be guided in planning and execution by an iron resolution to exterminate the enemy remorselessly and totally. In particular, no adherents of the contemporary Russian Bolshevik system are to be spared.\textsuperscript{21}

The decree on military jurisdiction can be viewed as an "example of systematic projection of National Socialist legal theory onto an ideological foe."\textsuperscript{22} The whole concept of ius in bello was viewed as an irksome obstacle to warfare. Thus General Müller, General Officer on Special Duties and the army's senior liaison officer for legal affairs could, while lecturing to intelligence officers and military judges on June 11, 1941, state that "in the operation to come feelings of justice must in certain situations give way to military exigencies and then revert to old habits of warfare... One of the two adversaries must be finished off. Adherents of the hostile attitude are not to be conserved, but liquidated."\textsuperscript{23} Any civilian impeding or inciting to impede the Wehrmacht was to be considered a "guerilla" and executed by the troops. In cases of doubt, suspicion was sufficient ground for an officer to pass the death sentence. In cases of attack upon the Wehrmacht where the individual culprit could not be identified quickly (on the suggestion of General Halder, Chief of the Army General Staff) "collective measures of force" were to be launched against villages or populations. Thus, later, burning of villages, mass executions and indiscriminate shooting became common features of anti-guerilla operations carried out by the armed forces.

\textsuperscript{21} Panzergruppe 4, Ia 20/41, Appendix 2, in "Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv" (BA-MA), Freiburg 17 956/7. It has now become clear why the leader of Action Group A described his collaboration with Panzer Group 4 as "very close and almost cordial," \textit{IMT XXXVII}, p. 671.


\textsuperscript{23} NOKW-2672 and BA-MA 13 119/1.
The initiative for the formulation of the "Commissar Order" was clearly that of the OKH. When the first draft was explained to General Halder, he pronounced in agreement: "Troops must participate in the ideological battle in the Eastern campaign to the end." Highly-placed political officials and leaders (commissars) could be shot not only as suspects in a hostile act, but merely for holding a position in the Red Army or in the Soviet power system. The Army command's fear that such individuals might continue disseminating propaganda in the Reich if taken prisoner of war, was a major factor dictating the treatment of political commissars of all kinds, illegal by all international rules. The Commander-in-Chief later ordered officers to be continually scrutinizing the prisoner of war camps. It would be incorrect to underrate the effect the "Commissar Order" had on the conduct of the troops, and as Nolte still did, assume that they generally knew how to circumvent it. The large number of executions listed in official reports speak in too clear a language. Are we really to believe that the listing in the report was deliberately manipulated, as former soldiers apologetically claim? Frequently the corps simply reported "negative," indicating that no false reports had to be made.

The planned extermination of an ideology by the Wehrmacht was continued inside the prisoner of war camps in the area of operations. That this was carried out a great deal more systematically when the Einsatzkommandos of the Security Police and the Security Service took over the murder operations, can be taken for granted: "Most of the Soviet commissars, high functionaries, etc. were not shot at the front, but only in

24 Halder, KTB II, p. 339, 6.5.1941.
25 Nolte, Der Faschismus, p. 437.
26 Cf. Streit's enumeration in Keine Kameraden, pp. 88-89. Much additional evidence for the execution of the "Commissar Order" is available in the Ic-papers, BA-MA.
27 Cf. Meyer, Leeb, p. 61, Note 240.
the various prisoner of war camps.” Responsibility for prisoners of war in the “Barbarossa Case” was shared by the OKW and OKH. Within the Reich, in occupied Poland and in the Reich Commissariats, Ostland and the Ukraine, created at a later stage, responsibility was borne by the OKW, and in the area of operations of the army, by the OKH. As early as June 10, 1941 the Commander-in-Chief voiced his fear that after discarding their insignia a number of Red Army political commissars might have entered prisoner of war camps unrecognized. Two weeks later an order of the Army Quartermaster-General decreed the “immediate isolation of politically intolerable and suspicious elements, commissars and agitators.” The camp commanders were to deal with them “in accordance with the special directives,” that is to say, to shoot them according to the “Decree on Military Jurisdiction” and “Commissar Order.” Employing the Security Police and the Security Service for this task was, however, still out of the question. “Asians (according to race), Jews, German-speaking Russians” were also to be segregated, though not to be shot, merely to be retained at a distance from Germany. This practice was not always observed; there was some collaboration with the SS and also Jews were shot in prisoner of war camps in the operation areas. This is borne out by the suggestion of the commandant of Transit Camp 131 in Slonim; he intimated to the prisoner of war District Commandant J in the rear area of Army Group Center that Jewish doctors “were not to be shot out of hand.” This is also documented by reports of the Einsatzgruppen. On the other hand, we know of the refusal of a camp commandant in Mogilev “to deliver up Jewish prisoners for special treatment (a euphemism for killing), since no order had been sub-

28 Krausnick, Kommissarbefehl, p. 736.
30 BA-MA RH 22/251.
mitted by the authorized Wehrmacht office."\textsuperscript{31} To be sure, on October 7, 1941 the Army command revoked the ruling prohibiting the \textit{Einsatzkommandos} of the Security Police and the Security Service from entering the camps in the area of operations; it adopted this practice obligatory in the OKW province since July, thus sanctioning the collaboration with the SS already practised in the rear areas of the army groups.

On 17 July, 1941 the OKW decreed that the Wehrmacht was to free itself from all those elements among the prisoners of war considered Bolshevik driving forces. The special situation of the Eastern Campaign therefore demands \textit{special measures} which are to be carried out free from bureaucratic and administrative influence and with a willingness to accept responsibility. While so far the regulations and orders concerning prisoners of war were based solely on \textit{military} considerations, now the \textit{political} objective must be attained, which is to protect the German nation from Bolshevik inciters and forthwith take the occupied territory strictly in hand.\textsuperscript{32}

After an initial separation of civilians and prisoners of war by Wehrmacht personnel according to nationality (\textit{Volkstumszugehörigkeit}) and political trustworthiness, the "specially trained" \textit{Einsatzkommando} of the Security Police and the Security Service then took over further selection and liquidation. According to Heydrich's guidelines this applied to all Jews. The OKW order of July 17 and its implementation by the army at the beginning of October 1941 achieved the "last radicalization in extermination of opponents within the framework of the ideologically based orders developed since March 1941."\textsuperscript{33} At least 580,000 to 600,000 Soviet citizens fell victim to it.

However, in the OKW some efforts were made, early on,

\textsuperscript{31} Streit, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 102.
\textsuperscript{32} Quoted from Streit, p. 90.
\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 93.
towards the treatment of Soviet prisoners of war in conformance with international law. They originated from the "Law of War" branch in the office for foreign counter-intelligence. Helmuth James von Moltke was the author of that memorandum in which on September 15, 1941, Admiral Canaris pointed to the validity of the principles of general international law, even if the 1929 Geneva Convention for the treatment of prisoners of war was not binding between Germany and the Soviet Union. It would be contrary to military tradition to kill or injure defenceless people. This intervention in favor of the Soviet prisoners of war, which seemed particularly urgent owing to the recently renewed order of July 17, was rejected by Keitel: "These scruples accord with the soldierly concepts of a chivalrous war! Here we are concerned with the extermination of an ideology. That is why I approve of and defend this measure." In particular, Keitel considered the SS selections on a racial-ideological basis "very appropriate."34 In this context it is well to note that Claus von Stauffenberg, questioned about his readiness for active opposition against the National-Socialist regime, in the winter of 1941 was still declaring: "During the war one must not do such a thing, especially not in a war against the Bolsheviks. But then, when we come home, we shall do away with the brown pest!" Helmuth von Moltke reacted to this attitude with the bitter remark: "They just aren't generals, but technicians, military technicians, and the whole thing is an enormous crime."35

From August 1941 onwards, the "Commissar Order" was also criticized by field commanders, not so much because it contravened international law, as on practical grounds. It would have led to the stiffening of Soviet resistance. On September 23, 1941 the Army command requested the OKW to examine the

34 IMT XXXVI, pp. 317–320.
implementation of the "Commissar Order," taking into considera-
tion the development of the operative situation. However,
Hitler refused any change. It was only in May 1942 that the
pressure exerted by the field commanders showed results. The
"Commissar Order" was suspended in the operations area in
order to encourage the tendency of the Soviet soldiers to desert.
On June 1 "special treatment" of commanders and politruks
was discontinued in the prisoner of war camps: in October this
order was rescinded. The Einsatzkommandos were ordered to
ascertain whether commissars and politruks had deserted or
whether they had been taken prisoner in action; the latter
were to be executed and the deserters to be taken to the Mauthau-
sen concentration camp. In the case of "Jews, criminals, etc.,"
the present procedure was to continue, that is to say, they were
to be shot.36

Besides the shooting of hundreds of thousands of politically
and racially "intolerable" prisoners of war, the wholesale death
of countless Red Army soldiers in German custody also re-
quires an explanation. This is supplied in a convincing manner
by Christian Streit. Even though no deliberate policy of whole-
sale extermination existed, still, the murder was generally con-
donned. The military command, reckoning on a short war, was
in no hurry to solve the problem of the calculated masses of
prisoners. Of primary importance were the establishment and
security of German rule in the East and the exploitation of
sources of food and raw materials for the use of the Wehr-
macht and the Reich.37 The minimal amount of foodstuffs was
to be provided for prisoners of war so as to extract the maxi-
mum from the country for German needs. Not before August
6, 1941, was the food supplied to Soviet prisoners of war uni-
formly fixed for all the camps. For working prisoners, the ra-
tions totalled 2,200 calories and for non-working prisoners,

36 Streit, op. cit., p. 253f.
37 Ibid., p. 128f.
2,040 calories. On October 21 they were drastically reduced for the camps in the operations area, in the Reich Commissariats and in occupied Poland, though not within the Reich proper. The fat ration was reduced by 34%, the potato ration by 44%. Rations for non-working prisoners totalled only 1,490 calories. When granting extra rations to working prisoners, a "particularly strict criterion" was to be employed. The unit leaders should realize that "any food supplied to the prisoners irregularly or in excess would be deducted from that of relatives at home or from the German soldier." Still under the trauma of the 1918 defeat, the atmosphere at home was regarded as an important factor in the conduct of the war; for that reason no political commissar was to be permitted to "escape" into the prisoner of war camps inside the Reich, and for that same reason, on no account were the rations of the German population to be reduced. This sequence led to the dreadful wholesale death of Soviet prisoners of war in the autumn and winter of 1941, since not even the rations approved on October 21 were distributed in the camps.

At the meeting between the army command and the field commanders in Orša on November 13, 1941, the Quartermaster-General, General Wagner, explained: "Non-working prisoners of war in the camps are to starve. In individual cases working prisoners of war can also be fed from army provisions. In view of the general state of the food supply, even this cannot, unfortunately, take the form of an order." On top of undernourishment and inadequate shelter from the wet and cold there came typhus and typhoid fever. Only after the failure of the expected "quick campaign" and due to the shortage of manpower in the war economy did the "value" of the Soviet prisoners of war rise and their situation improve. While at the end of January 1942 only 147,736 prisoners were employed in

38 Quoted from Streit, p. 142.
the war economy, they numbered some 750,000 towards the end of the war. Of a total of 5.7 million Soviet prisoners of war, c. 3.3 million died in German captivity. As a comparison, of the 3.2 million German prisoners of war in Soviet captivity, some 1.2 million died.\footnote{Ibid., p. 244ff.}

German security policy in the occupied territories in the East was a complex matter from the very onset of the campaign. Military security and administration met, mixed, and overlapped or were jointly conducted by the army and the SS. While the military command advocated the harshest measures against a sign of resistance within the operations area and had decreed “ruthless and vigorous action against Bolshevik inciters, guerillas, saboteurs, Jews,”\footnote{OKH/GenStdH/GenQu Abt. Kriegsverwaltung No. II/0315/41 of 3.4.1941 (BA-MA RH 22/12) and the OKW (“Richtlinien für das Vorhalten der Truppe in Russland”), 19.5.1941.} the SS carried out the “special tasks for the preparation of the political administration” on behalf of the Führer. These consisted not only in apprehending politically dangerous persons in “investigating and combating all attempts at hostile acts against the state and the Reich,” but also in the execution of all Jews. These were to lay the foundations “for the final removal of Bolshevism.”\footnote{As stated by the representative of the SD, Colonel Nockermann, at a meeting between the OKW/Abwehr and the OKH on 6.6.1941 in Berlin, BA-MA H 3/482—RH 19 III (688). For the action of the Einsatzgruppen cf. the fundamental study of H. Krausnick and K. Willuml, Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges. Quellen und Darstellungen zur Zeitgeschichte, Vol. 22, Stuttgart, 1980.} Both “armor-bearers” were committed to the “closest co-operation.” Each commander of the army group’s rear area commanded three specially organized Security divisions and three battalions of Order Police. The Higher SS—and Police Leaders allocated to the three sectors—North, Center and South—had control over the four Einsatzgruppen as well as three regiments of Order Police. Upon authorization of the Higher
SS—and Police Leader, the commander of the army group’s rear area could employ Order Police personnel for military objectives. The differentiation between the functions of the Wehrmacht and the SS as propounded by the delegate of the Army Quartermaster-General (see above) remained academic. Wehrmacht: overcoming the enemy; Reichsführer SS: the political and police surveillance of the enemy. This distinction was bound to collapse with the systematic extermination of an ideological opponent and the ideological delusion of many officers and men. It was Hitler who recognized the “chance” offered to him by Stalin’s appeal for a partisan war behind the front: “He gives us the possibility to exterminate everyone who opposes us.” As we know, a few weeks earlier the General Officer on Special Duties had explained the dispensation of military jurisdiction of Barbarossa saying that the “adherents of the hostile attitude were not to be conserved, but to be liquidated.” That is why the supplement to “Directive No. 33: The continuation of the war in the East,” of July 23, 1941, required breaking resistance in the conquered territories in the East not “by means of judicial punishment of the guilty” but by the use of terror to “eradicate any desire for insubordination within the population.”

The OKW directive was followed on July 25 by an order of OKH, which stipulated that the leading principle in all actions was the unconditional security of the German soldier.

The essential rapid pacification of the country can only be achieved if every threat on the part of the hostile civilian population is dealt with ruthlessly. All pity and softness are weakness, and constitute a danger.

43 Cf. Himmler’s note, 21.5.1941, NOKW-2079 and BA-MA RH 22/156.
45 IMT XXXVIII, p. 88.
47 OKH/Gen z.b.V. beim ObdH/Az. 453 Gr R Wes No. 1332/41, 25.7.1941. BA-MA 14768/5 and RH 27–7/41.
However, some field commanders attempted to distinguish between military duties and SS functions. While soldiers were not permitted to participate in mass executions of Jews by SS squads, they assisted to the extent of cordoning off the execution area. As late as spring 1942, rear area commanders still saw fit to reiterate those orders; this can only be interpreted as confirmation of the facts.48 Not only Communist functionaries were regarded as "adherents of the hostile attitude" and as "Bolshevik motivating forces," but also the Jews. Years of indoctrination of the Wehrmacht and the stereotyped formula of "Jewish Bolshevism" began to bear fruit.

Practical collaboration between the army and SS in the persecution of the Jews could come about so that advance units of the SS Action Groups advanced with the combat units, frequently even at the express wish of commanders; aside from identifying and registering Jews, field commanders actually ordered their arrest so that it was easy for the SS units to get them into their clutches. This is what happened, for example, with the LVII Corps under General von Manstein. When after the occupation of Dünaburg there were still cases of arson, the commanding officers were only too willing to believe the assertions of the "civilian population that above all the Jews... were directly or indirectly guilty of these acts of sabotage against the troops."49 After the arrest of the Jewish males the situation in Dünaburg was said to have changed "instantaneously." The assistant adjutant for counter intelligence, Intelligence Branch, acted on the basis of "experience" gained after the occupation of Rositten at the beginning of July 1941. A

48 Cf. orders of 207th Security Division, 22.7.1941 (BA-MA RH 22/271), of command of rear area Army Group South, 29.7.1941 (RH 22/5), of Commander of Army Group South, 24.9.1941 (RH 19 I/73) of 27th Infantry Division, 20.11.1941 (RH 26-27/44), and of rear area commanders of Army Group South, 20.3.42 (RH 22/24) and Center, 21.3.1941 (Rh 22/230).
49 Tätigkeitsbericht des 04, 22.6. — 11.9.1941, BA-MA 17 956/32.
detachment of the Secret Field Police with the help of a platoon of motorcycle troops of the First SS Totenkopf (Death’s Head) Regiment arrested the adult male Jews “since here one had also to reckon with acts of sabotage.” At the end of August 1941, the commander of the rear area of Army Group South ordered “the setting-up of ghettos in places with a sizable Jewish population, especially in towns.” In the area of the 99th Light Infantry Division the Secret Field Police actively searched out Jews who were then handed over to the SD. Thus the Action Groups were able to report not only “excellent cooperation with the military leaders, but even a satisfactory attitude towards the Jews.

It was not only Hitler and the SS that construed a connection between “Jewish Bolshevism” and the “Partisan” Movement; military commanders also saw in the Jews special adherents of the hostile system of government, and they acted accordingly. For example, the commander of the 44th Infantry Division, in carrying out the decree on military jurisdiction, on July 21, 1941 ordered collective measures when the individual saboteur could not be identified. In characteristic phraseology it was pointed out that the collective measures could “consist of shooting local Jews or Russians, burning down Jewish or Russian houses.” The 50th Infantry Division pointed out that one must consider that Jews and Soviet party members in particular “maintain radio contact across the fronts.” When the 1st SS-Cavalry Brigade informed the commander of the rear

51 Tätigkeitsbericht des Ic of September 1941, BA-MA 21 400/17. On 26.9.1941, the divisional commander complained that officers are reluctant to take responsibility for collective measures, ibid.
52 Quoted from Streit, op. cit., p. 111.
53 44th Division, Abt. Ia op No. 63/41, BA-MA RH 26 — 44/33.
area of Army Group Center, in a report dated September 3, 1941 of the "pacification of the Prypec Marshes," asserting that the contact between the partisan units was maintained "above all by Jews" and that villages "free from Jews" had in no instance served as partisan bases—this was readily accepted. Between September 24–26, 1941 General von Schenkendorf organized a "Course for Combating the Partisans." At this exchange of experience between the army and the SS, the Higher SS- and Police Leader, von dem Bach-Zelewski, amongst others, spoke of the "apprehending of commissars and partisans," and the leader of Action Group B, Nebe, spoke of "The Jewish Question with Special Reference to the Partisan Movement." After a "school exercise" by the Order Police Regiment Center on the closing day of the course, a part of Security Regiment 2 demonstrated the "correct" selection of partisans, commissars and Communists and screening of the population.55 Upon the recommendation of General von Schenkendorf on August 31, 1941, von dem Bach received the bar of the Iron Cross Second Class in recognition of the help of the SS in the pacification of the country. At the beginning of October, the commander of the 6th Army, von Reichenau, made his attitude to the war of extermination amply clear to the soldiers under his command. In the past he had repeatedly provided active support in the annihilation practices of the Action Group C:

In the Eastern Territories the soldier is not merely a combatant according to the rules of the art of warfare; he is also the harbinger of an unwavering racial concept and an avenger for all the bestialities inflicted upon the German and related nations. That is why the soldier must have total comprehension of the necessity of the harsh but just punishment meted out to Jewish sub-humanity. A further objective is to nip in the bud rebellions in the rear of the Wehrmacht which, as we know from experience, are invariably instigated by Jews... Far from

55 BA-MA RH 22/225.
all political considerations, the soldier is called upon to accomplish two goals: 1. The complete extermination of the Bolshevist heresy, the Soviet State and its armed forces. 2. The merciless annihilation of alien treachery and cruelty in order to safeguard the life of the German Wehrmacht in Russia. Only thus will we do justice to our historical task of freeing the German nation once and for all from the Asiatic-Jewish danger.\(^{56}\)

This order concerning the “Conduct of Troops in the Eastern Territories,” termed “excellent” by Hitler, was distributed by the OKH to all armies and army groups, with a request to issue similar directives. General von Manstein, commander of the 11th Army acted upon this suggestion. In his area in the Crimea there existed strong partisan associations and Action Group D was stationed there. He stipulated on November 20, 1941:

This struggle is not only being waged against the Soviet Armed Forces in the established manner laid down by European rules of warfare. Behind the front, too, the fighting continues... Jewry acts as the middle man between the enemy in rear and the still fighting remainder of the Red Army Forces and the Red leadership. More than in Europe, it holds all the key positions in the political leadership and administration, controls trades and guilds and, further, forms the nucleus for all unrest and uprising. The Jewish-Bolshevist system must be eradicated once and for all. Never again must it encroach upon our European Lebensraum...\(^{57}\)

Like Reichenau, Manstein called upon the soldiers under his command to show understanding “for the necessity of the harsh punishment of Jewry, the spiritual carriers of the Bolshevist terror.” This could be understood by the troops as justification for the mass executions carried out by Action Groups C and D.

\(^{56}\) *IMT XXXV*, pp. 84–86.

At the end of his order Manstein called for the traditional ethics of the soldier and "against arbitrary acts and selfishness." However, just treatment was demanded only for the "non-Bolshevist" and "Russian-hating" parts of the population, in particular for the Mohammedan Tartars. At the end of November 1941 the 11th Army established a Staff for the Combating of Partisans. In accordance with the evaluation of the situation it carried out operations on its own or in collaboration with the Action Group D, and there were also instances where army units carried out operations under the command of the SS.

Orders which summarily classified the Jews as suspected partisans—and other high officers conceded this classification—naturally had their consequences. Thus, after a "cleaning-up operation" near Mirgorod in the rear area of Army Group South, the 62nd Infantry Division in addition to executing forty-five partisans, also shot the entire "Jewish population in Mirgorod (168 souls) for associating with partisans." In revenge for the shooting of a member of the armed forces, Ersatz-Brigade 202 "as an act of retaliation shot 20 Jews from the villages of Dobosjanka and Gornostajewka and burnt down 5 Jew-houses." In its preliminary final report, the 44th Security Division reported that in "combating bandits in the wooded area of Nowomoskowsk it had shot 305 bandits, 6 armed females, 39 prisoners of war, 136 Jews." On November 11 and 12, 1941 the 97th Light Infantry Division carried out a

58 In this context cf. the order of the OKH/GenStdH/GenQu/H. Wes. Abt Nr. II/7215/41, 21.10.1941 (BA-MA RH 19 II/124), the orders of the AOK 11 of 14 and 29.11.1941 (ibid., RH 20–11/341), and NOKW-3453.
59 For example General Kitzinger, Army Services Commander in the Reich Commissariat Ukraine, 17.10.1941, BA-MA RW 41/31.
60 BA-MA RH 22/3, 31.11.1941.
61 Ibid. (13.11.1941). Also the 105th Honvéd inf. Brigade on 22.12.1941 shot "Jew-gang of 90" because they were said to have supplied the partisans of Karjukowka with food. BA-MA RH 22/182, extract from the Operational Diary.
“raid” in Artemovsk against “Communists, partisans and Jews.” Those arrested (12 Communists, 6 Jews and 6 women) were taken to a concentration camp. A public threat to shoot them was designed to prevent assaults on German military personnel. The examples of the special practices employed in “combating partisans” can be listed almost endlessly.

The reports of the “Commandant in White Ruthenia of the Armed Services Commander Ostland” and commander of the 707th Infantry Division, represent a striking example of self-corroboration and self-fulfilling prophecy in the extermination of “Jewish Bolshevism,” and for that reason will be quoted here at length:

It was noticed with the Jews that they tend to leave their homes in the flat country, probably for the south, whereby they seek to escape the operations introduced against them. Since, then and now, they make common cause with the Communists and partisans, the complete extermination of this alien element is being carried out. (Monthly Report of October 1-November 10, 1941.)

The measures introduced against the Jews, as bearers of the Bolshevik idea and as leaders of the Partisan Movement, have shown tangible results. The confining of the Jews in ghettos and the liquidation of Jews convicted of partisan activity and fomenting agitation are to be continued; these are the most effective in furthering the pacification of the country. During this month the raiding-parties repeatedly noted and confirmed the association of the Jews with the Partisan Movement. (Monthly Report of November 1-November 30, 1941.)

It has been shown that concentrating the Jews in ghettos contributes everywhere to the well-being of the population and pacification of the country. It has greatly reduced the unrest among the population resulting from rumors and agitation: the support given to the partisans has been reduced considerably. Even so, we repeatedly receive reports which show that Jews make common cause with partisans, and that considerable num-

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62 BA-MA RH 22/19.
63 BA-MA 18 409/33. My italics.
bers are even armed and belong to the partisan bands. Jews are also continually involved in acts of sabotage. (Report of January 8, 1942.)

Concerning Jews and Poles, further to the previous situation reports it should be added that they work hand-in-hand with and assistCommunism and the partisan organizations in every conceivable way. Hence, without a single exception, Jews and partisans are an identical concept. One report mentions a Jew, picked up as a partisan, who had been employed as a propagandist. In his speeches he persuaded the population that Gomel, Mogilev and Kiev had already been reconquered by the Red Army and that the Soviets should shortly return; then, obviously, all those who had assisted the Germans were going to be hanged. (Situation Report of February 1–15, 1942) 64

The connection construed between the mass murder of Jews and the fight against partisans must on no account induce us to justify the extermination of the Jews in the occupied Soviet territories. 65 The enormous difference between the numbers of Jews and partisans-communists murdered as cited in the “Operational Situation Reports of the Chief of the Security Police,” as well as the “criminal orders” of the Wehrmacht command and the directives to the Action Groups, prove that the racial-ideological war of extermination against “Jewish Bolshevism” was considered an integral component of the Eastern Campaign even before the beginning of the war. To be sure, Stalin’s proclamation of July 3, 1941 had enabled Hitler to prevent a psychologically satisfying justification to the Eastern Army for these two facets of the war of extermination. On July 25, 1941,

under the motto “absolute security for the German soldier,” the Army command had renewed the harsh orders for the treatment of Soviet civilians and Soviet prisoners of war, and once again referred to the “Jewish-Bolshevist” character of the Soviet system. In Poland the army had already acted with the utmost severity against francs tireurs, but only in the war against the Soviet Union was the “elimination of all active and passive opposition” ideologically based. Consequently, the anti-partisan warfare conducted by the army, along with the SS, could be viewed more as part of systematic extermination of Bolshevism, Slavism and Jewry than had it been waged only according to military rules.

Jews and Communists were in fact and a priori, classified as suspected partisans and therefore shot. Also Soviet soldiers, cut off from the main body of their army, who had not reported to German authorities by a set date, were considered as francs tireurs and shot. The disparity between the numbers of guerrillas reported as against German losses listed in the Security Division and the Army Secret Field Police reports, makes it difficult to disregard the ideological background. In the area of the Wehrmacht Commandant in White Russia, within one month 10,431 prisoners were shot out of a total of 10,940, while in combat with partisans the losses of the 707th Infantry Division were two dead and five wounded. Similarly, the Secret Field Police in the rear area of Army Group South reported the results of its clashes with the partisans for the months of October to December 1941 as 4,150 persons (guerrillas, saboteurs, parachutists) shot, as against its own losses of seven dead and five wounded. This closely approached Hitler’s formula of July 16, 1941 for the pacification of the

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68 Der Leitende Feldpolizeidirektor beim Bfh. rückw.H.Geb 103, TgbNr. 62/64, 15.1.1942, BA-MA RH 22/19.
Eastern Territories: to shoot everyone "who merely looks askance."

In the war of extermination against the Soviet Union, military warfare was mixed with political and police measures. These were mainly carried out by the SS, but also by the army. Total exoneration of the army is as little helpful for mastering this chapter in German history as is total condemnation. Is it really possible to draw a line between the conscious renunciation of the international laws of war on the part of the army and the organized mass murder of Soviet Jews by the SS as Hillgruber suggested?\(^{69}\)

Quantity is no moral category. In contrast to its attitude in the autumn of 1939, which was to keep the army out of the way of the anti-Polish "clean-up," but not let it oppose the planned extermination policy of the SS—in the spring of 1941 the Wehrmacht leadership was prepared to accept its share in the ideological battle against "Jewish-Bolshevism" and to convert Hitler's intentions into commands. An all-absolving principle of obedience or lack of civil courage is certainly an inadequate explanation for the attitude adopted by the generalship. The same applies to contemporary characterizations such as "military technicians" (H. von Moltke) or "hopeless sergeants" (U. von Hassel). The relationship between the army and Hitler was also determined by "partially identical aims"\(^{70}\) which developed into cooperation in the war of extermination against the Soviet Union. Henning von Tresckow's concept "when international law gets broken, let the Russians do it, not us," was simply no longer valid in the officers corps. That

\(^{69}\) Hillgruber, *Die ideologisch-dogmatische Grundlage*, p. 284.

is why, in his speech on March 30, 1941, Hitler was able publicly to revoke major norms in international laws of war, without the closed ranks of the generalship withdrawing their obedience. March 30, 1941 could no longer be considered the "hour of final decision"\textsuperscript{71} since as far back as 1938, let alone at the beginning of 1941, the prerequisite for remonstrating with the "Führer," i.e. a collective sense of political responsibility and suitable conduct, had ceased to exist.\textsuperscript{72} Many officers took up Hitler's suggestion of March 30, 1941 and led the battle against the antagonistic ideology. Also opponents of National Socialism, such as Hoepner, Stülpnagel and Stauffenberg, were able to combine this attitude with a militant anti-Communism. A great many officers withdrew to a stance of formal obedience and kept their distance from acts of annihilation. A few subscribed to a change in these objectives and methods because they feared that these might jeopardize the military victory over the Soviet Union. However, so long as Hitler determined the course of the Third Reich and the officers corps obeyed, no fundamental change could be instituted in the methods of warfare and in the treatment of Soviet citizens, soldiers and civilians alike. It is difficult, in the sober language of the historian, to convey the enormity of moral guilt and to do justice to the millions of victims.

\textsuperscript{71} Hillgruber, \textit{Die "Endlösung" und das deutsche Ostimperium} p. 149.