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# THE UNWRITTEN ORDER

Hitler's Role in the Final Solution

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TEMPUS

## 'BY REMOVING THE JEWS' HITLER'S RESPONSIBILITY

As has been shown in the previous chapters, it can be proved that Hitler also played a leading role in 'Anti-Jewish policy' in the last years of the Third Reich, in the phase of the Final Solution.

Hitler's responsibility for the murder of the European Jews can be seen directly as well as indirectly: on the basis of way in which the apparatus of power was structured one can assume with complete certainty that an operation like the murder of millions of people in all areas of Europe, an operation therefore with such wide ramifications and necessitating such huge resources in terms of personnel and materials, was only possible with the consent of the man at the top, the man in whom all the various threads came together.

However, Hitler's responsibility for the Holocaust is also subject to documentary proof. Initially this includes his attitudes to certain key groups amongst the servants of the regime – his repeated speeches to generals, for example, and other significant instructions for the preparation of the racist campaign of destruction against the Soviet Union in spring 1941, his statements concerning the 'new order' of the occupied Soviet area on 16 July 1941, or his speech to the Reich and Gauleiter on 12 December 1941.

This attitudes were not so much concrete instructions telling others how to act, but were intended to create a particular climate in which the executive organs of the state were made certain that all further forms of radicalization of the 'Anti-Jewish policy' had the authorization of the highest representative of the regime. This is true of Hitler's repeated radically anti-Semitic statements to Goebbels or to his dinner guests, and also of his public speeches, in which he returned again and again to his 'prophecy' that he would 'destroy the Jews of Europe' in the event of a World War.

In addition, however, Hitler issued instructions orally, in private conversations, which served to set in motion individual operations as part of the systematic mass murder of the Jews. These consisted of giving individuals authorization, allowing his subordinates to decide on how the operations were to be executed, and significantly they are only preserved in

the notes made by those to whom he was talking. The model for such authorizations was the pogrom of 9 November 1938, when Hitler initially gave Goebbels oral instructions, then absented himself, left Goebbels responsible for the further conduct of the pogrom, and then re-involved himself during the course of the night (via the Führer's Deputy, amongst other means). There was a similar course of action when Himmler gave Hitler the early plans for the deportation of the Jews to Africa in May 1940. He approved the suggestions in principle, and encouraged Himmler to show his plans to Fränk.

Hitler gave decisive authorization for the policy of deporting the European Jews. At the end of 1940 he instructed Heydrich to present a 'project for the Final Solution', which he had in January 1941, and which envisaged the deportation of all the Jews into an area yet to be fixed upon. By the end of May at the latest it had been decided that this would be the Soviet Union, which would have to be conquered. Furthermore, he made a series of individual decisions about plans for deportation. In the middle of September 1941 Hitler ordered the deportation of the Jews from Germany threatening them with 'reprisals' in the event that the USA entered the war. A little later, Heydrich noted his instruction to the effect that the Jews would have to leave 'the whole of Europe'.

On 18 December 1941 Hitler confirmed to Himmler that the Jews were to be 'extirpated as partisans', most probably referring to the occupied Eastern areas. In July 1942 Himmler reported that he had received an instruction from Hitler to render the occupied Eastern areas 'free of Jews'. But Hitler did not let things rest with such instructions kept at such a general level. It can be proved that in 1941 and 1942 he had the RSHA and Himmler keep him informed about the mass murders in the East.

Furthermore, in September 1942 Hitler ordered the deportation of the Jews still living in Germany, and at the same time he seems to have given the decisive impetus for accelerating the deportations from allied nations. On 10 December 1942 he instructed Himmler to 'get rid of' 600,000-700,000 Jews and other enemies in France. The plan, adumbrated on the same day, to exchange Jews for hard currency as an exception to the policy of mass destruction, also needed the explicit agreement of Hitler. Hitler's instruction in June 1943 to Himmler - for the 'radical implementation' of the plan to 'evacuate' the Jews still alive within three to four months - completes the picture.

Such direct instructions by Hitler have been handed down in an accidental and fragmentary manner; we are dealing with the remains of what must be a much bigger mass of instructions. Such fragments make it clear that the murder of the European Jews was not the outcome of a single order but the result of a policy pursued by the regime over a relatively long period of time, which was time and time again driven forward decisively by Hitler himself.

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There is in addition a series of unambiguous statements by Himmler and Hitler from the years 1943 and 1944 on the question of responsibility for the murder of the Jews. In various addresses during this period Himmler expressed himself very clearly about the murder of the European Jews by his SS, and at the same time he referred to having received a commission for these mass murders. Even if he did not name one particular name, his listeners knew perfectly well who it was who had given him this commission, since as Reichsführer of the SS he was subordinate to only one person, and one person alone: Adolf Hitler.

Addressing a meeting of Gauleiter and Reichsleiter (the top brass of the Nazi Party), Himmler said on 6 October 1943:

I ask of you only to hear to what I say to you in this gathering – not ever to discuss it. We were faced with the question: what about the women and children? I decided to find a very clear solution to this problem, too. I did not feel myself justified in exterminating the men – that is to say, therefore, killing them or having them killed – and then allowing the avenger, in the form of their children, to grow up to confront our sons and grandsons. The difficult decision had to be taken to make this people disappear from the face of the earth. For the organisation that had to carry out this task, it was the most difficult that we had ever had.<sup>1</sup>

It is true that Himmler in this speech gives the impression that the murder of women and children was in large part his responsibility, and undertaken on his initiative ('I decided ...'); yet he refers at the end of the paragraph to the most difficult 'task' that 'we had ever had', and not, say, to a task that he had assigned to the SS. In a speech on 5 May 1944 to generals of the Wehrmacht in Sonthofen, Himmler became even clearer:

The Jewish question has been solved within Germany itself and in general within the countries occupied by Germany. It was solved in an uncompromising fashion appropriate to the life-and-death struggle of our nation for the continued existence of our blood. [...] You can perhaps understand how difficult it was for me to carry out the order that I had been given as a soldier, and which I implemented out of a sense of obedience and absolute conviction. If you say: 'we can understand as far as the men are concerned, but not when it comes to the children', then I must remind you of what I said at the beginning of my address. In this confrontation with Asia we must get used to condemning to oblivion those rules and customs of past European wars to which we have become accustomed and which are more suited to us. In my view, however deeply we may feel in our hearts, we as Germans are not entitled to allow a generation of hate-filled avengers to grow up, who our children and

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grandchildren will have to deal with because we were too weak and cowardly and left it to them.<sup>2</sup>

A few weeks later, on 24 May 1944, and again in Sonthofen, he spoke once more to a group of Generals of the Wehrmacht:

Another question that was decisive for the inner security of the Reich and of Europe, was the Jewish question. It was uncompromisingly solved, according to our orders and according to rational understanding. I believe, Gentleman, that you know me well enough to know that I am not a bloodthirsty person and not a man to take pleasure or joy in something firm that has to be done. However on the other hand, I have such good nerves and such a developed sense of duty – I can say that much for myself – that, when I recognise something to be necessary, I can implement it without compromise. I have not considered myself entitled – this concerns especially the Jewish women and children – to allow the children to grow into the avengers who will then murder our fathers [sic] and our grandchildren. That I would have thought of as cowardly. Consequently the question was uncompromisingly resolved.<sup>3</sup>

In the context of the murder of the Jews, Himmler is thus speaking here unmistakably of an 'order' and of a 'sense of duty'. His way of formulating it – that he considered himself 'entitled' to have the women and children killed as well – speaks for the view that this mass murder was carried out on his own initiative; it also shows, however, that Himmler was firmly convinced that this decision was covered by Hitler's authority and was in accordance with his will.

Himmler expressed himself yet more clearly a few weeks later, on 21 June 1944, once again in the context of ideological-political training for the Generals:

It was the most terrible task and the most terrible assignment that an organization can possibly receive: the task of solving the Jewish question. I may say this once again quite openly in this gathering, in a few words. It is good that we had sufficient firmness to extirpate the Jews in our area.<sup>4</sup>

Hitler himself stated in a speech addressing high officers of the Wehrmacht on 26 May 1944:

By removing the Jew, I abolished the possibility of building up a revolutionary core or nucleus in Germany. Of course one might say to me, 'Yes, couldn't you have solved this more simply – or not simply, since all other means would have been more complicated – but more humanely?' Gentlemen, fellow Officers, we are engaged in a life-and-death struggle. If

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our opponents triumphed in this struggle, then the German people would be extirpated.

Hitler describes in the following sentences what sort of gruesome extirpation would take place, and then goes on to say:

Here, as well as in general, humanity would imply the worst atrocities against one's own people. If I draw the hatred of the Jews upon myself, then I would at least like not to miss out on the advantages of such hatred. The advantages consist in our having a clean, organised body of the Volk, where no others can ever again meddle in our affairs.<sup>5</sup>

In his will and testament of 29 April 1945, and thus in what were literally his last written words, Hitler once more gave expression to his deep anti-Semitic hatred:

But I have also never left room for any doubt about the fact that if the peoples of Europe are once again to be regarded only as packages of shares held by these international monetary and financial conspirators, then the people who are the true culprit behind this murderous battle will also be called to face their responsibility: Jewry! I have also left no-one in the dark about the fact that, this time, millions of the children of European Aryan peoples will not be allowed to die of hunger, millions of grown men will not be allowed to suffer death, and hundreds of thousands of women and children will not be allowed to be burnt and bombed to death in the cities without the true culprit being held responsible for this crime, even though it may be by more humane methods. [...]

Above all I pledge the leadership of the nation and its followers to the scrupulous observation of the racial laws and to implacable opposition to the universal poisoner of all peoples, international Jewry.<sup>6</sup>