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7. JEWISH RESISTANCE

The very term Jewish resistance suggests a point of view. We normally think of it as a blow struck on behalf of Jews. But to many Jews in Vilna in 1943, for example, the escape of a group of Jewish fighters from the ghetto to join partisans in the nearby Naroch Forest was not heroic opposition to the Nazis, it was rather a cruel, adventurist betrayal. What happened next was typical of resistance action and German response. Having obtained a few weapons, the escapees clashed with the Nazis outside the city, and a few Jews were captured. In retaliation for the breakout, the local Gestapo seized the entire family of each fugitive or all who lived with him; they also seized the leaders of all Jewish work parties in the vicinity, together with their families. All were shot. Thereafter, the Germans divided all work parties leaving the ghetto into groups of ten; if one person escaped, the entire group would be killed. Denouncing the first group of escapees, the ghetto newspaper called them traitors—"endangering the existence of our entire ghetto and the lives of our loved ones. . . . They are responsible for the split blood." Jacob Gens, the head of the Vilna Judenrat, argued that idealism and selflessness required that the Jews remain where they were—behind the ghetto walls. As he reminded his listeners, the local SS chief could easily have liquidated the entire ghetto. At stake, therefore, were the lives of twenty thousand Jews.1

In the Lithuanian city of Kovno the Judenrat feverishly consulted
the elderly rabbi Abraham Duber Shapiro in 1941 when the Germans ordered all the Jewish inhabitants assembled for a “selection.” After agonizing discussion, the council followed Shapiro’s advice: “If a Jewish community (may God help it) has been condemned to physical destruction, and there are means of rescuing part of it, the leaders of the community should have the courage and assume the responsibility to act and rescue what is possible.” The results were catastrophic, but fit expectations: of 26,400 Jews, 9,000 were taken away and shot. But the rest were spared—for a time. Later, the same council worked together with the Jewish underground. Council members assisted escapes by forging documents and providing food and clothing for those about to join the partisans. Ghetto workshops, with the approval of the judenrat head, supplied and armed Jewish partisans in the forests, and the ghetto police provided cover for underground fighters. But in the spring of 1943, the Gestapo struck, arresting the entire council and murdering the leadership of the Jewish police. The ghetto was gradually worn down, its inhabitants deported to camps and killed. Remnants of the Kovno Jewry survived as slave laborers until the summer of 1944, when their ghetto was finally liquidated.2

For Michael Dov Ber Weissmandel, the Slovakian rabbi involved in desperate negotiations with the Nazis in the summer of 1942, resistance as conventionally understood would have seemed a cruel joke. His goal was to stop the murders by bribing high-ranking Germans with whom he was in contact. To him, money from abroad was the only justifiable response to mass murder. “We cannot understand how you can eat and drink,” he wrote in an anguished letter to Jewish representatives in Geneva, “how you can rest in your beds, how you can stroll in the streets—and I am sure you are doing all those things—while this responsibility rests upon you… We demand deeds! Not great deeds and not acts of sacrifice. Just money—and thousands and hundreds of thousands depend on that money.”3

DILEMMAS AND OBJECTIVES OF JEWISH RESISTANCE

What we see here are responses to the dizzying conditions imposed on European Jewry by the Germans. Their tactic of “collect-
tive responsibility," as the term suggests, held entire communities or their leaders hostage, to suffer for acts of resistance. In most cases, as a result, resistance was guaranteed to punish Jews, rather than assist them. Fearful of massive German retribution, resisters everywhere waited until what they felt was the last moment—the final extinction of hope—for only then could they justify the reprisals that followed. But how was this point to be determined?

Jewish communities agonized over their prospects and were divided sharply over what tactics to follow. Since the Germans were themselves inconsistent, with the pace or character of persecution often depending on local commanders, Jewish leaders could usually find reason for a variety of actions. Time was a critical factor. Some groups of Jews were massacred immediately on contact with the Nazis, while others were spared. And even within regions conditions varied. As Yisrael Gutman has observed, while Jews were dying of starvation in places like Warsaw and Lodz in 1940 and 1941, there were other places, like Czestochowa and Zagłębie, where conditions were "relatively tolerable for a prolonged period." Was there a reason for this? Could Jews influence their fate? If they remained alive long enough, would they be rescued? The calculations were impossibly complex, and the impulse for resistance invariably provoked controversy and disagreement. Understandably, some never gave up hope, and therefore opposed resistance to the bitter end. In a New Year's message in 1942, council chairman Chaim Rumkowski told the Jews of Lodz that they would survive, that all would be well, "if we eradicate the evil in ourselves"—by which he meant any slackening in the ghetto's work for the Third Reich. Even when hopeful signs vanished, there was always the possibility that the Nazis might change their minds. Weissmandel, the Slovakian-Jewish negotiator, may actually have succeeded in one effort at suspending Slovakian deportations in the summer of 1942, while everywhere else Jews were being herded on trains to death camps; he was likely wrong in expecting to save many hundreds of thousands more by further discussions, and he received little encouragement from anyone. But there were at least scraps of evidence to justify his frantic efforts. He therefore poured his considerable energy into a futile scheme to bribe the leadership of the Third Reich. It took some time for underground leaders in various places to dare pronounce the opposite view—that all the Jews were doomed
and that there was no hope at all. Up to that point, even those disposed to resistance usually acted cautiously.

Historians evaluating Jewish resistance invariably become tangled in the stormy contemporary debates by Jews over what course to take. Historians may not, in the end, be able to dispense with their own points of view, and according to one notion they should not attempt to do so. But it is well to be aware of such moral or ideological points of departure. There is no doubt that this issue touches a sensitive nerve in the Jewish consciousness, an unspoken assumption of which has been that Jewish resistance somehow validates Jewish self-worth. More so than with most issues associated with the Holocaust, research has often been heavily preoccupied with righting a historical balance—establishing the importance of Jewish heroism in the face of overwhelming force. In Israel, the principal center for both research and commemoration of the Holocaust is Yad Vashem, known in English as the Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority.6

While such preoccupations continue, it may be possible now to study resistance with greater historical detachment. Certainly a starting point is to note that historians are not always agreed on what they understand by the term resistance. Those who adopt the most restrictive definition take the view sometimes advanced by Jewish partisans—that resistance necessarily means armed struggle. While not explicit in his text, it seems clear that Raul Hilberg understands resistance as a violent uprising by Jews against their oppressors. And as we have seen, Hilberg considers that the Jews' "reaction pattern... is characterized by almost complete lack of resistance." Its relative insignificance, in his view, can be demonstrated in terms of German casualties: "It is doubtful that the Germans and their collaborators lost more than a few hundred men, dead and wounded, in the course of the destruction process. The number of men who dropped out because of disease, nervous breakdowns, or court martial proceedings was probably greater. The Jewish resistance effort could not seriously impede or retard the progress of destructive operations. The Germans brushed that resistance aside as a minor obstacle, and in the totality of the destruction process it was of no consequence."7 At the other end of the scale, Yehuda Bauer argues for an inclusive approach, one that declares "keeping body and soul together" under circumstances of unimaginable privation case was, essent _Judenräte_ of ea sense in 1940 ar faced seemed ak past. The Jews' sanction, was to tably, the Jews points out, the tal and so string bly have perishe saw in 1941, h starvation level: the Nazis' plan: broad pattern t Holocaust, Bat opposition to l rected against t phasis in origin In the view sciouly intend pair their obje perspective th: for survival. H obviouly due fr from this stan of striking a bl the common tiesties, whatever element, I beli tions—an ex the imaginativa ground group ing materials tants. In his described wh: information c side the wall: Ringelblum c
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able privation and misery as one way of resisting the Nazis. This case was, essentially, the one made by most Jewish leaders and the Judenräte of eastern Europe. Nonviolent resistance made most sense in 1940 and 1941, before the Final Solution, when what Jews faced seemed akin to persecution they had known so often in their past. The Jews' goal, for which they occasionally received religious sanction, was to carry on a struggle by "life-affirming means." Notably, the Jews avoided and evaded Nazi regulations. As Bauer points out, the rules the Germans set for ghettos were often so brutal and so stringent that if Jews had obeyed them they would probably have perished in a short period. Jewish food allocations for Warsaw in 1941, he notes, amounted to 336 calories daily—far below starvation levels. Later, when the Jews came to realize the nature of the Nazis' plans, resistance took other forms. But both are part of a broad pattern of collective Jewish response. Resistance during the Holocaust, Bauer says, is "any group action consciously taken in opposition to known or surmised laws, actions, or intentions directed against the Jews by the Germans and their supporters" (emphasis in original).

In the view taken here, resistance is organized activity consciously intended to damage the persecutors of Jews or seriously impair their objectives. Implicitly, this definition involves a political perspective that extends beyond the struggle of particular groups for survival. How that political aim is expressed varies widely, most obviously due to the widely differing means at hand. What matters, from this standpoint, is less what was accomplished than the intent of striking a blow against the Nazi machine. This is, it seems to me, the common thread to be found in studies of Jewish resistance activities, whatever their differences of emphasis and method. The key element, I believe, is to understand how the resisters saw their actions—an exercise that sometimes requires a considerable leap of the imagination. In the Warsaw ghetto, for example, the underground group known as Oneg Shabbat, or OS, busied itself collecting materials on the life of the ghetto and the suffering of its inhabitants. In his ghetto diary for June 1942, Emmanuel Ringelblum described what he felt was a great achievement for the group: some information on the fate of Polish Jewry that they had smuggled outside the walls reached London and was broadcast over the BBC. Ringelblum deemed the achievement of Oneg Shabbat a stunning
victory for Jewish resistance: "The O.S. group has fulfilled a great historical mission. It has alarmed the world to our fate, and perhaps saved hundreds of thousands of Polish Jews from extermination... I do not know who of our group will survive, who will be deemed worthy to work through our collected material. But one thing is clear to all of us. Our toils and tribulations, our devotion and constant terror, have not been in vain. We have struck the enemy a hard blow." In one sense, Ringelblum was wrong, and his desperate appeal makes especially painful reading today. The Polish Jews were not saved. In London, the government was not moved. There were no massive retaliatory attacks. And no blow was struck against the Germans. Yet however unrealized, one can hardly deny the resistance goals of Ringelblum and his group and one can hardly challenge their authenticity in pursuing them. My conclusion is that the best yardstick for identifying Jewish resistance is that which the Jews at the time were prepared to accept. Since that was often itself an object of bitter dispute it is best to present the widest possible view.

Historians face a serious challenge in assessing Jewish involvement in the general current of resistance activity in every country. At what point is the resistance of Jews "Jewish resistance"? As we know, many thousands of Jews fought in underground groups across Europe—from Tito's partisans to irregular units attached to the Red Army, to Communist cells in France. Quite often such people fought as Yugoslavs, Soviets, or Frenchmen; their involvement, in these cases, had little or nothing to do with Jewish commitments. But in other cases their struggle was directly related to a Jewish cause. In December 1941 the Soviets formed a Lithuanian infantry division within the Red Army, made up of Lithuanian refugees who had fled eastward during the Nazi invasion. Certainly the Soviets' intention was not to form a Jewish force. But Jews constituted about half of its complement in the initial recruitment stage—about five thousand men—and much of the division was stamped with a Jewish identity. Among these soldiers, Yiddish was the daily language, Jewish religious traditions were respected, and Jewish identity was maintained. Political officers attached to the unit attuned their propaganda, and hence part of their political message about the war, to the Nazi slaughter of European Jews.

Clearly motivations varied with individuals. Most often these were mixed, however imperative in nists or others if the cause to be at one courage that this as a Fascist Committee paper Eynikayt (!) Associated with the fort signaled a ren approval of the u against Nazism. I on behalf of the J the principal char Communist orga Nazi Holocaust. France, for exam nounced the dest life." "Their sacri awaken to the fa-life-and-death stri the Jewish peoples. To others, the half of a Jewish r sentiment penet before and baca tion in resistanc h lead Otto I in the Diaspora would not ask Jews would be ever they lived a to have a count is evidence of a sion and inters Support gether with a h one of the by-p One last rem
were mixed, however, having reference both to a Jewish and a general imperative in the struggle against Nazism. Among Communists or others of the far Left, it was common to declare the Jewish cause to be at one with the rest of the free world. The Soviets encouraged this as a propaganda theme, constituting a Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in April 1942, with a Yiddish-language newspaper *Eynikayt* (Unity) that carried accounts of Nazi atrocities. Associated with the Soviet-Jewish novelist Ilya Ehrenburg, this effort signaled a remarkable (and, as it turned out, short-lived) Soviet approval of the use of Jewish identity as part of the mobilization against Nazism. The committee made an explicit appeal to the West on behalf of the Jews, who were encouraged to look to Moscow as the principal champion of their cause. All along the line, as a result, Communist organs beamed to Jewish readers some sense of the Nazi Holocaust. Reporting the uprising of the Warsaw ghetto in France, for example, the Jewish Communist journal *Notre Voix* denounced the destruction of “the greatest European center for Jewish life.” “Their sacrifice is not in vain. Every French Jew should by now awaken to the fact that only by adopting hard-line attitudes, in this life-and-death struggle with the Hitlerites, can safety be insured for the Jewish people.”

To others, the Holocaust fortified the prewar arguments on behalf of a Jewish national home. As the war went on, and as information about the massacre of European Jewry accumulated, Zionist sentiment penetrated Jewish consciousness where it had not existed before and became another means for expressing Jewish motivations in resistance movements. Writing in 1942, the Hungarian Jewish leader Otto Komoly despised of solving the “Jewish Question” in the Diaspora: “Nowadays there is no serious-minded Jew who would not acknowledge the veracity of the Zionist rationale—that Jews would be unable to assimilate and would remain aliens wherever they lived as long as they were unable, unlike all other peoples, to have a country of their own.” Despite official disapproval, there is evidence of a strong Zionist affinity within the Lithuanian division and intense suspicion of this tendency among its political officers. Support for a Jewish national home in Palestine, it seems, together with a heightened national consciousness among Jews, was one of the by-products of the resistance experience of many Jews.

One last remark before looking at some regional manifestations:
in any evaluation of Jewish resistance, one must beware of applying to the Jewish victims of Nazism criteria and scales of judgment that one would not apply to other groups in similar circumstances. Observers sometimes set arbitrary standards for Jewish populations, assume that the incidence of physical resistance among them should have been high, and then seek esoteric explanations as to why this was not so. The case of Soviet prisoners of war highlights how unfair this approach can be. According to Christian Streit, some 3.3 million out of a total of 5.7 million Soviet prisoners perished while in German custody, most of them executed, starved, or worked to death; yet we have no knowledge of any important uprising until the very end of the war among these victims—men of military age and training, about whose fate there was little doubt. Similarly, the caution that Jews expressed about armed resistance should be seen in the context of a European-wide disinclination to incur massive German reprisals for violent operations. We know, from our vantage point, that the Jews were doomed by the Final Solution, and in this sense their fate was unique in Nazi-occupied Europe. But this was not generally evident to the Jews themselves. And even when it was, their response must surely be assessed with an eye to other civilian populations of Europe. Such people virtually never threw themselves against Nazi troops and police in the sort of desperate gesture that many assume now the Jews should have undertaken. It makes no sense to expect communities of Jews, without military traditions or experience, containing people of all ages and backgrounds, to have behaved, for example, like warlike Chetniks in the mountains of Yugoslavia or hardened Communist in Lyon. Commenting on this point, the historian of the French resistance Henri Michel observed how, from the very outset, the Jews lacked basic requisites for resistance found elsewhere: they had no supportive environment of sympathetic populations; they lacked the trained personnel and equipment that partisans drew upon everywhere; and they had no link with the Allies or with governments in exile. The Jews' calamity was indeed unique, but their circumstances hardly favored the kind of physical uprising many feel is missing from the historical record.\textsuperscript{18}

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GHETTOS, FORESTS, AND CAMPS
IN EASTERN EUROPE

Reflecting on resistance in wartime Yugoslavia, Milovan Djilas speaks of a fundamental psychological requisite that was usually missing from Jewish resistance groups—the “prospect of victory.” According to Djilas, who monitored carefully what was necessary to keep Tito’s partisans in the field, “victory must be worth the trouble and sacrifice. An insane form of human relations, war is nevertheless a highly motivated and extremely rational act.” In eastern Europe this expectation of victory was almost always missing, and the Jews fought, as the apt title of a recent work puts it, “the war of the doomed.” But how did a small number reach this point? It takes time, as we know, to abandon all hope.

In Poland and occupied parts of the Soviet Union most Jews were killed before violent opposition of any sort was possible. Survivors of the initial shocks of ghettoization or mass shooting seem to have been overwhelmed. Cut off from the outside, exhausted by prolonged hunger, the Jews seldom had time to build resistance networks or to see through Nazi deceptions. Historians have traced the beginnings of underground organizations to the latter part of 1942, when most communities were already decimated by the massive deportations to death camps. A study of ghetto underground organizations indicates that practical planning began only after the first deportations—by which point a handful of rebels were finally convinced that the inhabitants had no chance for survival. Organization continued into 1943, a year that saw outbreaks in the ghettos of Warsaw and Bialystok, and violent incidents in Czestochowa, Brody, Tarnów, Sandomierz, and elsewhere. In general, the groups that banded together were pitifully small and barely armed at all.

For Warsaw, which saw the most important of several ghetto rebellions, Yisrael Gutman estimates the original insurgents as numbering under a thousand in a ghetto population of about forty thousand. The uprising began in the spring of 1943, following the disappearance of some 80 percent of the original ghetto population, most of whom had been sent to Treblinka to be murdered the previous summer. From the outset, therefore, the Jewish rebels were a small
minority within their own community, a fragment of the remnant still alive after massive deportations. The mainstream Jewish Fighting Organization, or ZOB, with under five hundred fighters, was armed with gasoline bombs, hand grenades, pistols, one or two submachine guns, and about ten rifles. Its Revisionist counterpart apparently had some minor heavier armament. Jewish historians have pored painstakingly over the question of these weapons to the point of counting every pistol and calculating every bit of ammunition the rebels managed to procure. Their conclusion is that the Polish Home Army helped starve the weapon-hungry Jewish fighters, leaving them even more vulnerable than would otherwise be the case. For reasons discussed in chapter 1, anti-Jewish feeling and a different strategic conception of the fight against Nazism ensured that the Warsaw Jews would end their struggle virtually alone.

Against them, the German commander SS-Brigadeführer (Major General) Jürgen Stroop daily mustered over two thousand well-armed men, equipped with armored vehicles, artillery, flame throwers, heavy caliber machine guns, and even aircraft. Once the fighting began, many hundreds of Jews were drawn into the struggle. Eventually, the Germans set fire to the ghetto to drive out its inhabitants, reduced whole blocks to rubble by shelling, and pumped poison gas into sewers and bunkers where the Jews sought shelter. Sporadic resistance continued for more than a month, ending in the total destruction of the ghetto and the deportation of its remaining population. As for German losses, Stroop admitted sixteen dead and eighty-five wounded; Gutman does not dismiss these figures out of hand, but while discounting the highly exaggerated Jewish claims he concludes that the German list was probably incomplete. The significance of the uprising was clearly symbolic, however. This was, after all, the first significant urban revolt against a Nazi occupation in Europe. As Gutman puts it, "the principal impact...lay not in the casualties it caused but in the fact that the Germans were forced to invest a substantial number of men and weapons merely to hold their own in what turned out to be a long struggle under the most disadvantageous conditions—from the viewpoint of both political propaganda and the effect of the fighting upon the non-Jewish population of Poland." The greatest impact was undoubtedly on the Jews themselves. News of the Warsaw ghetto rebellion spread among other imprisoned groups of Jews, and inspired pride and emulation who were grappling ironically, and uprising of the ghettos. According more armed forces took greater care in the camps of the Jews, eager to exploit it.

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pride and emulation. It had a clear if unmeasurable impact on those who were groping toward resistance elsewhere. 31

Ironically, and underscoring the hopelessness of the revolt, the uprising of the ghetto may have quickened the pace of the Final Solution. According to Gutman, the Germans thereafter applied much more armed force than ever before in initiating deportations and took greater care with security matters. They accelerated the liquidation of camps and ghettos in the eastern part of the Generalgouvernement, able to demonstrate to recalcitrant officials still eager to exploit Jewish labor the mortal danger posed by the Jews. 34

Historians are now extending our knowledge of armed resistance in eastern Europe, drawing upon Jewish documentation as well as the Nazis' own appreciation of the insurgents. Increasingly, their work seems less burdened with ideology and more devoted to the reconstruction of a very complex and diverse historical terrain. By any scale, we can now point to considerable resistance activity. Yehuda Bauer identifies armed resistance to the Nazis and their henchmen in twenty-four ghettos of western and central Poland, the heaviest Jewish population concentration, and even more in eastern parts of the country. Full-scale ghetto revolts seldom occurred, to be sure, but armed clashes between Germans and scattered groups of Jews were not uncommon. In several cases organizers deliberately attempted to create confusion and the impression of a full-scale rebellion, giving cover to mass flight to the forests. 35 Thousands of Jews on the run managed to establish so-called family camps in the wooded countryside of Belorussia and Volhynia, where Jewish refugees scratched out a bare existence. 36 Jews also formed their own partisan units—numbering as many as 15,000 in western Belorussia, for example, according to one rough estimate. 37 Krakowski has found more than thirty Jewish partisan groups established in the Generalgouvernement of Poland between 1942 and 1943, and notes hundreds of Jews participating in non-Jewish formations as well. He further estimates that more than 50,000 Jews escaped to the forests, most of whom were killed in German manhunts. 38

Studying Lithuanian territory occupied by the Germans in 1941, Dov Levin estimates that resistance fighters numbered at least 10,000 men and women, including some 8,000 Lithuanian partisans and other units fighting with the Red Army and more than 2,000 in ghettos and labor camps. As he notes, these figures repre-
sent 4 percent of the 2,500,000 Jews living in Lithuania on the eve of the Nazi invasion and approximately 16 percent of the Jews who were still alive at the beginning of 1942. By most comparative measurements, this was an extraordinarily high proportion of the victimized communities.

Historians provide insights as well on the organizational framework of Jewish resistance, particularly the ghetto underground. Those unfamiliar with Jewish life in eastern Europe before the Holocaust may see in the politics of Jewish resistance evidence of incorrigible factiousness and division. In Warsaw, for example, the Jewish resistance was built upon the preexisting political groups and splinters of groups within the ghetto, each one of which formed platoon-sized fighting units. It was remarkably difficult for these groups to work together, and only in July 1942 did representatives of Zionist youth movements finally manage to form a united combat organization—the ZOB. And even then some groups remained outside—the right-wing Zionist Revisionists and the various religious factions including the orthodox Agudat Yisrael. In fairness, it should be pointed out that Jewish resistance hardly had a European monopoly on partisan squabbling, as students of underground politics everywhere in Europe can attest. Yet what is striking about the Jewish case may be the European Jewry’s zest for political organization, a striking feature of the urban landscape of Poland in the 1930s. Jewish cultural and educational activities also spawned a dense network of organizations, characteristic of Jewish communal life. The organizations that became the vehicles for resistance were not traditional Jewish community agencies, however. Research indicates that most of the long-established leaders of Polish Jewry left their places of authority with the arrival of the Nazis. Some were killed, others simply abandoned their posts, fled eastward, or otherwise disappeared.

According to Gutman, it was Jewish youth movements that filled the vacuum created by the departed leaders. One must understand the European framework of these movements—often militant, activist adjuncts of established political formations, with members somewhat older than present-day North American equivalents. Among Jews, these associations were mainly Zionist and Bundist, ideologically sophisticated, and committed to camaraderie and communal actions, and a Jewish historical view of victimization of political beings seem to have established Jewish venturous an responsibility to draw the reader's attention to the occupations by organizations. In opposition to this formality

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ia on the eve of the Jews who were part of the other portion of the communal action. Both of these streams had a utopian vision—Jewish autonomy within a socialist society in Poland for the Bundists, and a Jewish nation in Palestine for the Zionists. Both had a historical view that placed their struggle in the context of Jewish victimization and self-assertion. Less insular in traditional patterns of political behavior than their adult counterparts, youth leaders seem to have grasped the Jews’ predicament more quickly than established Jewish spokesmen. Young people were generally more adventurous and more hardy than their elders, and had fewer familial responsibilities as well. Almost invariably, they were more prone to draw the revolutionary conclusions implied in resistance. During the occupation they emerged from the cocoon of prewar organizational life to immerse themselves in the struggles of their communities. In one ghetto after another they became the spearheads of opposition to the more conservative Judenräte and the core of resistance formations.

Plainly, resisters were a tiny minority. Once formed, resistance groups had frequently to face the strong opposition of the Jewish communities in which they lived. The Judenräte often did everything possible to undermine resistance networks. The Jewish police tracked them down, and they were denounced in the official Jewish press. Up to the last moment most ghetto inmates rejected resistance when the suggestion was made. According to Trunk, at least one Judenrat, in the town of Shavli, even voted on the matter. The majority rejected the suggestion of their chairman, Mendel Leibowicz, that the Jews take up arms and prepare to set fire to their ghetto if the end was near. Most were unwilling to face the bitter conclusion and also to sacrifice women and children. In one of the most dramatic instances, the Jewish public in the Vilna ghetto demanded that the underground surrender its leader, Yitzhak Wittenberg, to the Nazis in 1943, fearing the liquidation of the entire ghetto if they did not.33 “The truth is that the Jewish public in most of the ghettos neither understood nor accepted the path and assessment of the fighters,” says Yisrael Gutman. “As always, it was the select few of the oppressed who decided to go underground and fight.”

Every historian of Jewish resistance has had to consider relations with non-Jewish opponents of the Nazis in eastern Europe—
issue that has been touched upon in chapter 5. While hostility toward the Jews was widespread, and in some places intense, it is also clear that circumstances varied, with a corresponding impact on the Jewish resisters. Only scraps of evidence have been published about this theme, and our knowledge has not gone far beyond the collection of anecdotes. One can certainly conclude, however, that the outlook of Polish Jews, the great majority in the region, was stamped with a deep sense of isolation. Generally spurned by the Polish resistance or local partisans, the Jews came increasingly to recognize the helplessness of their position. “After the war Poland will be resurrected,” one of them told Jan Karski, a courier from the Polish Home Army. “Your cities will be rebuilt and your wounds will slowly heal. From this ocean of tears, pain, rage, and humiliation your country will emerge again but the Polish Jews will no longer exist. We will be dead. Hitler will lose his war against the human, the just, and the good, but he will win his war against the Polish Jews. No—it will not be a victory; the Jewish people will be murdered.” Throughout Poland, Jewish resistance gradually assumed the character of an armed protest—a last, suicidal gesture of anger and vengeance of a doomed community. Without hope, the Jewish rebels were in an utterly different position from non-Jews, many of whom fought precisely with the postwar future in mind.

For Lithuanian Jews, on the other hand, as Levin’s book suggests, the Soviet-sponsored military and political network broke through the isolation caused by the hostility of the local population. Unlike much of Poland, the Lithuanian situation was not entirely hopeless. In such places as Kovno, Svenčian, and Šiauliai, the options for Jewish fighters included a desperate flight to nearby forests. While the great majority were slaughtered, some survived. In territory taken from the Soviet Union in 1941 the experience of Jewish resisters seems to have varied. Material is scarce, and researchers are hampered by the lack of access to Soviet archives. According to Hersch Smolar, head of the Jewish underground in the Belorussian capital of Minsk, there was much support for the Jews among the Belorussian population. The ghetto underground there seems to have established important links with partisans in the rest of the city and in the surrounding countryside as well. Throughout the Ukraine, on the other hand, pro-German feeling and anti-Jewish hostility seem to have been extensive from the very beginning, contributing to the isolation of Jews evi Nazi occupation. Conditions in the fulfillment of revolts occurred isolation. In the context of starvation, and desperate structure to the problem, starvation was nonexistent, at least in the western part of Poland. Even after the war, the rules were in place, and the inhumanity was a direct, unattractive, therefore, civil acts of resistance were no substitute for delay of inmate starvation or resistance network. For example, in the inmates of Treblinka and Sobibor, the only twelve of whom were killed out of Sobibor, but on October 1944, when the inmates of Treblinka were dismantled, there were even more cases of collective uprising wiped out in the process.

Important uprisings at Treblinka, Sobibor, and elsewhere—such as the Treblinka uprising in August serving that “the resistance in any Nazi camp was a matter of general action that, in fact, had to express
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isolation of Jews even when the local partisans turned against the Nazi occupation.39

Conditions in the concentration and death camps, where a handful of revolts occurred, provide the most extreme illustration of this isolation.40 In the camps the Jews were enervated by exhaustion, starvation, and disease and crushed by the most complete totalitarian structure to have been devised by man. Help from the outside was nonexistent, and the Jews were utterly alone. “Collective responsibility” was unrestrained: punishment for any infraction of the rules was immediate and lethal. In such circumstances, resistance was a direct, even mortal threat to every Jewish inmate. Opposition, therefore, seemed impossible. Even so, sabotage and individual attempts to escape were not uncommon. And in a few cases there were even substantial, violent clashes. Almost always the rebels had no chance, accounting for the frequent hesitation and delay of inmate strategists. Timing was crucial. A quite sophisticated resistance network existed in the Plaszów concentration camp, for example, but in the end its members failed to revolt. An uprising of the inmates of Treblinka led to a breakout of several score prisoners, only twelve of whom survived; a few months later hundreds burst out of Sobibor, but most of them were immediately killed. In October 1944, when the death factory of Auschwitz was soon to be dismantled, there was a revolt of its Jewish Sonderkommando—men employed in grisly tasks by the Nazis before they were murdered themselves. The inmates succeeded in destroying one of the crematoria and killing a few guards. Almost all the rebels fell in the fighting or were captured soon after.41 Elsewhere, in smaller camps, collective uprisings also occurred, but here too the inmates were wiped out in almost every case.42

Important uprisings occurred in three of the six death camps—Treblinka, Sobibor, and Auschwitz. Bauer notes three other camp rebellions—at Krzyzyna, Krychow, and Minsk Mazowiecki—observing that “these were the only rebellions that ever did take place in any Nazi camps, except for that of Soviet prisoners of war at Ebensee at the end of the war.”43 We also know that there were several hundred escapes from these camps—many aided by collective action that, in camp conditions, was possibly the only way for resistance to express itself.
SLOVAKIA AND HUNGARY: RESCUE AS RESISTANCE

Central Europe saw quite a different current of resistance activity associated with the rescue of Jews—smuggling refugees to sanctuary on the periphery of the Nazi empire, often sending them on to Palestine. Most of this activity was conducted secretly, at great risk to the organizers, and with the additional objective of passing detailed information about the Jewish catastrophe to the outside world. Of political motivation in the widest sense, moreover, there is no doubt. “When we see this terrible tragedy before us,” wrote an organizer in Bratislava to contacts in Geneva, “we see the continuation of our rescue work as God’s sacred wish. The life of every single refugee is sacred to us and we know that you are bound to them with all your heart strings. Let us, then, carry on this work with our united strengths.”

Gisi Fleischmann, the author of those lines, was the Slovakian leader of WIZO, the Women’s International Zionist Organization, and the head of the emigration department of the so-called Jewish Center, the Slovakian equivalent of the Judenrat established everywhere by the Germans. In this case the Jewish Center operated under Slovakian government auspices, in conditions of systematic persecution that also included, for a time, deportations to death camps in the east. In a pattern that occurred elsewhere, activist members of the Jewish agency established to administer persecution used the cover provided by that body to form a network of self-help. During the course of the deportations, as the official Jewish leadership floundered in despair, a committee known as the Working Group came into being to negotiate with Dieter Wisliceny, Adolf Eichmann’s representative in Bratislava. These negotiations will be considered in the next chapter. But along with these discussions, the Working Group became involved in other activities, notably underground rescue and intelligence efforts.

The Working Group sent out lines of contact in every direction. Rabbi Weissmandel, the ultra-Orthodox rabbi who relentlessly pursued negotiations with Wisliceny, carried on a sustained secret correspondence with Jewish organizations in Geneva, Istanbul, and Budapest. A courageous and energetic woman, Gisi Fleischmann was in touch with the American Joint Distribution Committee, of which she was the coded letters to its effort building a relayed to the wes ported Jews. Gisi Fleischmann was in touch with the Zionist group in Budapest, with the Zionists across the frontier death camps of the deported Jews. Evident are the numerous arrests of the apparatus; at the same time, it was subverted into the mous risks. Fleischmann was murdered in Auschwitz, similarly arrested and jumped from the train.

After learning from two Jewish sources, the Working Group proposed an escape route as a way of two coded telegrams, one transmission to the other, and the second one to the officials in the complex and the place for the Jewish Jewry’s escape to a high-ranking Nuremberg, the worst of the forced labor in the bureaucracy. So far as the Allies were concerned, understanding, communication, and language were key in his escape.
which she was the Slovakian representative, sending a stream of
coded letters to its deputies in Switzerland. She spent a great deal
of effort building an intelligence network with links in Poland and
relayed to the west whatever was discovered about the fate of de-
ported Jews. Fleischmann helped establish an underground rail-
way to Budapest, working with the Hungarian Jewish Relief and
Rescue Committee. As well, the Slovakian leaders worked closely
with the Zionist youth organization Hechalutz, smuggling Jews
across the frontier into Hungary. They even sent envoys to the Nazi
death camps of Lublin and Majdanek to ascertain the fate of Jewish
deportees. Evidence suggests that members of the Jewish Center
who were also part of the Working Group had a “dual role,” as
Livia Rothkirchen puts it. Officially, they were part of the appa-
rus of the pro-Nazi Tiso regime, doing the bidding of Slovakian
authorities; at the same time, using the instruments provided by
their office, and fully conscious of the peril Jews faced, they worked
to subvert the machinery of destruction. Such work involved enor-
mous risks. Fleischmann herself was arrested twice and was finally
murdered in Auschwitz in the autumn of 1944. Weissmandel was
similarly arrested, released, and then deported, but he managed to
jump from the train and eventually escaped to Switzerland.

After learning details about the killings at Auschwitz-Birkenau
from two Jewish escapees, Weissmandel seems to have been the first
to propose an Allied bombing of the railway approaches to the
camp as a way of disrupting the killings. In mid-May 1944 he sent
two coded telegrams from Bratislava to Swiss Orthodox leaders for
transmission to the United States. At the same time he was involved
in complex and ultimately futile negotiations originating in Hun-
gary for the cessation of the Final Solution. Bitterly disappointed at
the lack of support he felt received, he fulminated against world
Jewry for not providing the funds to support his efforts to bribe
high-ranking Nazis. Between the negotiator on the spot, knowing
the worst of the Nazis’ atrocities, and Jews in the free world, shared
in the bureaucracies of their own organizations as well as the indif-
ference of Allied governments, there was a profound gulf of mis-
understanding. Beyond this, a clash of cultures possibly impeded
communication. Weissmandel was an extremely pious Jew whose
language and worldview were steeped in rabbinic traditions; some
of his Jewish interlocutors were freethinking Zionists or worldly pro-
fessionals, suspicious of Orthodoxy, and inclined to dispute his evaluation of Nazi policies and his efficacy in opposing them. Present-day assessments of these negotiations may still be affected by such differences of outlook.47

The Hungarian counterpart to the Working Group operated more openly, given the buffer that the government in Budapest placed between the Jews of that country and anti-Jewish extremists. At the beginning of 1943 a handful of Jewish activists established a Relief and Rescue Committee, which operated within the framework of the government-sponsored Jewish Council and was empowered to assist Jewish refugees entering the country from Slovakia and Poland. Known by its Hebrew name—the Vaada (for Vaadat Ezra ve’Hatzalah)—this committee played an important and extremely controversial role, to be considered later, in negotiations with the SS in 1944 for the ransom of Hungarian and other threatened Jews. Its leaders included Otto Komoly, Rezső Kasztner, and Samuel Springmann—prominent figures in the world of Hungarian Zionism. Sharply divided internally, and quarreling also with its counterpart in Istanbul, the Vaada seems to have functioned usefully, smuggling Jewish escapees into the country, maintaining them when they arrived, and arranging their subsequent escape elsewhere, even to Palestine. Several hundred of these refugees formed an underground network in Budapest, led by a Polish-Jewish partisan Boris Teicholz.48 In all, as many as fifteen thousand Jewish refugees may have entered Hungary during the war, although the numbers cannot be determined with any certainty.49 Much of this refugee work was clandestine—organized by one of its officials, Joel Brand, who doubtless drew upon his underground experience after the First World War in the German Communist party. Pursuing these rescue efforts, the Vaada worked closely with Fleischmann and Weissmandel in Bratislava. The committee also conducted negotiations with the Hungarian government that was trying to untangle itself from the Nazi embrace and maintained shadowy ties with Admiral Canaris’s dissident intelligence unit of the Wehrmacht, known as the Abwehr. As the Hungarian deportations began in 1944, the Vaada extended its underground activities, manufacturing counterfeit identity documents, smuggling refugees to safety in Rumania, and relaying news to Jewish representatives in Switzerland and Turkey.50

With the shift to direct authorities, Hav Jewish leader their luck in Vaada made chance was temporarily torturing leaders of the vicem in misfired, Hungarian fascists a small group to establish Braham, the cover, for a headquarter broke with small numel weapons, a garian capi

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Jewish Resistance / 151

With the Nazi invasion of Hungary in March 1944, the Vaada shifted direction and became deeply involved with the German authorities. Having escaped the Final Solution for so long, Hungarian Jewish leaders, including the Zionist rescue activists, believed that their luck might hold. As Braham suggests, the members of the Vaada made quite logical deduction at the time that their best chance was to deal with the Germans. They began complex, eventually torturous negotiations, which ended in failure. Massive deportations to Auschwitz began in the spring, and anti-Jewish terror spread throughout the country. About this time, some dissident leaders of the Jewish Council attempted to arm Jewish labor servicemen in conjunction with an anti-Nazi uprising; this attempt misfired, however, and was crushed by the Germans and the Hungarian fascists. Resistance in Hungary now passed to a relatively small group of young Zionists, who became ever more scornful of the established Jewish leaders in Budapest. Here too, according to Braham, the structures of the Jewish establishment helped provide cover, for a time, for resisters. Youthful Hehalutz activists used the headquarters of the Jewish Council in Budapest, until they finally broke with the established leaders. These resisters, likely a very small number, maintained an underground existence, acquired weapons, and established links with anti-Nazi forces in the Hungarian capital.11

WESTERN EUROPE: JEWISH AFFIRMATION

Throughout western Europe, Jews blended far more easily than elsewhere into the national struggles against Nazism. Despite the rise of antisemitism in the 1930s, assimilation in these countries was very extensive, and Jewish patriotism was strong. Jews flocked to the colors in 1939. In France, as many as forty thousand foreign Jews joined the armed forces when war broke out, most assembled into special foreigners' units.12 Jewish soldiers fought in the various armies that engaged the Wehrmacht and were prominently involved in resistance movements that arose in countries occupied by the Germans. The resistance, however, seldom accented Jewish concerns in the manner, for example, of the Soviet-sponsored Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. Generally speaking, resistance in the west
did not address Jews separately and did not attempt its strategies to the particular Jewish predicament. Anti-Jewish currents among resisters were rare—unlike the situation with the Polish Home Army, for example—but occasional hostile voices were also heard. In addition, resistance propagandists were aware of popular anti-Jewish feeling under Nazi occupation and sometimes trimmed their messages to the people accordingly. Thus while condemning the Vichy government’s betrayal of “the national conscience” in its persecution of Jews in October 1942, the underground French newspaper *Combat* appealed to widespread hostility to recent Jewish immigrants from eastern Europe; *Combat* called for a special law restricting the rights of foreigners and urged a “naturalization that rewards their assimilation instead of initiating it.” Such expressions were infrequent, however, and Jewish veterans of the resistance often strenuously deny the existence of any such sentiment among their comrades. Certainly many thousands of Jews participated in the general resistance without ever having to face the dilemmas of their coreligionists in eastern Europe, where antisemitism was deeply rooted and widespread.

Historians usually distinguish between this participation in the broad current of resistance and resistance that affirmed some Jewish specificity. The latter has assumed an important place in the Jewish history of the various countries under Nazi occupation and is now the object of considerable historical investigation, most of it concerning France. Arguing for the importance of a Jewish consciousness in the formation of resistance sentiment, Renée Poznanski notes how Jews found themselves facing fundamental choices long before their non-Jewish contemporaries. She argues that these measures had the effect upon Jewish existence in France that the forcible labor drafts of February 1943 had for the French population as a whole: they galvanized resistance, sending a wave of new recruits into newly founded clandestine organizations. However, this kind of Jewish affirmation was generally much less widespread and intense than in the German *Lebensraum* in the east. For one thing, Jews were not generally separated physically from non-Jews as in Nazi-occupied Poland and the Soviet Union. For another, Jews in Nazi-occupied Belgium, Holland, France, and Denmark could not build upon an extensive Jewish cultural foundation firmly set in the Jewish community at large. For these reasons, resistance groups never constituted among Jews in France, *H* mass starvation east in the st*lice began* had any idea, therefore, g*(notated elsewhere and rescue is common occasionally. With the eastern European Communist establishment of the a*ité nationa Committee, nated illegal children, n Catholic cl to have its fense Com organizati ever, broad of reprisal Belgian *J*posed the, *A*JB, and its call to *tacked the conduct*.

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never constituted a countercommunity that had broad, mass appeal among Jews. Also, there were no Einsatzgruppen massacres of Jews in France, Holland, Belgium, or the Netherlands and no process of mass starvation as elsewhere. Until the massive deportations to the east in the summer of 1942, and sometimes even later, when the police began extensive roundups of natives as well as foreign Jews, few had any idea that their very survival was at stake. Jewish resistance, therefore, generally lacked the suicidal desperation that we have noted elsewhere and was far more attuned to underground relief and rescue activity. In this sense it operated on the margins of what is commonly called “resistance,” pursuing armed opposition only occasionally and in the last year of the occupation.

With the great majority of its Jewish population coming from eastern Europe in recent decades, Belgium had a particularly strong concentration of left-wing Zionist and Bundist supporters as well as Communist activists. Jewish Communists took the initiative to establish a clandestine Jewish Defense Committee in 1942, operating under the aegis of the national underground organization, the Comité national du front de l’indépendence. Eventually the Defense Committee won broad support among Jewish activists and coordinated illegal resistance activity among Belgian Jews. Its most important achievement was the rescue of three or four thousand Jewish children, many of whom were hidden with the assistance of the Catholic church. Determined to oppose the Germans and unwilling to have its activity “degenerate into simple social work,” the Defense Committee worked closely with a wide variety of underground organizations. Armed opposition was a controversial option, however, broadly opposed by a Jewish underground that feared the cycle of reprisals this would bring, and the resulting further isolation of Belgian Jews. The more militant among the resistors sharply opposed the Judenrat equivalent, the Association des Juifs de Belgique (AJB), and engaged in a futile campaign imploring Jews not to heed its call to assemble for deportation. A few armed Jewish resisters attacked the AJB headquarters in Brussels in 1942, and a year later conducted the only assault anywhere on a deportation convoy.

Concentrating on Paris, Jacques Adler emphasizes the role of the Jewish Left, especially the Communists. He contends that immigrant Jews were less entranced by the liberal heritage of France and less subject to illusions about French beneficence than were well-
established French Jews—the “Juifs français de vieille souche.” Psychologically better prepared for their ordeal, they strove to unify Jewish responses. As in the general sphere of resistance, the Jewish Communists were the first in the field, mounted the most extensive attacks on the Nazi-Vichy system, and suffered the most for their efforts. In the Jewish and non-Jewish sphere, they were known as the “parti des fusillés,” the party that paid the heaviest price before the firing squads. Their Paris-based organization, known as Solidarité, linked the internments of Jews and other anti-Jewish moves in the Occupied Zone with Vichy policy in the south. After the attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941, the Jewish Communists moved into active resistance, while at the same time championing a collective Jewish response to persecution. Specifically Jewish units were formed; Jewish internments became a focal point for agitation and self-help; and wider Jewish political activity was encouraged in the shape of the Communist-sponsored Union des Juifs pour la résistance et l’entraide (UJRE). From mid-1942, according to Adler, there was an even greater accent on specifically Jewish issues and an affirmation of a Jewish national consciousness.

Yet despite this heroic struggle, we can question how much the Jewish Communists offered persecuted Jews as a whole in France or Belgium. The starting point of the movement was Jewish identification with the cause of the Soviet Union, engaged in its titanic struggle with the Hitlerian Reich. For the Communists, Russia was the principal champion of oppressed peoples, and its interests ultimately determined resistance strategy. Therefore, Jewish Communists made few direct assaults on the Nazis’ anti-Jewish machinery: they blew up no deportation trains; assassinated no SS Jewish affairs specialists; and left it to others, for example, to liberate the camp of Drancy, the Paris antechamber to Auschwitz. The French party’s immigrant organization, the Main d’oeuvre immigré (MOI), refused to consider Solidarité or the UJRE as specifically Jewish bodies, disowning the line taken by immigrant activists and leaving them even more vulnerable to the Gestapo than would otherwise have been the case. Other Jewish resistance groups drew upon secular Jewish ideologies—mainly Bundism and Zionism—to form networks less powerful than those of the Communists, but more strictly attuned to Jewish needs in the latter part of the occupation period. Their desperate and dangerous efforts span the full range of underground activity, from juive, which cue operation nized by you. Finally, we risks—comp not conteste four Jewish of three retu

As seen ir activity note as with ever amid of res ways to im over Nazis force preve impossible. answers for east or wes ties, armed last, terribl the final m children, tl passage of gary were relatively v the assista local authi luck. And
activity, from independent fighting units, such as the French Armée juive, which later became the Organisation juive de combat, to rescue operations like those of the underground railway to Spain organized by youthful Zionist pioneering groups in the Netherlands. Finally, we should note how such work involved extraordinary risks—comparable to armed resistance elsewhere. Historians have not contested the evaluation of Olga Wormser-Migot: three out of four Jewish resisters were deported, and one of these deportees out of three returned after the war.

As seen in this chapter, Jewish resistance spans the full range of activity noted by historians of resistance in general. With the Jews, as with everyone else, armed conflict was on the peak of a great pyramid of resistance activity, most of which was designed in other ways to impede German objectives and contribute to the victory over Nazism. For most Jews, however, overwhelming German force prevented even minor achievements, and a final victory was impossible. Even the most clear-sighted resistance leaders had no answers for most Jews caught in the maelstrom of 1940–44—in the east or west. For the young, for those without family responsibilities, armed combat provided a means for Jewish affirmation in the last, terrible moments before the inevitable German onslaught or in the final months of Nazi presence; for others, the rescue of Jewish children, the manufacture of false identity papers, and the secret passage of the frontiers into Spain, Switzerland, Rumania, or Hungary were realistic possibilities. But these were exceptions—and relatively very few. For most Jews, very little could be done without the assistance of the surrounding population, the willingness of local authorities and police to look aside, and extraordinary good luck. And as we have seen, every one of these was in short supply.
7. JEWISH RESISTANCE

The very term Jewish resistance suggests a point of view. We normally think of it as a blow struck on behalf of Jews. But to many Jews in Vilna in 1943, for example, the escape of a group of Jewish fighters from the ghetto to join partisans in the nearby Narotch Forest was not heroic opposition to the Nazis, it was rather a cruel, adventuristic betrayal. What happened next was typical of resistance action and German response. Having obtained a few weapons, the escapees clashed with the Nazis outside the city, and a few Jews were captured. In retaliation for the breakout, the local Gestapo seized the entire family of each fugitive or all who lived with him; they also seized the leaders of all Jewish work parties in the vicinity, together with their families. All were shot. Thereafter, the Germans divided all work parties leaving the ghetto into groups of ten; if one person escaped, the entire group would be killed. Denouncing the first group of escapees, the ghetto newspaper called them traitors—"endangering the existence of our entire ghetto and the lives of their loved ones... They are responsible for the spilt blood." Jacob Gens, the head of the Vilna Judenrat, argued that idealism and selflessness required that the Jews remain where they were—behind the ghetto walls. As he reminded his listeners, the local SS chief could easily have liquidated the entire ghetto. At stake, therefore, were the lives of twenty thousand Jews.1

In the Lithuanian city of Kovno the Judenrat feverishly consulted
the elderly rabbi Abraham Duber Shapiro in 1942 when the Germans ordered all the Jewish inhabitants assembled for a “selection.” After agonizing discussion, the council followed Shapiro's advice: “If a Jewish community (may God help it) has been condemned to physical destruction, and there are means of rescuing part of it, the leaders of the community should have the courage and assume the responsibility to act and rescue what is possible.” The results were catastrophic, but fit expectations: of 26,400 Jews, 9,000 were taken away and shot. But the rest were spared—for a time. Later, the same council worked together with the Jewish underground. Council members assisted escapees by forging documents and providing food and clothing for those about to join the partisans. Ghetto workshops, with the approval of the Judenrat head, supplied and armed Jewish partisans in the forests, and the ghetto police provided cover for underground fighters. But in the spring of 1943, the Gestapo struck, arresting the entire council and murdering the leadership of the Jewish police. The ghetto was gradually worn down, its inhabitants deported to camps and killed. Remnants of the Kovno Jewry survived as slave laborers until the summer of 1944, when their ghetto was finally liquidated.2

For Michael Dov Ber Weissmandel, the Slovakian rabbi involved in desperate negotiations with the Nazis in the summer of 1942, resistance as conventionally understood would have seemed a cruel joke. His goal was to stop the murders by bribing high-ranking Germans with whom he was in contact. To him, money from abroad was the only justifiable response to mass murder. “We cannot understand how you can eat and drink,” he wrote in an anguished letter to Jewish representatives in Geneva, “how you can rest in your beds, how you can stroll in the streets—and I am sure you are doing all those things—while this responsibility rests upon you... We demand deeds! Not great deeds and not acts of sacrifice. Just money—and thousands and hundreds of thousands depend on that money.”3

DILEMMAS AND OBJECTIVES OF JEWISH RESISTANCE

What we see here are responses to the dizzying conditions imposed on European Jewry by the Germans. Their tactic of “collective responsibility,” as the term suggests, held entire communities or their leaders hostage, to suffer for acts of resistance. In most cases, as a result, resistance was guaranteed to punish Jews, rather than assist them. Fearful of massive German retribution, resisters everywhere waited until what they felt was the last moment—the final extinction of hope—for only then could they justify the reprisals that followed. But how was this point to be determined?

Jewish communities agonized over their prospects and were divided sharply over what tactics to follow. Since the Germans were themselves inconsistent, with the pace or character of persecution often depending on local commanders, Jewish leaders could usually find reason for a variety of actions. Time was a critical factor. Some groups of Jews were massacred immediately on contact with the Nazis, while others were spared. And even within regions conditions varied. As Yisrael Gutman has observed, while Jews were dying of starvation in places like Warsaw and Lodz in 1940 and 1941, there were other places, like Częstochowa and Zagreb, where conditions were “relatively tolerable for a prolonged period.”4 Was there a reason for this? Could Jews influence their fate? If they remained alive long enough, would they be rescued? The calculations were impossibly complex, and the impulse for resistance invariably provoked controversy and disagreement. Understandably, some never gave up hope, and therefore opposed resistance to the bitter end. In a New Year's message in 1942, council chairman Chaim Rumkowski told the Jews of Lodz that they would survive, that all would be well, “if we eradicate the evil in ourselves”—by which he meant any slackening in the ghetto's work for the Third Reich.5 Even when hopeful signs vanished, there was always the possibility that the Nazis might change their minds. Weissmandel, the Slovakian-Jewish negotiator, may actually have succeeded in one effort at suspending Slovakian deportations in the summer of 1942, while everywhere else Jews were being herded on trains to death camps; he was likely wrong in expecting to save many hundreds of thousands more by further discussions, and he received little encouragement from anyone. But there were at least scraps of evidence to justify his frantic efforts. He therefore poured his considerable energy into a futile scheme to bribe the leadership of the Third Reich. It took some time for underground leaders in various places to dare pronounce the opposite view—that all the Jews were doomed
and that there was no hope at all. Up to that point, even those disposed to resistance usually acted cautiously.

Historians evaluating Jewish resistance invariably become tangled in the stormy contemporary debates by Jews over what course to take. Historians may not, in the end, be able to dispense with their own points of view, and according to one notion they should not attempt to do so. But it is well to be aware of such moral or ideological points of departure. There is no doubt that this issue touches a sensitive nerve in the Jewish consciousness, an unspoken assumption of which has been that Jewish resistance somehow validates Jewish self-worth. More so than with most issues associated with the Holocaust, research has often been heavily preoccupied with righting a historical balance—establishing the importance of Jewish heroism in the face of overwhelming force. In Israel, the principal center for both research and commemoration of the Holocaust is Yad Vashem, known in English as the Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority.

While such preoccupations continue, it may be possible now to study resistance with greater historical detachment. Certainly a starting point is to note that historians are not always agreed on what they understand by the term resistance. Those who adopt the most restrictive definition take the view sometimes advanced by Jewish partisans—that resistance necessarily means armed struggle. While not explicit in his text, it seems clear that Raul Hilberg understands resistance as a violent uprising by Jews against their oppressors. And as we have seen, Hilberg considers that the Jews' reaction pattern . . . is characterized by almost complete lack of resistance. Its relative insignificance, in his view, can be demonstrated in terms of German casualties: "It is doubtful that the Germans and their collaborators lost more than a few hundred men, dead and wounded, in the course of the destruction process. The number of men who dropped out because of disease, nervous breakdowns, or court martial proceedings was probably greater. The Jewish resistance effort could not seriously impede or retard the progress of destructive operations. The Germans brushed that resistance aside as a minor obstacle, and in the totality of the destruction process it was of no consequence." At the other end of the scale, Yehuda Bauer argues for an inclusive approach, one that declares "keeping body and soul together" under circumstances of unimaginable privation and misery as one way of resisting the Nazis. This case was, essentially, the one made by most Jewish leaders and the Juedenrat of eastern Europe. Nonviolent resistance made most sense in 1940 and 1941, before the Final Solution, when what Jews faced seemed akin to persecution they had known so often in their past. The Jews' goal, for which they occasionally received religious sanction, was to carry on a struggle by "life-affirming means." Notably, the Jews avoided and evaded Nazi regulations. As Bauer points out, the rules the Germans set for ghettos were often so brutal and so stringent that if Jews had obeyed them they would probably have perished in a short period. Jewish food allocations for Warsaw in 1941, he notes, amounted to 336 calories daily—far below starvation levels. Later, when the Jews came to realize the nature of the Nazis' plans, resistance took other forms. But both are part of a broad pattern of collective Jewish response. Resistance during the Holocaust, Bauer says, is "any group action consciously taken in opposition to known or surmised laws, actions, or intentions directed against the Jews by the Germans and their supporters" (emphasis in original).

In the view taken here, resistance is organized activity consciously intended to damage the persecutors of Jews or seriously impair their objectives. Implicitly, this definition involves a political perspective that extends beyond the struggle of particular groups for survival. How that political aim is expressed varies widely, most obviously due to the widely differing means at hand. What matters, from this standpoint, is less what was accomplished than the intent of striking a blow against the Nazi machine. This is, it seems to me, the common thread to be found in studies of Jewish resistance activities, whatever their differences of emphasis and method. The key element, I believe, is to understand how the resisters saw their actions—an exercise that sometimes requires a considerable leap of the imagination. In the Warsaw ghetto, for example, the underground group known as Ooghe Shabbat, or OS, busied itself collecting materials on the life of the ghetto and the suffering of its inhabitants. In his ghetto diary for June 1942, Emmanuel Ringelblum described what he felt was a great achievement for the group: some information on the fate of Polish Jewry that they had smuggled outside the walls reached London and was broadcast over the BBC. Ringelblum deemed the achievement of Ooghe Shabbat a stunning
victory for Jewish resistance: “The O.S. group has fulfilled a great historical mission. It has alarmed the world to our fate, and perhaps saved hundreds of thousands of Polish Jews from extermination... I do not know who of our group will survive, who will be deemed worthy to work through our collected material. But one thing is clear to all of us. Our toils and tribulations, our devotion and constant terror, have not been in vain. We have struck the enemy a hard blow.”

In one sense, Ringelblum was wrong, and his desperate appeal makes especially painful reading today. The Polish Jews were not saved. In London, the government was not moved. There were no massive retaliatory attacks. And no blow was struck against the Germans. Yet however unrealized, one can hardly deny the resistance goals of Ringelblum and his group and one can hardly challenge their authenticity in pursuing them. My conclusion is that the best yardstick for identifying Jewish resistance is that which the Jews at the time were prepared to accept. Since that was often itself an object of bitter dispute it is best to present the widest possible view.

Historians face a serious challenge in assessing Jewish involvement in the general current of resistance activity in every country. At what point is the resistance of Jews “Jewish resistance”? As we know, many thousands of Jews fought in underground groups across Europe—from Tito’s partisans to irregular units attached to the Red Army, to Communist cells in France. Quite often such people fought as Yugoslavs, Soviets, or Frenchmen; their involvement, in these cases, had little or nothing to do with Jewish commitments. But in other cases their struggle was directly related to a Jewish cause. In December 1941 the Soviets formed a Lithuanian infantry division within the Red Army, made up of Lithuanian refugees who had fled eastward during the Nazi invasion. Certainly the Soviets’ intention was not to form a Jewish force. But Jews constituted about half of its complement in the initial recruitment stage—about five thousand men—and much of the division was stamped with a Jewish identity. Among these soldiers, Yiddish was the daily language, Jewish religious traditions were respected, and Jewish identity was maintained. Political officers attached to the unit attuned their propaganda, and hence part of their political message about the war, to the Nazi slaughter of European Jews.

Clearly motivations varied with individuals. Most often these were mixed, however, having reference both to a Jewish and a general imperative in the struggle against Nazism. Among Communists or others of the far Left, it was common to declare the Jewish cause to be at one with the rest of the free world. The Soviets encouraged this as a propaganda theme, constituting a Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in April 1942, with a Yiddish-language newspaper Eynikayt (Unity) that carried accounts of Nazi atrocities. Associated with the Soviet-Jewish novelist Ilya Ehrenburg, this effort signaled a remarkable (and, as it turned out, short-lived) Soviet approval of the use of Jewish identity as part of the mobilization against Nazism. The committee made an explicit appeal to the West on behalf of the Jews, who were encouraged to look to Moscow as the principal champion of their cause. All along the line, as a result, Communist organs beamed to Jewish readers some sense of the Nazi Holocaust. Reporting the uprising of the Warsaw ghetto in France, for example, the Jewish Communist journal Notre Voix denounced the destruction of “the greatest European center for Jewish life.” “Their sacrifice is not in vain. Every French Jew should by now awaken to the fact that only by adopting hard-line attitudes, in this life-and-death struggle with the Hitlerites, can safety be insured for the Jewish people.”

To others, the Holocaust fortified the prewar arguments on behalf of a Jewish national home. As the war went on, and as information about the massacre of European Jewry accumulated, Zionist sentiment penetrated Jewish consciousness where it had not existed before and became another means for expressing Jewish motivations in resistance movements. Writing in 1942, the Hungarian Jewish leader Otto Komoly despaired of solving the “Jewish Question” in the Diaspora: “Nowadays there is no serious-minded Jew who would not acknowledge the veracity of the Zionist rationale—that Jews would be unable to assimilate and would remain aliens wherever they lived as long as they were unable, unlike all other peoples, to have a country of their own.” Despite official disapproval, there is evidence of a strong Zionist affinity within the Lithuanian division and intense suspicion of this tendency among its political officers.

Support for a Jewish national home in Palestine, it seems, together with a heightened national consciousness among Jews, was one of the by-products of the resistance experience of many Jews.

One last remark before looking at some regional manifestations:
in any evaluation of Jewish resistance, one must beware of applying to the Jewish victims of Naziism criteria and scales of judgment that one would not apply to other groups in similar circumstances. Observers sometimes set arbitrary standards for Jewish populations, assume that the incidence of physical resistance among them should have been high, and then seek esoteric explanations as to why this was not so. The case of Soviet prisoners of war highlights how unfair this approach can be. According to Christian Streit, some 3.3 million out of a total of 5.7 million Soviet prisoners perished while in German custody, most of them executed, starved, or worked to death; yet we have no knowledge of any important uprising until the very end of the war among these victims—men of military age and training, about whose fate there was little doubt.\(^7\) Similarly, the caution that Jews expressed about armed resistance should be seen in the context of a European-wide disinclination to incur massive German reprisals for violent operations. We know, from our vantage point, that the Jews were doomed by the Final Solution, and in this sense their fate was unique in Nazi-occupied Europe. But this was not generally evident to the Jews themselves. And even when it was, their response must surely be assessed with an eye to other civilian populations of Europe. Such people virtually never threw themselves against Nazi troops and police in the sort of desperate gesture that many assume now the Jews should have undertaken. It makes no sense to expect communities of Jews, without military traditions or experience, containing people of all ages and backgrounds, to have behaved, for example, like warlike Chetniks in the mountains of Yugoslavia or hardened Communists in Lyon. Commenting on this point, the historian of the French resistance Henri Michel observed how, from the very outset, the Jews lacked basic requisites for resistance found elsewhere: they had no supportive environment of sympathetic populations; they lacked the trained personnel and equipment that partisans drew upon everywhere; and they had no link with the Allies or with governments in exile. The Jews’ calamity was indeed unique, but their circumstances hardly favored the kind of physical uprising many feel is missing from the historical record.\(^8\)

GHETTOS, FORESTS, AND CAMPS
IN EASTERN EUROPE

Reflecting on resistance in wartime Yugoslavia, Milovan Dijhas speaks of a fundamental psychological requisite that was usually missing from Jewish resistance groups—the “prospect of victory.” According to Dijhas, who monitored carefully what was necessary to keep Tito’s partisans in the field, “victory must be worth the trouble and sacrifice. An insane form of human relations, war is nevertheless a highly motivated and extremely rational act.”\(^9\) In eastern Europe this expectation of victory was almost always missing, and the Jews fought, as the apt title of a recent work puts it, “the war of the doomed.” But how did a small number reach this point? It takes time, as we know, to abandon all hope.

In Poland and occupied parts of the Soviet Union most Jews were killed before violent opposition of any sort was possible. Survivors of the initial shocks of ghettoization or mass shooting seem to have been overwhelmed. Cut off from the outside, exhausted by prolonged hunger, the Jews seldom had time to build resistance networks or the perspective to see through Nazi deceptions. Historians have traced the beginnings of underground organization to the latter part of 1942, when most communities were already decimated by the massive deportations to death camps. A study of ghetto underground organizations indicates that practical planning began only after the first deportations—by which point a handful of rebels were finally convinced that the inhabitants had no chance for survival.\(^10\) Organization continued into 1943, a year that saw outbreaks in the ghettos of Warsaw and Białystok, and violent incidents in Częstochowa, Brody, Tarnów, Sandomierz, and elsewhere. In general, the groups that banded together were pitifully small and barely armed at all.

For Warsaw, which saw the most important of several ghetto rebellions, Yisrael Gutman estimates the original insurgents as numbering under a thousand in a ghetto population of about forty thousand. The uprising began in the spring of 1943, following the disappearance of some 80 percent of the original ghetto population, most of whom had been sent to Treblinka to be murdered the previous summer. From the outset, therefore, the Jewish rebels were a small
minority within their own community, a fragment of the remnant still alive after massive deportations. The mainstream Jewish Fighting Organization, or ZOB, with under five hundred fighters, was armed with gasoline bombs, hand grenades, pistols, one or two submachine guns, and about ten rifles. Its Revisionist counterpart apparently had some minor heavier armament. Jewish historians have pored painstakingly over the question of these weapons to the point of counting every pistol and calculating every bit of ammunition the rebels managed to procure. Their conclusion is that the Polish Home Army helped starve the weapon-hungry Jewish fighters, leaving them even more vulnerable than would otherwise be the case. For reasons discussed in chapter 5, anti-Jewish feeling and a different strategic conception of the fight against Nazism ensured that the Warsaw Jews would end their struggle virtually alone.

Against them, the German commander SS-Brigadeführer (Major General) Jürgen Stroop daily mustered over two thousand well-armed men, equipped with armored vehicles, artillery, flamethrowers, heavy caliber machine guns, and even aircraft. Once the fighting began, many hundreds of Jews were drawn into the struggle. Eventually, the Germans set fire to the ghetto to drive out its inhabitants, reduced whole blocks to rubble by shelling, and pumped poison gas into sewers and bunkers where the Jews sought shelter. Sporadic resistance continued for more than a month, ending in the total destruction of the ghetto and the deportation of its remaining population. As for German losses, Stroop admitted sixteen dead and eighty-five wounded; Gutman does not dismiss these figures out of hand, but while discounting the highly exaggerated Jewish claims he concludes that the German list was probably incomplete. The significance of the uprising was clearly symbolic, however. This was, after all, the first significant urban revolt against a Nazi occupation in Europe. As Gutman puts it, “the principal impact . . . lay not in the casualties it caused but in the fact that the Germans were forced to invest a substantial number of men and weapons merely to hold their own in what turned out to be a long struggle under the most disadvantageous conditions—from the viewpoint of both political propaganda and the effect of the fighting upon the non-Jewish population of Poland.” The greatest impact was undoubtedly on the Jews themselves. News of the Warsaw ghetto rebellion spread among other imprisoned groups of Jews, and inspired pride and emulation. It had a clear if unmeasurable impact on those who were groping toward resistance elsewhere.19

Ironically, and underscoring the hopelessness of the revolt, the uprising of the ghetto may have quickened the pace of the Final Solution. According to Gutman the Germans thereafter applied much more armed force than ever before in initiating deportations and took greater care with security matters. They accelerated the liquidation of camps and ghettos in the eastern part of the Generalgouvernement, able to demonstrate to recalcitrant officials still eager to exploit Jewish labor the mortal danger posed by the Jews.20

Historians are now extending our knowledge of armed resistance in eastern Europe, drawing upon Jewish documentation as well as the Nazis’ own appreciation of the insurgents. Increasingly, their work seems less burdened with ideology and more devoted to the reconstruction of a very complex and diverse historical terrain. By any scale, we can now point to considerable resistance activity. Yehuda Bauer identifies armed resistance to the Nazis and their henchmen in twenty-four ghettos of western and central Poland, the heaviest Jewish population concentration, and even more in eastern parts of the country. Full-scale ghetto revolts seldom occurred, to be sure, but armed clashes between Germans and scattered groups of Jews were not uncommon. In several cases organizers deliberately attempted to create confusion and the impression of a full-scale rebellion, giving cover to mass flight to the forests.21 Thousands of Jews on the run managed to establish so-called family camps in the wooded countryside of Belorussia and Volhynia, where Jewish refugees scratched out a bare existence.22 Jews also formed their own partisan units—numbering as many as 15,000 in western Belorussia, for example, according to one rough estimate.23 Krakowski has found more than thirty Jewish partisan groups established in the Generalgouvernement of Poland between 1942 and 1943, and notes hundreds of Jews participating in non-Jewish formations as well. He further estimates that more than 50,000 Jews escaped to the forests, most of whom were killed in German manhunts.24 Studying Lithuanian territory occupied by the Germans in 1941, Dov Levin estimates that resistance fighters numbered at least 10,000 men and women, including some 8,000 Lithuanian partisans and other units fighting with the Red Army and more than 2,000 in ghettos and labor camps. As he notes, these figures repre-
sent 4 percent of the 250,000 Jews living in Lithuania on the eve of the Nazi invasion and approximately 16 percent of the Jews who were still alive at the beginning of 1942. By most comparative measurements, this was an extraordinarily high proportion of the victimized communities.

Historians provide insights as well on the organizational framework of Jewish resistance, particularly the ghetto underground. Those unfamiliar with Jewish life in eastern Europe before the Holocaust may see in the politics of Jewish resistance evidence of incorrigible factiousness and division. In Warsaw, for example, the Jewish resistance was built upon the preexisting political groups and splinters of groups within the ghetto, each one of which formed platoon-sized fighting units. It was remarkably difficult for these groups to work together, and only in July 1942 did representatives of Zionist youth movements finally manage to form a united combat organization—the ZOB. And even then some groups remained outside—the right-wing Zionist Revisionists and the various religious factions including the orthodox Agudat Yisrael. In fairness, it should be pointed out that Jewish resistance hardly had a European monopoly on partisan squabbling, as students of underground politics everywhere in Europe can attest. Yet what is striking about the Jewish case may be east European Jewry's zest for political organization, a striking feature of the urban landscape of Poland in the 1930s. Jewish cultural and educational activities also spawned a dense network of organizations, characteristic of Jewish communal life. The organizations that became the vehicles for resistance were not traditional Jewish community agencies, however. Research indicates that most of the long-established leaders of Polish Jewry left their places of authority with the arrival of the Nazis. Some were killed, others simply abandoned their posts, fled eastward, or otherwise disappeared.

According to Gutman, it was Jewish youth movements that filled the vacuum created by the departed leaders. One must understand the European framework of these movements—often militant, activist adjuncts of established political formations, with members somewhat older than present-day North American equivalents. Among Jews, these associations were mainly Zionist and Bundist, ideologically sophisticated, and committed to camaraderie and communal action. Both of these streams had a utopian vision—Jewish autonomy within a socialist society in Poland for the Bundists, and a Jewish nation in Palestine for the Zionists. Both had a historical view that placed their struggle in the context of Jewish victimization and self-assertion. Less inured to traditional patterns of political behavior than their adult counterparts, youth leaders seem to have grasped the Jews' predicament more quickly than established Jewish spokesmen. Young people were generally more adventurous and more harried than their elders, and had fewer familial responsibilities as well. Almost invariably, they were more prone to draw the revolutionary conclusions implied in resistance. During the occupation they emerged from the cocoons of prewar organizational life to immerse themselves in the struggles of their communities. In one ghetto after another they became the spearheads of opposition to the more conservative Judenrätter and the core of resistance formations.

Plainly, resistors were a tiny minority. Once formed, resistance groups had frequently to face the strong opposition of the Jewish communities in which they lived. The Judenrätter often did everything possible to undermine resistance networks. The Jewish police tracked them down, and they were denounced in the official Jewish press. Up to the last moment most ghetto inmates rejected resistance when the suggestion was made. According to Trunk, at least one Judenrat, in the town of Shavli, even voted on the matter. The majority rejected the suggestion of their chairman, Mendel Leibowitz, that the Jews take up arms and prepare to set fire to their ghetto if the end was near. Most were unwilling to face the bitter conclusion and also to sacrifice women and children. In one of the most dramatic instances, the Jewish public in the Vilna ghetto demanded that the underground surrender its leader, Yitzhak Wittenberg, to the Nazis in 1943, fearing the liquidation of the entire ghetto if they did not. "The truth is that the Jewish public in most of the ghettos neither understood nor accepted the path and assessment of the fighters," says Yisrael Gutman. "As always, it was the select few of the oppressed who decided to go underground and fight."

Every historian of Jewish resistance has had to consider relations with non-Jewish opponents of the Nazis in eastern Europe—an
issue that has been touched upon in chapter 5. While hostility toward the Jews was widespread, and in some places intense, it is also clear that circumstances varied, with a corresponding impact on the Jewish resisters. Only scraps of evidence have been published about this theme, and our knowledge has not gone far beyond the collection of anecdotes. One can certainly conclude, however, that the outlook of Polish Jews, the great majority in the region, was stamped with a deep sense of isolation. Generally spurred by the Polish resistance or local partisans, the Jews came increasingly to recognize the helplessness of their position. “After the war Poland will be resurrected,” one of them told Jan Karski, a courier from the Polish Home Army. “Your cities will be rebuilt and your wounds will slowly heal. From this ocean of tears, pain, rage, and humiliation your country will emerge again but the Polish Jews will no longer exist. We will be dead. Hitler will lose his war against the human, the just, and the good, but he will win his war against the Polish Jews. No—it will not be a victory; the Jewish people will be murdered.”

Throughout Poland, Jewish resistance gradually assumed the character of an armed protest—a last, suicidal gesture of anger and vengeance of a doomed community. Without hope, the Jewish rebels were in an utterly different position from non-Jews, many of whom fought precisely with the postwar future in mind.

For Lithuanian Jews, on the other hand, as Levin’s book suggests, the Soviet-sponsored military and political network broke through the isolation caused by the hostility of the local population. Unlike much of Poland, the Lithuanian situation was not entirely hopeless. In such places as Kovno, Svencion, and Shavli, the options for Jewish fighters included a desperate flight to nearby forests. While the great majority were slaughtered, some survived. In territory taken from the Soviet Union in 1941 the experience of Jewish resisters seems to have varied. Material is scarce, and researchers are hampered by the lack of access to Soviet archives. According to Hersch Smolar, head of the Jewish underground in the Belorussian capital of Minsk, there was much support for the Jews among the Belorussian population. The ghetto underground there seems to have established important links with partisans in the rest of the city and in the surrounding countryside as well. Throughout the Ukraine, on the other hand, pro-German feeling and anti-Jewish hostility seem to have been extensive from the very beginning, contributing to the isolation of Jews even when the local partisans turned against the Nazi occupation.

Conditions in the concentration and death camps, where a handful of revolts occurred, provide the most extreme illustration of this isolation. In the camps the Jews were enervated by exhaustion, starvation, and disease and crushed by the most complete totalitarian structure to have been devised by man. Help from the outside was nonexistent, and the Jews were utterly alone. “Collective responsibility” was unrestrained: punishment for any infraction of the rules was immediate and lethal. In such circumstances, resistance was a direct, even mortal threat to every Jewish inmate. Opposition, therefore, seemed impossible. Even so, sabotage and individual attempts to escape were not uncommon. And in a few cases there were even substantial, violent clashes. Almost always the rebels had no chance, accounting for the frequent hesitation and delay of inmate strategists. Timing was crucial. A quite sophisticated resistance network existed in the Płaszów concentration camp, for example, but in the end its members failed to revolt. An uprising of the inmates of Treblinka led to a breakout of several score prisoners, only twelve of whom survived; a few months later hundreds burst out of Sobibór, but most of them were immediately killed. In October 1944, when the death factory of Auschwitz was soon to be dismantled, there was a revolt of its Jewish Sonderkommando—men employed in grisly tasks by the Nazis before they were murdered themselves. The inmates succeeded in destroying one of the crematoria and killing a few guards. Almost all the rebels fell in the fighting or were captured soon after. Elsewhere, in smaller camps, collective uprisings also occurred, but here too the inmates were wiped out in almost every case.

Important uprisings occurred in three of the six death camps—Treblinka, Sobibór, and Auschwitz. Bauer notes three other camp rebellions—at Kruszyna, Krychów, and Minsk Mazowiecki—observing that “these were the only rebellions that ever did take place in any Nazi camps, except for that of Soviet prisoners of war at Ebensee at the end of the war.” We also know that there were several hundred escapes from these camps—many aided by collective action that, in camp conditions, was possibly the only way for resistance to express itself.
SLOVAKIA AND HUNGARY: RESCUE AS RESISTANCE

Central Europe saw quite a different current of resistance activity associated with the rescue of Jews—smuggling refugees to sanctuary on the periphery of the Nazi empire, often sending them on to Palestine. Most of this activity was conducted secretly, at great risk to the organizers, and with the additional objective of passing detailed information about the Jewish catastrophe to the outside world. Of political motivation in the widest sense, moreover, there is no doubt. "When we see this terrible tragedy before us," wrote an organizer in Bratislava to contacts in Geneva, "we see the continuation of our rescue work as God's sacred wish. The life of every single refugee is sacred to us and we know that you are bound to them with all your heart strings. Let us, then, carry on this work with our united strengths."  

Gisi Fleischmann, the author of those lines, was the Slovakian leader of WIZO, the Women's International Zionist Organization, and the head of the emigration department of the so-called Jewish Center, the Slovakian equivalent of the Jüdische Werkstätte established everywhere by the Germans. In this case the Jewish Center operated under Slovakian government auspices, in conditions of systematic persecution that also included, for a time, deportations to death camps in the east. In a pattern that occurred elsewhere, activist members of the Jewish agency established to administer persecution used the cover provided by that body to form a network of self-help. During the course of the deportations, as the official Jewish leadership floundered in despair, a committee known as the Working Group came into being to negotiate with Dieter Wisliceny, Adolf Eichmann's representative in Bratislava. These negotiations will be considered in the next chapter. But along with these discussions, the Working Group became involved in other activities, notably underground rescue and intelligence efforts. 

The Working Group sent out lines of contact in every direction. Rabbi Weissmandel, the ultra-Orthodox rabbi who relentlessly pursued negotiations with Wisliceny, carried on a sustained secret correspondence with Jewish organizations in Geneva, Istanbul, and Budapest. A courageous and energetic woman, Gisi Fleischmann was in touch with the American Joint Distribution Committee, of which she was the Slovakian representative, sending a stream of coded letters to its deputies in Switzerland. She spent a great deal of effort building an intelligence network with links in Poland and relayed to the west whatever was discovered about the fate of deported Jews.  

Fleischmann helped establish an underground railroad to Budapest, working with the Hungarian Jewish Relief and Rescue Committee. As well, the Slovakian leaders worked closely with the Zionist youth organization Hechalutz, smuggling Jews across the frontier into Hungary. They even sent envoys to the Nazi death camps of Lublin and Majdanek to ascertain the fate of Jewish deportees. Evidence suggests that members of the Jewish Center who were also part of the Working Group had a "dual role," as Livia Rothkirchen puts it. "Officially, they were part of the apparatus of the pro-Nazi Tiso regime, doing the bidding of Slovakian authorities; at the same time, using the instruments provided by their office, and fully conscious of the peril Jews faced, they worked to subvert the machinery of destruction. Such work involved enormous risks. Fleischmann herself was arrested twice and was finally murdered in Auschwitz in the autumn of 1944. Weissmandel was similarly arrested, released, and then deported, but he managed to jump from the train and eventually escaped to Switzerland.

After learning details about the killings at Auschwitz-Birkenau from two Jewish escapees, Weissmandel seems to have been the first to propose an Allied bombing of the railway approaches to the camp as a way of disrupting the killings. In mid-May 1944 he sent two coded telegrams from Bratislava to Swiss Orthodox leaders for transmission to the United States. At the same time he was involved in complex and ultimately futile negotiations originating in Hungary for the cessation of the Final Solution. Bitterly disappointed at the lack of support he felt he received, he fulminated against world Jewry for not providing the funds to support his efforts to bribe high-ranking Nazis. Between the negotiator on the spot, knowing the worst of the Nazis' atrocities, and Jews in the free world, snared in the bureaucracies of their own organizations as well as the indifference of Allied governments, there was a profound gulf of misunderstanding. Beyond this, a clash of cultures possibly impeded communication. Weissmandel was an extremely pious Jew whose language and worldview were steeped in rabbinic traditions; some of his Jewish interlocutors were freethinking Zionists or worldly pro-
professionals, suspicious of Orthodoxy, and inclined to dispute his evaluation of Nazi policies and his efficacy in opposing them. Present-day assessments of these negotiations may still be affected by such differences of outlook.\(^{47}\)

The Hungarian counterpart to the Working Group operated more openly, given the buffer that the government in Budapest placed between the Jews of that country and anti-Jewish extremists. At the beginning of 1943 a handful of Jewish activists established a Relief and Rescue Committee, which operated within the framework of the government-sponsored Jewish Council and was empowered to assist Jewish refugees entering the country from Slovakia and Poland. Known by its Hebrew name—the Vaada (for Vaadat Ezra ve’Hatzalah)—this committee played an important and extremely controversial role, to be considered later, in negotiations with the SS in 1944 for the ransom of Hungarian and other threatened Jews. Its leaders included Otto Komoly, Rezső Kasztner, and Samuel Springmann—prominent figures in the world of Hungarian Zionism. Sharply divided internally, and quarreling also with its counterpart in Istanbul, the Vaada seems to have functioned usefully, smuggling Jewish escapees into the country, maintaining them when they arrived, and arranging their subsequent escape elsewhere, even to Palestine. Several hundred of these refugees formed an underground network in Budapest, led by a Polish-Jewish partisan Boris Teicholz. In all, as many as fifteen thousand Jewish refugees may have entered Hungary during the war, although the numbers cannot be determined with any certainty.\(^{48}\) Much of this refugee work was clandestine—organized by one of its officials, Joel Brand, who doubtless drew upon his underground experience after the First World War in the German Communist party. Pursuing these rescue efforts, the Vaada worked closely with Fleischmann and Weissmandel in Bratislava. The committee also conducted negotiations with the Hungarian government that was trying to unravel itself from the Nazi embrace and maintain shadow ties with Admiral Canaris’s dissident intelligence unit of the Wehrmacht, known as the Abwehr. As the Hungarian deportations began in 1944, the Vaada extended its underground activities, manufacturing counterfeit identity documents, smuggling refugees to safety in Rumania, and relaying news to Jewish representatives in Switzerland and Turkey.\(^{49}\)

With the Nazi invasion of Hungary in March 1944, the Vaada shifted direction and became deeply involved with the German authorities. Having escaped the Final Solution for so long, Hungarian Jewish leaders, including the Zionist rescue activists, believed that their luck might hold. As Braham suggests, the members of the Vaada made the quite logical deduction at the time that their best chance was to deal with the Germans. They began complex, eventually tortuous negotiations, which ended in failure. Massive deportations to Auschwitz began in the spring, and anti-Jewish terror spread throughout the country. About this time some dissident leaders of the Jewish Council attempted to arm Jewish labor servicemen in conjunction with an anti-Nazi uprising; this attempt misfired, however, and was crushed by the Germans and the Hungarian fascists. Resistance in Hungary now passed to a relatively small group of young Zionists, who became ever more scornful of the established Jewish leaders in Budapest. Here too, according to Braham, the structures of the Jewish establishment helped provide cover, for a time, for resisters. Youthful Hehalutz activists used the headquarters of the Jewish Council in Budapest, until they finally broke with the established leaders. These resisters, likely a very small number, maintained an underground existence, acquired weapons, and established links with anti-Nazi forces in the Hungarian capital.\(^{51}\)

WESTERN EUROPE: JEWISH AFFIRMATION

Throughout western Europe, Jews blended far more easily than elsewhere into the national struggles against Nazism. Despite the rise of antisemitism in the 1930s, assimilation in these countries was very extensive, and Jewish patriotism was strong. Jews flocked to the colors in 1939. In France, as many as forty thousand foreign Jews joined the armed forces when war broke out, most assembled into special foreigners’ units.\(^{52}\) Jewish soldiers fought in the various armies that engaged the Wehrmacht and were prominently involved in resistance movements that arose in countries occupied by the Germans. The resistance, however, seldom accented Jewish concerns in the manner, for example, of the Soviet-sponsored Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. Generally speaking, resistance in the west
did not address Jews separately and did not attune its strategies to the particular Jewish predicament. Anti-Jewish currents among resisters were rare—unlike the situation with the Polish Home Army, for example—but occasional hostile voices were also heard. In addition, resistance propagandists were aware of popular anti-Jewish feeling under Nazi occupation and sometimes trimmed their messages to the people accordingly. Thus while condemning the Vichy government's betrayal of "the national conscience" in its persecution of Jews in October 1942, the underground French newspaper *Combat* appealed to widespread hostility to recent Jewish immigrants from eastern Europe; *Combat* called for a special law restricting the rights of foreigners and urged a "naturalization that rewards their assimilation instead of initiating it." Such expressions were infrequent, however, and Jewish veterans of the resistance often strenuously deny the existence of any such sentiment among their comrades. Certainly many thousands of Jews participated in the general resistance without ever having to face the dilemmas of their coreligionists in eastern Europe, where antisemitism was deeply rooted and widespread.

Historians usually distinguish between this participation in the broad current of resistance and resistance that affirmed some Jewish specificity. The latter has assumed an important place in the Jewish history of the various countries under Nazi occupation and is now the object of considerable historical investigation, most of it concerning France. Arguing for the importance of a Jewish consciousness in the formation of resistance sentiment, Renée Poznanski notes how Jews found themselves facing fundamental choices long before their non-Jewish contemporaries. She argues that these measures had the effect upon Jewish existence in France that the forcible labor drafts of February 1943 had for the French population as a whole: they galvanized resistance, sending a wave of new recruits into newly founded clandestine organizations. However, this kind of Jewish affirmation was generally much less widespread and intense than in the German Lebensraum in the east. For one thing, Jews were not generally separated physically from non-Jews as in Nazi-occupied Poland and the Soviet Union. For another, Jews in Nazi-occupied Belgium, Holland, France, and Denmark could not build upon an extensive Jewish cultural foundation firmly set in the Jewish community at large. For these reasons, resistance groups never constituted a countercommunity that had broad, mass appeal among Jews. Also, there were no Einsatzgruppen massacres of Jews in France, Holland, Belgium, or the Netherlands and no process of mass starvation as elsewhere. Until the massive deportations to the east in the summer of 1942, and sometimes even later, when the police began extensive roundups of natives as well as foreign Jews, few had any idea that their very survival was at stake. Jewish resistance, therefore, generally lacked the suicidal desperation that we have noted elsewhere and was far more attuned to underground relief and rescue activity. In this sense it operated on the margins of what is commonly called "resistance," pursuing armed opposition only occasionally and in the last year of the occupation.

With the great majority of its Jewish population coming from eastern Europe in recent decades, Belgium had a particularly strong concentration of left-wing Zionist and Bundist supporters as well as Communist activists. Jewish Communists took the initiative to establish a clandestine Jewish Defense Committee in 1942, operating under the aegis of the national underground organization, the Comité national du front de l'indépendance. Eventually the Defense Committee won broad support among Jewish activists and coordinated illegal resistance activity among Belgian Jews. Its most important achievement was the rescue of three or four thousand Jewish children, many of whom were hidden with the assistance of the Catholic church. Determined to oppose the Germans and unwilling to have its activity "degenerate into simple social work," the Defense Committee worked closely with a wide variety of underground organizations. Armed opposition was a controversial option, however, broadly opposed by a Jewish underground that feared the cycle of reprisals this would bring, and the resulting further isolation of Belgian Jews. The more militant among the resisters sharply opposed the *Judenrat* equivalent, the Association des Juifs de Belgique (AJB), and engaged in a futile campaign imploring Jews not to heed its call to assemble for deportation. A few armed Jewish resisters attacked the AJB headquarters in Brussels in 1942, and a year later conducted the only assault anywhere on a deportation convoy.

Concentrating on Paris, Jacques Adler emphasizes the role of the Jewish Left, especially the Communists. He contends that immigrant Jews were less entranced by the liberal heritage of France and less subject to illusions about French beneficence than were well-
established French Jews—the “Juifs français de vieille souche.” Psychologically better prepared for their ordeal, they strove to unify Jewish responses. As in the general sphere of resistance, the Jewish Communists were the first in the field, mounted the most extensive attacks on the Nazi-Vichy system, and suffered the most for their efforts. In the Jewish and non-Jewish sphere, they were known as the “parti des fusillés,” the party that paid the heaviest price before the firing squads. Their Paris-based organization, known as Solidarité, linked the internments of Jews and other anti-Jewish moves in the Occupied Zone with Vichy policy in the South. After the attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941, the Jewish Communists moved into active resistance, while at the same time championing a collective Jewish response to persecution. Specifically Jewish units were formed; Jewish internments became a focal point for agitation and self-help; and wider Jewish political activity was encouraged in the shape of the Communist-sponsored Union des Juifs pour la résistance et l’entraide (UJRE). From mid-1942, according to Adler, there was an even greater accent on specifically Jewish issues and an affirmation of a Jewish national consciousness.

Yet despite this heroic struggle, we can question how much the Jewish Communists offered persecuted Jews as a whole in France or Belgium. The starting point of the movement was Jewish identification with the cause of the Soviet Union, engaged in its titanic struggle with the Hitlerian Reich. For the Communists, Russia was the principal champion of oppressed peoples, and its interests ultimately determined resistance strategy. Therefore, Jewish Communists made few direct assaults on the Nazis’ anti-Jewish machinery: they blew up no deportation trains; assassinated no SS Jewish affairs specialists; and left it to others, for example, to liberate the camp of Drancy, the Paris antechamber to Auschwitz. The French party’s immigrant organization, the Main d’oeuvre immigré (MOI), refused to consider Solidarité or the UJRE as specifically Jewish bodies, disowning the line taken by immigrant activists and leaving them even more vulnerable to the Gestapo than would otherwise have been the case. Other Jewish resistance groups drew upon secular Jewish ideologies—mainly Bundism and Zionism—to form networks less powerful than those of the Communists, but more strictly attuned to Jewish needs in the latter part of the occupation period. Their desperate and dangerous efforts span the full range of underground activity, from independent fighting units, such as the French Armée juive, which later became the Organisation juive de combat, to rescue operations like those of the underground railway to Spain organized by youthful Zionist pioneering groups in the Netherlands. Finally, we should note how such work involved extraordinary risks—comparable to armed resistance elsewhere. Historians have not contested the evaluation of Olga Wronner-Migot: three out of four Jewish resisters were deported, and one of these deportees out of three returned after the war.

As seen in this chapter, Jewish resistance spans the full range of activity noted by historians of resistance in general. With the Jews, as with everyone else, armed conflict was on the peak of a great pyramid of resistance activity, most of which was designed in other ways to impede German objectives and contribute to the victory over Nazism. For most Jews, however, overwhelming German force prevented even minor achievements, and a final victory was impossible. Even the most clear-sighted resistance leaders had no answers for most Jews caught in the maelstrom of 1940–44—in the east or west. For the young, for those without family responsibilities, armed combat provided a means for Jewish affirmation in the last, terrible moments before the inevitable German onslaught or in the final months of Nazi presence; for others, the rescue of Jewish children, the manufacture of false identity papers, and the secret passage of the frontiers into Spain, Switzerland, Rumania, or Hungary were realistic possibilities. But these were exceptions—and relatively very few. For most Jews, very little could be done without the assistance of the surrounding population, the willingness of local authorities and police to look aside, and extraordinary good luck. And as we have seen, every one of these was in short supply.