

THE ORIGINS OF THE FINAL SOLUTION

THE EVOLUTION OF NAZI JEWISH POLICY,

SEPTEMBER 1939—MARCH 1942

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Operation Barbarossa and the Onset of the Holocaust, June–December 1941

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On June 22, 1941, the first day of Operation Barbarossa, German army units swept across the border into the Soviet Union. Within a few months the Wehrmacht had conquered a vast strip of land that extended from the Baltic Sea in the north via Belorussia to the southeastern Ukraine. Unlike previous campaigns, this Blitzkrieg did not proceed according to plan. Despite defeats in many battles and an immense loss of men and material, the Red Army was able to stop the German advance, forcing the Wehrmacht into a winter campaign for which it was not prepared. What followed might appear in hindsight as a protracted German retreat that ended in unconditional surrender. In late 1941, however, the extended front line in the east not only demonstrated the Reich's unbroken military power; it meant suffering and death for millions of people in the occupied parts of the Soviet Union.¹

From the beginning, Germany adopted a policy of terror that, though foreshadowed in earlier plans for this war of destruction, gathered momentum over time. Already by the end of 1941, the death toll among noncombatants was devastating. Between 500,000 and 800,000 Jews, including women and children, had been murdered—on average 2,700 to 4,200 per day—and entire regions were reported “free of Jews.” While many Jewish communities, especially in rural areas, were targeted later, the murder of Soviet POWs reached its climax in this early period. In the fall of 1941, Red Army soldiers were dying in German camps at a rate of 6,000 per day; by the spring of 1942, more than 2 million of the 3.5 million Soviet soldiers captured by the Wehrmacht had perished. By the time of their final withdrawal in 1943/44, the Germans had devastated most of the occupied territory, burned thousands of villages, and depopulated vast

question of where to take the deportees and what to do with them. Götz Aly was the first historian to point to the possibility that, in fall 1941, a major killing site was planned for Jewish deportees in the occupied parts of the Soviet Union, most likely in Mogilev, the city in the rear area of Army Group Center where a forced labor camp had been established in late September or early October. Although there is no clear documentation on this project, the assumption that it existed is supported by several pieces of evidence, most notably a large order of Zyklon—a prussic acid used for disinfection as well as later in Auschwitz-Birkenau, in its “B” version, for gassing—to be shipped to Mogilev and Riga; and plans for installing crematorium ovens in Mogilev were developed in mid-November by the ss. No gassings with Zyklon B seem to have taken place in either Mogilev or Riga. By the time the first crematorium oven was delivered to Mogilev on December 30, the project had already been dropped in favor of alternative solutions. In 1942 the other ovens ordered were rerouted to Auschwitz.³⁴⁹

For other parts of the Ostland, in late November the deportation issue was settled. While more and more areas were reported as “free of Jews,”³⁵⁰ deportations from the west had to be accepted.³⁵¹ Lohse was informed by his ministry that Heydrich had decided to select a different site for the camp planned near Riga;³⁵² in arriving at this decision, the Reichskommissar’s opinion had not been requested. Subsequently, Lohse declined to get involved in the decision of how the Jews deported from Germany were to be treated.³⁵³ In mid-December, Bräutigam responded to Lohse’s enquiry of November 15, saying that he assumed that “in the meantime matters in regard to the Jewish question will have been clarified by oral discussions.” In principle, economic aspects were to be disregarded; remaining questions were to be discussed directly with the HSSPF.³⁵⁴

Things were also straightened out within the ss. On December 4 Jeckeln, reprimanded days before for the murder of the Berlin Jews deported to Riga, met with Himmler and reported the killing of most of the Riga Jews.³⁵⁵ Himmler cared more than ever about the morale of his men involved in the ongoing executions. In an order dated December 12, the Reichsführer advised unit commanders to hold “comradely get-togethers” (*kameradschaftliches Beisammensein*) at the end of days in which “enemies of the German people” had been subjected to “the just death sentence.” These evenings were not designed for heavy drinking, but for leading the men through music and lectures “into the beautiful regions of German spiritual and cultural life.”³⁵⁶ Reality in the east, however, was very different from the ideas of the Reichsführer.

In the first six months of the war against the Soviet Union, the “material” was “tested” and “opportunities” were “used,” as envisaged by Heydrich in his

ferent reason—to the one Jeckeln received. The fact that, in his macabre statistics of mass murder addressed to his superiors, EK 3 commander Jäger made no reference to any instruction coming from Berlin or elsewhere regarding the treatment of Jews deported from the Reich confirms the absence of an overall directive for immediate killing.

In view of the communications received regarding deportations and given the absence of clear guidelines from above, civilian authorities had until that time indeed assumed that they would have a say in the treatment of Jewish questions. After the murder of Reich Jews deported to the east, high-ranking officials in the Interior Ministry conceded that they had lost control over the course of events.³⁴² On November 15, in response to an inquiry from the Ostministerium that noted a complaint from the RSHA about the prohibition of executions by his office, Lohse had specifically asked whether this inquiry was meant to imply “that all Jews in the Ostland are to be liquidated.”³⁴³ That same day, Himmler met with Rosenberg to discuss whether the Jewish question was to be treated as a “police matter”—that is, an issue to be solved by the Reichsführer-ss and Chief of German Police—or “as part of overall politics” as envisaged by Rosenberg.³⁴⁴ On the central level, the issue remained contentious. In early 1942 Heydrich again claimed sole authority and urged the civil administration to replace their own guidelines regarding the treatment of Jews with a version drafted by Eichmann. Days after the Wannsee Conference, held on January 20, the matter was discussed in Berlin; only in autumn 1942 did Himmler grudgingly agree to a compromise that postponed indefinitely a clear delineation of tasks.³⁴⁵

In late autumn 1941 the military was also ready to get involved in the discussion over the new dimensions of the Jewish question. On November 20 Braemer, as Wehrmacht commander for Ostland, sent Lohse a letter that expressed the army’s concern over the political and military implications of the deportations: the presence of German Jews in the Generalkommissariat Weissruthenien added to the partisan movement; more important, shipping Jews to the east seemed “in view of the tense transport situation, for the time being not at all possible.”³⁴⁶ Raising the transport question touched the most sensitive spot of the entire deportation project. Heydrich had previously mentioned that Hitler had agreed to the deportations provided the means of transport would not interfere with the needs of the military.³⁴⁷ The complaint by the Wehrmacht was successful. Except for one more transport that left Cologne on November 28, no further deportations were to arrive in Minsk until spring 1942.³⁴⁸

The bottleneck created by the transport situation seems also to have been the key factor in the termination of an attempt for an alternative solution to the dual

happened in Kaunas in late October with the murder of almost 10,000 Jews could indeed be perceived as “creating space”; in Minsk similar executions took place in early November that claimed the life of 12,000 Jews.³³⁵ However, it is not altogether certain that the Aktion in Kaunas at least was directly caused by the deportations of Jews from the Reich. In fact the reverse might have been the case; not for the first time, the measures taken in Lithuania provided exemplary lessons for the entire area, in this case how to make room for deportees. In his postwar testimony, Jeckeln offered a different rationale by claiming to have received an order from Himmler in Berlin on November 10 or 11, 1941—around the time of the mass murder in Minsk and two weeks after the Aktion in Kaunas—according to which “all Jews in the Ostland down to the last man must be exterminated” (*alle sich im Ostland befindenden Juden bis zum letzten Mann vernichtet werden müssen*).³³⁶

Such a Himmler order, if it had actually been issued, would have settled the other unresolved question concerning what to do with the deportees once they had reached their destination. But confusion prevailed: On November 10 the first transport arrived in Minsk; the Jews from the Reich were immediately forced into the ghetto.³³⁷ Two weeks later in Kaunas, the Security Police took the 5,000 German and Austrian deportees directly to Fort IX and shot them.³³⁸ In Riga on November 30 all of the 1,000 Jews who had just arrived from Berlin and 3,000 local Jews already in the ghetto were executed. It was only after another large-scale murder action on December 8, with an estimated death toll of more than 25,000, that deportees were admitted into the ghetto.³³⁹ In view of the different treatment of these early transports, Hans Safrian’s argument “that in fall 1941 no general orders were issued which called for the immediate and indiscriminate murder of all Jews deported from Central Europe” is convincing.³⁴⁰

This assumption finds further support in what took place in the aftermath of the first killings of deportees. In the early afternoon of November 30, Himmler had a telephone conversation with Heydrich from Hitler’s headquarters, in which he said there was to be “no liquidation” of the Berlin Jews deported to Riga. By that time, the more than 1,000 Jews who had arrived in Riga from Berlin were already dead. Himmler now warned Jeckeln against “arbitrariness and violation” of “guidelines given either by me or by the RSHA on my behalf” and summoned the HSSPF for a talk.³⁴¹ No such reaction, however, from Heydrich or Himmler is recorded for the murder of the almost 5,000 deportees who had been killed on arrival in Kaunas, including some 1,000 Berlin Jews. If Himmler had issued a previous directive for the killing of all Jews transported east, his subordinates in Minsk would have violated it by admitting all deportees to the ghetto and thus were liable to a similar reprimand—although for a dif-

chological side effects for the perpetrators and repeated complaints from within the Nazi hierarchy.³²⁶ However, other options were under consideration.

Experiments with gassings had already been conducted near Minsk and Mogilev in September.³²⁷ Now, in late October, the experts from the “euthanasia” killings were offering to import their expertise to the east. In a draft letter to Lohse, Erhard Wetzel, the “race expert” in Rosenberg’s ministry, reported the willingness of Viktor Brack, one of the organizers of the so-called Aktion T4 in Hitler’s Chancellery, to assist in the production of gassing facilities. Eichmann had already agreed to this proposal and explained that in Riga and Minsk camps were to be created for Jewish deportees. The Ostministerium, Wetzel wrote, had no objections “if those Jews who are not fit for work will be disposed of with Brack’s device.” This would also ensure greater secrecy than mass executions, which, as seen in Liepaja, continued to create unwanted public attention. The remaining Jews, kept separate by gender over the winter, were to be transported “further east” the following spring.³²⁸

Despite an obscure and largely undocumented deployment of T4 personnel in the area of Minsk in early 1942, Brack’s specific proposal for Riga was never implemented in this form. Beginning in November/December, carbon monoxide was used for the gassing of Jews in the occupied Soviet Union. The gas came not from bottles, as in the “euthanasia” killing centers on Reich territory, but from the exhaust pipes of trucks specifically designed for that purpose by Nebe’s criminal technicians at the RSHA.³²⁹

In November administrators in the Ostland were still calling for “general directives” on anti-Jewish policy.³³⁰ The need for clarification was increased by pressure from the Security Police to prepare for the arrival of the first deportees scheduled for mid-November and to speed up the ongoing killings of local Jews.³³¹ On November 9 Friedrich Trampedach, in charge of the political division in the RKO, sent an urgent request to the Ostministerium and Lohse (who was in Berlin at the time) to have the transports prevented and directed “further east.”³³² Four days later, Georg Leibbrandt, head of the political division in Rosenberg’s ministry, informed Trampedach that deportations to camps in Riga and Minsk were indeed “preliminary measures”; since the Jews were to be sent on, the Ostministerium had no objections. For further clarification, Trampedach should get in touch with the HSSPF.³³³

With the former HSSPF North, Prützmann, about to be replaced, it fell to his successor Jeckeln to solve the open questions. Where were the Jews to be sent, if only temporarily? In the Ostland, none of the camps mentioned in the communications from Berlin were ready.³³⁴ Putting the Jews up in the existing ghettos seemed to present a solution, provided space could be created. What

Stahlecker's attempt to prepare the stage for the "total cleansing of Europe of all Jews" by raising Berlin's awareness of the possibilities in the Ostland was starting to have an effect.³¹⁴ Provided with an expression of interest from his superior, Stahlecker could, as a first step, intensify his push for a concentration camp in the Riga area, an effort he had started back in late July. In early October the office of the BdS in the Ostland revived the project.³¹⁵ Characteristically, in pressing his case vis-à-vis the civil administration, the BdS Ostland and leader of Einsatzgruppe A did not refer to a directive from Heydrich but hinted at a "wish of the Führer" according to which Jews from the Protectorate and the Reich had to be accommodated.³¹⁶

In Riga, Generalkommissar Drechsler, Lohse's chief administrator for Latvia, was not thrilled. The same day Stahlecker confronted him with the prospect of having more undesirable Jews added to his area of influence, Drechsler received a report from his subordinate in Liepaja informing him about the ongoing problems in getting rid of the Jews that were already there. After the men had been killed, the Gebietskommissar wrote, it was the turn of the remaining women and children. The actions taken by the police had not gone unnoticed: "Especially the shooting of women and small children, some of them screaming when led to the execution site, has created common outrage."³¹⁷ Higher up in the administration, however, the issue was addressed in a clean, bureaucratic manner. On October 11 Rosenberg's aide Otto Bräutigam attended a large meeting with Lohse and Wehrmacht commander Braemer.³¹⁸ Two days later Bräutigam noted for Rosenberg that the SD regarded the "liquidation of commissars and Jews" as a matter of course.³¹⁹ In Himmler's appointment book, there is a (as usual, cryptic) reference to a conversation with Heydrich on October 14 that included the topic of "executions."³²⁰ One day later, Stahlecker submitted his first cumulative report on the activities of his Einsatzgruppe. It contained staggering death figures: a total of 125,000 Jews had been killed so far, more than 80,000 in Lithuania.³²¹ That same day, the first wave of deportations started. By November 5, some 25,000 victims had been transported to Lodz.³²²

While the Security Police in Riga were trying to speed up the construction of the planned camp for Jews so that it would be ready to receive the first deportees in early November,³²³ Himmler visited Mogilev and Smolensk to consult with Bach-Zelewski and leading Wehrmacht officers.³²⁴ Regulations were issued by police authorities for another wave of deportations from the Reich and the Protectorate to the area around Riga and Minsk to begin on November 1.³²⁵ Most Jews in the east had been murdered in mass executions—a killing procedure that had proven its effectiveness despite Himmler's concern with psy-

authorities, however, 50,000 of the “most burdensome” Jews were to be shipped to Minsk and Riga. The leaders of Einsatzgruppe B and C, Nebe and Rasch, would make space for some of these Jews and others from the Reich “in the camps for communist prisoners” in the area of military operations (*Operationsgebiet*); according to Eichmann, preparations for this had already begun. In addition, an unspecified number of “Gypsies”—as it turned out, 5,000 Sinti and Roma from Austria³⁰⁸—were to be deported, as the protocol put it, “to Stahlecker in Riga, whose camp is equipped according to the model of [concentration camp] Sachsenhausen.” The protocol continued,

Since the Führer wishes that by the end of the year the Jews be removed as far as possible from the German sphere, pending questions have to be solved immediately. The transport question too must not present any problems.

*(Die zu evakuierenden Zigeuner könnten nach Riga zu Stahlecker gebracht werden, dessen Lager nach dem Muster von Sachsenhausen eingerichtet ist. Da der Führer wünscht, dass noch Ende d. J. möglichst die Juden aus dem deutschen Raum herausgebracht sind, müssen die schwebenden Fragen umgehend gelöst werden. Auch die Transportfrage darf dabei keine Schwierigkeit bedeuten).*³⁰⁹

In a press announcement Heydrich summed up the result of the meeting by stating that it was the “final aim” of the Reich “not only to exclude Jewry from having any influence on the peoples of Europe, but if possible to resettle them outside Europe.” As Madagascar was by that time but a distant memory, Heydrich must have been referring to the east. “I have decided,” he declared, “to go through these stages also in the Protectorate consistently and as quickly as possible.” (*Ich habe mich entschlossen, diese Etappen auch im Protektorat folgerichtig und möglichst schnell zu gehen.*) The first deportations from the Protectorate were to take place the same week.³¹⁰ Obviously, Heydrich did not regard the practical implementation of Hitler’s “wish” as a matter requiring any further Führer decision, even though deportation was expected to have drastic consequences for the people affected.³¹¹ In taking the initiative, Heydrich adapted to Hitler’s image of the “best man” who bothered him least³¹² as well as to the example set by some of his officers like Nebe, Rasch, and Stahlecker.

While Heydrich and the other participants at the meeting had clear ideas where the deportations should start, they were vague on the destination. According to Christian Gerlach, no “camps for communist prisoners” existed at that time behind the front line with the exception of a forced labor camp in Mogilev, where more than 2,200 Jewish men, women, and children had recently been massacred on October 2 and 3.³¹³ The discussions in Prague indicate that

what could be done. In a speech given to members of the occupation apparatus on October 2 in Prague, where he had just taken over the office of acting Reichsprotektor in addition to his position as chief of the Security Police and the SD, he stressed that the events of the previous years were interrelated and a prerequisite for the ultimate Germanization of the Reich's sphere of influence. Toward that aim, even those of good racial origin but bad character (*guttrassig Schlechtgesinnten*) would have to be put up against the wall; one could but imagine what Heydrich had in mind for those whom he regarded as racially inferior. The implementation of this vision, however, was a "question that the Führer will have to decide." But it was already possible "to gather the plans and the raw material." "We have to test the material," he concluded, "we have to take advantage of the available opportunities."³⁰⁵

Two days after his Prague speech, Heydrich met with representatives of the Ostministerium to discuss a lengthy agenda, including the "settlement of the Jewish question" (*Regelung der Judenfrage*). Heydrich stressed that a coordinated effort would be useful, especially to prevent economic considerations from jeopardizing his "plan of a total resettlement of the Jews from the territory occupied by us" (*Plan einer totalen Aussiedlung der Juden aus den von uns besetzten Gebieten*). He saw no need to quarrel with the civil administration, "since the implementation of the treatment of the Jews lies anyway in every respect in the hands of the Security Police" (*da die Durchführung der Behandlung der Juden in jeder Beziehung sowieso in den Händen der Sicherheitspolizei liegt*).³⁰⁶ For his part, Rosenberg was clearly aware of this fact and favored cooperation in view of the approaching "great ideological struggle" (*grosse weltanschauliche Kampf*); at the same time, he gave Heydrich's superior Himmler to understand that some of his officers were performing "very violent actions" without the Reichsführer necessarily knowing everything that was going on. (*Manche SS-Führer sollen sehr gewaltsame Aktionen durchgeführt haben, ohne dass der Reichsführer-SS über alles im Bilde gewesen.*)³⁰⁷

Getting the Ostministerium out of the way was one thing, preparing the actual "total resettlement" another. His new position as acting Reichsprotektor enabled Heydrich to adopt a more proactive role. On October 10 he chaired a meeting in Prague with Eichmann and other resettlement specialists regarding a "solution of Jewish questions." The records of this meeting provide important insight into how the eastern periphery was perceived by the center. According to the protocol, the purpose of the meeting was to discuss ways in which the problem could be solved "for the time being" in the Protectorate and the Reich. Following their concentration in "temporary collection camps," the Jews in the Protectorate were to be deported to Lodz; in view of the resistance of the Lodz

The word of the Führer [in his speech of January 1939] that a new war, instigated by Jewry, will not bring about the destruction of anti-Semitic Germany but rather the end of Jewry, is now being carried out. The gigantic spaces of the east, which Germany and Europe have now at their disposition for colonization, also facilitate the definitive solution of the Jewish problem in the near future. This means not only removing the race of parasites from power, but its elimination [*Ausscheidung*] from the family of European peoples. What seemed impossible only two years ago, now step-by-step is becoming a reality: the end of the war will see a Europe free of Jews [*am Ende des Krieges steht das judenfreie Europa*].²⁹⁶

For the Germans deployed in the east, basic social norms and rules did not apply. The combination of extreme forms of public violence and the attempt to re-create German *Gemütlichkeit* in the private sphere meant that even Germans who did not directly participate in mass murder found the idea of normality assuming a specific meaning.²⁹⁷ Behind the façade of selfless devotion to the Fatherland, corruption and moral depravation were rampant. The city of Minsk can serve as an example. Rumors about alcoholic and sexual excesses (*Saufexzesse, Weibergeschichten*) spread back to the Reich and were officially investigated.²⁹⁸ After the war, former members of the KdS described the office as a “pigsty” (*Sauhaufen*).²⁹⁹ Trostinez, a camp complex where at least 40,000 people were murdered, was remembered by secretaries and other German women as a place where they would go for horseback riding or to pick up a fur coat from Jewish victims.³⁰⁰ A KdS officer distributed thousands of bottles of vodka for consumption during and after mass killings—not exactly what Himmler had in mind when he called for the “spiritual care” of men performing executions.³⁰¹ The physical retreat from the occupied territories toward the end of the war enabled the perpetrators to psychologically dissociate themselves from their crimes and facilitated their more or less smooth integration, shielded by the myth of their own victimization, into postwar German society.³⁰²

While genocide by any other name was under way at the periphery, the possibilities of the east for solving the Jewish question were slowly being recognized in Berlin. Heydrich’s planners in the RSHA were facing increasing pressure to address the practical sides of the problem in a European context. Goebbels and other Gauleiter tried to use their direct access to Hitler to speed up the deportation of German Jews,³⁰³ at the same time, lower-ranking officials developed their own plans.³⁰⁴ Again, Hitler preferred the role of observer to that of decision maker. In early October 1941 Heydrich showed signs of frustration over the discrepancy between prevailing expectations and the limited nature of

adults, whose mere presence could be construed as a threat. In some cases, as in Belaja Cerkov, the murder of children was perceived as the consequence of the preceding murder of adults, as something required to bring the job to an end. The sterile logic of this argument stands in marked contrast to the way the killings were performed. This was not industrial murder in a confined space in which a poison gas did the killing; this was anything but a "nice, quick death." Mattner's testimony is clearly an exception insofar as he wants to convince himself—and his wife—that in murdering Jewish children he is protecting his own children and thus fulfilling his parental obligations. However, it provides a glimpse at the ease with which German perpetrators rationalized their participation in the most abysmal crimes and were transformed in the process. Not only did they get used to killing, they also learned how to live with it, and even impatiently waited for the killing process to engulf Jews from the Reich.

In addition, men in the field at times expressed with greater clarity where developments were heading than did top officials in Berlin. In a lengthy order issued in mid-November 1941 on the fight against partisans, Himmler stressed the need for complete annihilation and recommended "increased attention" to women and children in partisan-infested areas, but did not once mention Jews.²⁹³ He thus fell short of the example set by Keitel in mid-September and Reichenau in October. In passing Reichenau's order on to its units, the Kommandostab leadership praised its usefulness in giving the men "a uniform, thorough inner orientation concerning the general questions of our struggle for life in the east." Not only would such an orientation make the troops look more self-confident in the eyes of the locals; it was also desperately needed because soldiers, "if only in individual cases caused by observing the misery in these areas," still acted insecurely and even handed out bread or other food to the local population.²⁹⁴

The men who brought death to civilians in the occupied Soviet Union were reacting not only to one another but also to their environment. Time (the stage reached in the persecution of the Jews and other "undesirables") and space (the conditions in the east and the occupiers' perception of them) intersected in summer 1941 to facilitate the crossing of the threshold to genocide. While the actual killings required deliberate decisions on the part of the direct and indirect perpetrators, they themselves could perceive their role as mere agents of destiny. It is no surprise that in one of his letters Mattner invokes Hitler's well-known "prophecy" of January 1939 that presented the "annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe" as an abstract consequence of fate without actors.²⁹⁵ In late December 1941 the training journal of the Order Police expressed the eastern dimension of the necessity for a solution to the Jewish question in unusually frank, yet clinically sterile terms:

stresses the importance of situational factors, especially group pressure to conform and the threat of isolation in case of dereliction.²⁹⁰ On the other hand, the group of perpetrators was stratified enough to allow a separation of tasks—from drawing up plans to organizing transport to guarding the perimeters—that enabled reluctant individuals to at least occasionally abstain from directly participating in murder while still being involved in an Aktion. As in the process as a whole, division of labor was key to the deadly success of the Final Solution. A few committed, full-time killers (*Dauerschützen*) and a sufficient supply of short-term executioners were enough to get the job done and even allowed a small minority to consistently abstain without facing serious repercussions.²⁹¹ In this sense, the frequent claim by perpetrators after the war that they had only been guarding while others were shooting realistically describes the social interaction in the group and the mental defense mechanism resulting from the possibility of temporarily retreating from the crime scene and dissociating oneself from the devoted murderers.

In his monumental study on German occupation policy in Belorussia, Christian Gerlach presents a most disturbing account of the mind-set of a seemingly committed lower-ranking perpetrator, based on letters from police secretary Walter Mattner from Vienna to his wife written on the occasion of the mass murder in Mogilev in early October 1941. On his direct involvement in the shooting, Mattner wrote:

When the first truckload [of victims] arrived my hand was slightly trembling when shooting, but one gets used to this. When the tenth load arrived I was already aiming more calmly and shot securely at the many women, children, and infants. Considering that I too have two infants at home, with whom these hordes would do the same, if not ten times worse. The death we gave to them was a nice, quick death compared with the hellish torture of thousands upon thousands in the dungeons of the GPU. Infants were flying in a wide circle through the air and we shot them down still in flight, before they fell into the pit and into the water. Let's get rid of this scum that tossed all of Europe into the war and is still agitating in America. . . . I am actually already looking forward, and many say here that after our return home, then it will be the turn of our own Jews. Well, I'm not allowed to tell you enough.²⁹²

Neither the gradual radicalization of anti-Jewish measures after 1933 and their dehumanizing effects on both Jews and non-Jews, nor the massive push toward physical elimination beginning with Operation Barbarossa, can fully explain the apparently smooth incorporation of child victims into the murder process. Much stronger means of legitimization were required than for killing

modity: workers.²⁸⁸ Already in 1941, ghetto administrators performed “selections” of those seen as fit for work and those deemed unfit—a phenomenon usually associated with the death camps established later in Poland—in a number of ghettos, such as Kaunas and Berdichev. But the categorization was not consistent or uniform, and some workers and their families remained alive for the time being while other men and women just as “fit” or “unfit” were killed.²⁸⁹ As with anti-Jewish measures in general, ghettoization and the use of forced labor implied an interpretation of material usefulness that entailed the temporary preservation of laborers, their being worked to death, or their immediate murder. The capricious and arbitrary element inherent in German economic policy toward the Jews is hardly surprising given the fact that, as reflected in earlier plans for Operation Barbarossa, the extraction of economic value from the east was regarded as a means to the central aim of preserving quiet on the German home front.

With the beginning of the mass murder of children in mid-August, genocide of the Jews in the territory of the occupied Soviet Union had become a reality. No further escalation in the process was conceivable. It implied the physical elimination of all Jews, irrespective of gender, age, occupation, or behavior, and lead directly to the destruction of entire communities and the “de-Jewification” of vast areas. The question was no longer why the Jews should be killed, but why they should *not* be killed. In the eyes of German officials, especially outside the civil administration, the economic usefulness of Jews as forced laborers was far outweighed by their being perceived as a threat to security, even in the absence of an organized and efficient partisan movement; as “useless eaters” who contributed to the depletion of scarce food resources; as remnants of an “impossible condition” that could no longer be tolerated; or as “scum” that had to be exterminated. The importance of these factors in determining practical politics varied according to time and place. While each agency involved favored its own rationale, “pacification” served as the strongest overarching legitimization for mass murder.

In no respect is the available German documentation, with its tendency toward “clean” bureaucratic language and the hiding of individual sentiments behind standardized phraseology, more unreliable than in regard to motivation. Given the resources at their disposal, historians find it difficult to answer the question how, on the individual and the group level, the adaptation to mass murder was possible. In his book on the “ordinary men” of Reserve Police Battalion 101, the first study that seriously confronts the issue of motivation and its relevance for the carrying out of mass shootings, Christopher Browning

between 5,000 and 9,000 victims.²⁸³ The number of Soviet POWs murdered by deliberate malnutrition or “selections” in this region increased drastically to 30,000 in October and 80,000 in November—staggering figures that surpassed the number of executions reported by the Einsatzgruppen.²⁸⁴ Across the occupied territory, “Gypsies” and hospital patients were targeted for execution in varying intensity.²⁸⁵ No reliable figures are available for civilian losses from starvation or disease caused by the German policy of exploitation and insufficient supplies.

For the creation of ghettos, the economic rationale was important but not paramount. The systematic extraction of economic value from Jews by forced labor and the smooth execution of mass murder both required confined spaces. For this dual purpose, it made sense to establish ghettos. Yet it remained an open question whether Jewish labor represented an asset valuable enough to be preserved. Different agencies favored different approaches in different areas. In the Baltic and in western Belorussia, the Security Police preferred to make use of the unprecedented possibilities created by the war for swiftly proceeding with the most drastic measures, while civil and military administrators were more inclined to exploit Jewish workers in the interest of long-term occupation policy. Nevertheless, men like Stahlecker used economic arguments to advance their plans for “reserve areas” and concentration camps. If Jews were regarded as useful workers, this did not preclude their murder. In mid-September Einsatzgruppe C warned that the main task of destroying the communist apparatus should not be subordinated to “the practically easier task of the exclusion of the Jews,” who especially in western Ukraine formed the core of the workforce. In contrast to what the German administration had done for a long time in the General Government, “the solution of the Jewish problem” should be brought about “by extensive labor utilization of the Jews.” According to the Einsatzgruppe, this “will result in a gradual liquidation of the Jews, a development which corresponds to the economic conditions of the country.”²⁸⁶ Two months later, Max Thomas, Rasch’s successor as chief of Einsatzgruppe C, called for the “complete extermination of the Jews” in western Ukraine “to remove thereby the most fertile soil from Bolshevism.” Jews, Thomas claimed, were “without any doubt less valuable as laborers compared with the damage they do as ‘germ carriers’ of communism.”²⁸⁷

Even in its economic aspects, Operation Barbarossa was primarily an ideologically driven military campaign. While many Germans experienced war in the east as a rush to get rich, on the macroeconomic level the material benefits of mass murder were outweighed by the depletion of an increasingly scarce com-

istration. Rosenberg's Ostministerium tried to adjust to the situation it found when taking up office and at the end of the year favored coordinated measures that integrated rather than antagonized the police apparatus.

What drove the killing process in the initial stage of the war against the Soviet Union? Economic factors clearly played a role. Already in its planning stage, Operation Barbarossa had been designed as a war to ensure German supremacy in Europe and thus by its very nature implied a massive redistribution of wealth at the expense of the material and physical well-being of the population in the occupied territory. Once the campaign had started, actual German policy became increasingly less influenced by preinvasion plans than by the disparate dynamics of unfolding events that, though brought about by German agencies, often threatened to slip from their control. Already in late July the economic experts of the military found themselves pressured to abandon long-range plans for the solution of pressing short-term problems—to feed the troops in the east and to fill gaps in supplies for the home front.²⁷⁶ While this focusing on practical key issues hardly offered the civilian population better prospects for sustenance than the initial plans,²⁷⁷ it helped to shift the balance of political power from the center to the periphery, where regional and local authorities were expected to make decisions based on the prevailing conditions.²⁷⁸

With the further expansion of the front line to the east, more areas with little or no industry came under German control. Since fewer workers were needed for economic purposes, the remaining population appeared as “useless eaters.”²⁷⁹ At the same time, fewer Jews were falling into German hands, so that their perception as a burden on the German food statistics became less relevant in practice, especially since they received about half the rations allotted to non-Jews.²⁸⁰ Even where Jews were regarded as “an extraordinary burden, especially in terms of food policy,” as for example in the city of Brest Litovsk, this did not necessarily result in their being killed immediately. In Brest, in fact, even as the Jews' rations were officially cut and actual deliveries were reduced to almost nothing, Jewish labor, paradoxically, was increasingly valued more highly and exploited more thoroughly.²⁸¹ In other areas, German officials found the food supply abundant enough to provide Jews with sufficient rations; however, neither the supply situation nor the demand for Jewish artisans prevented the “final execution of the Jewish question.”²⁸²

As in its first phase, the murder of the Jews took place in the context of sweeping “pacification” that left tens of thousands of civilians either dead or without housing and means of subsistence. Captured Red Army soldiers faced an even grimmer fate than other groups. According to estimates, in September the monthly death rate among Soviet POWs in the Rear Army Area Center was

imately 300,000—were still alive at the end of 1941. They became the targets of a second huge killing wave that was jointly set in motion by German occupation agencies in spring 1942.²⁷¹

Beginning in late 1941, those Ukrainian Jews left alive in the area under civil administration were forced into ghettos. However, ghettoization in western Ukraine was less systematic than further north, leaving many Jews, especially in isolated communities, in their old places of residence until the arrival of the murder squads.²⁷² Concentration in confined and easily controllable spaces was more important where the Germans wanted to exploit Jews for forced labor. At this stage in the war, few projects required as much Jewish forced labor as road construction projects. The most ambitious such project was the extension of the so-called transit road IV (Durchgangsstrasse IV), planned since autumn 1941. Conceived as the main supply line for the troops in the southern sector of the eastern front, the road was to extend more than 1,200 kilometers, from the General Government through Ukraine to Stalino in the Donets region.²⁷³ Although construction work started on a massive scale only in 1942, preparatory work on the central and regional level had already begun in fall 1941.²⁷⁴ Implemented under the control of the SS in conjunction with other agencies, the project marked the intermediate stage between pre-Barbarossa concepts of Jewish forced labor and “destruction through work” (*Vernichtung der Arbeit*), which was to claim the lives of hundreds of thousands of camp prisoners in the second half of the war.²⁷⁵

THE FINAL SOLUTION IN THE EAST

Chronological and regional differences reflected in the reports by Einsatzgruppen, Wehrmacht, and police units support the idea that central planning and top-level decision making were one factor among many that contributed to the radicalization of anti-Jewish policy during the first six months of Operation Barbarossa. Officers in the field were the ones who decided whether a community was temporarily bypassed, decapitated by killing members of the “intelligentsia,” or entirely wiped out. Their superiors sanctioned such lower-level initiative in a variety of ways. The Wehrmacht top brass preferred *ex post facto* orders that, based on the Barbarossa directives drafted before the invasion, made anti-Jewish measures seem to be an integral element of securing the occupied territory. Himmler and the SS and police leadership, not relying solely on feeble communication lines and incoming reports, joined their men in the east for brief stints to sanction and encourage energetic actions and shielded them from occasional criticism by rival agencies, most notably the civil admin-

the city with the largest Jewish population in the Soviet Union. After bomb explosions that killed high-ranking Romanian and some German officers, approximately 19,000 Jews were rounded up and shot in the city's harbor area by Romanians on October 23, 1941, and at least 500 men, women, and children fell victim to SK 11B of Einsatzgruppe D. Shortly thereafter, 16,000 more Jews were murdered outside Odessa.²⁶⁴ With the occupation of the Crimea in October/November, the killing spree spread further to the southeast.²⁶⁵ At the end of 1941, Ohlendorf's Einsatzgruppe reported that it had murdered approximately 55,000 Jews.²⁶⁶

In the minds of the killers, the problems of mass murder, even of orphaned children, had been reduced to logistics. At the end of September, the 454th Security Division reported that "in some places providing for Jewish children and infants who lost their parents presented some difficulties; but also in that respect a remedy has been found in the meantime by the SD." (*An einigen Orten bereitete die Versorgung elternlos gewordener jüdischer Kinder und Säuglinge teilweise Schwierigkeiten; auch insoweit ist jedoch inzwischen durch den S.D. Abhilfe geschaffen worden.*)²⁶⁷ Again, leading Wehrmacht officers helped to rationalize the systematic slaughter of unarmed men, women, and children as part of ordinary warfare in the east. On October 10 the commander of the 6th Army, Field Marshal von Reichenau, issued his notorious order regarding the "behavior of the troops in the east" (*Verhalten der Truppe im Ostraum*) which called for the "elimination of the Asiatic influence in the European sphere of culture" (*Ausrottung des asiatischen Einflusses im europäischen Kulturkreis*) and "harsh but just punishment of Jewish subhumanity" (*Notwendigkeit der harten, aber gerechten Sühne am jüdischen Untermenschentum*).²⁶⁸ Reichenau was commended by Hitler for his zeal, leading other army commanders to follow his example.²⁶⁹

In rural Ukraine, the Wehrmacht seems to have been less involved in the killings than it was in the Ostland. Here, the "cleansing of the flat land" was left to a larger extent to the civil administration with its units of Security, Order, and auxiliary police. In the cities of Koch's new fiefdom, especially in central and southern Ukraine and the area east of Kiev, there were few Jews left. As in Belorussia, the systematic killing sweep had progressed from the east to the west. In the administrative centers, Rosenberg's men wasted no time in getting involved. On October 1, the day of the official inauguration of the Reichskommissariat, 2,500 Jews were murdered in Ostrog in western Ukraine. The next communities targeted were Koch's capital Rovno, where in early November 17,000 Jews were killed, followed by massacres in Kostopol and Proskurov.²⁷⁰ But in contrast to the area under military administration, most of the Jews in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine—according to an estimate by Dieter Pohl, approx-

For the month of August the units under the HSSPF South reported a total death toll of 44,125; by mid-October this figure had surpassed 100,000 men, women, and children.²⁵⁸

In large cities Einsatzgruppe C and the Wehrmacht would kill some Jews on arrival, register the remaining persons, and coordinate the modus and date for their murder with the HSSPF, the Security Police, or the Order Police. Guidance from higher authorities was not required. In Zhitomir, Blobel held a conference with the local military commander on September 10 to discuss what to do with the more than 3,300 Jews in the city. "The resulting decision," Einsatzgruppe C reported, "was the final and radical liquidation of the Jews of Zhitomir." On the morning of September 19, the Ukrainian militia helped to round up 3,145 Jews, who were brought in 12 trucks (some supplied by the military, others by the city administration) to the killing site, where they were shot.²⁵⁹ Other urban communities in the area under military administration were targeted at about the same time. In Berdichev, where some 20,000 Jews had been forced into a ghetto in late August, more than 16,000 persons were killed by Police Regiment South, Reserve Police Battalion 45, and Jeckeln's Stabskompanie in the first half of September.²⁶⁰ In late September the 17th Army under Heinrich von Stülpnagel approached EK 4a to exterminate the Jews in Kremenchug. In Vinnitsa, an estimated 10,000 persons fell victim to a combined action of EK 6 and Police Battalions 45 and 314; in Kirovograd, SK 4b and Police Battalion 304 murdered 4,200 Jews; in Dnepropetrovsk, the death toll was estimated at 15,000. The killing spree continued further east. At least 20,000 Jews were killed in Kharkov between December 1941 and January 1942 as part of a terror campaign that no longer differentiated between specific target groups but engulfed the entire civilian population.²⁶¹

Along the southernmost sector of the front line, the turning point from mass murder to genocide was reached with the liquidation of the Jewish community in Nikolayev in mid-September 1941. Members of Ohlendorf's Einsatzgruppe D, assisted by the 11th Army, rounded up the Jews under the pretext of "resettlement" and shot approximately 5,000 men, women, and children. There seem to have been no survivors. A similar Aktion was staged in Cherson, bringing the death toll reported by Einsatzgruppe D for September up to 22,467 "Jews and communists."²⁶² When Himmler visited Ohlendorf's men in Nikolayev in early October en route from Kiev, he reassured them that the liquidation of Jews and political opponents was necessary to crush Bolshevism and to win territory for German settlement.²⁶³ Such incentives added to the momentum of the killing process. In October the communities of Melitopol, Berdyansk, Mariupol, and Taganrog were targeted. Later that month, Romanian troops captured Odessa,

von Reichenau, and SK 4b to the 17th Army under Hermann Hoth) and supporting the police work of HSSPF Russia South, Friedrich Jeckeln, with his Order Police and Waffen-SS units in the rear army areas. Further south, since August units of Einsatzgruppe D in conjunction with the 11th Army had been successful in asserting greater independence from the Romanian military.²⁵³

Bernd Boll and Hans Safrian, in retracing the advance of the 6th Army to Stalingrad, have shown the close cooperation between Wehrmacht and Security Police from the first days of the campaign. On August 9 in Zhitomir, SK 4 of Einsatzgruppe C and army units transformed the public hanging of two Jews into a festive spectacle that was followed by the execution of more than 400 Jewish men.²⁵⁴ As in the other occupied areas, Order Police units attached to the HSSPF or the Wehrmacht participated heavily in the killings.²⁵⁵ The division of labor between the 6th Army and Einsatzgruppe C found its clearest expression in the murder of Jewish children in Belaja Cerkov in late August. Their parents had been murdered earlier in a joint operation by the local military commander and SK 4a. For days the children, some only months old, were left without any food, until a staff officer raised the question what to do with them. The Wehrmacht Feldkommandant was convinced that "this scum had to be exterminated." The issue was brought to the attention of the commander of the 6th Army, Field Marshal von Reichenau, who decided that the "action had to be executed in an appropriate manner." The children were killed by Paul Blobel's SK 4a.²⁵⁶

Like his counterparts further north, HSSPF Jeckeln played a key role in coordinating and expanding the murder of the Jews. In Ukraine, Jewish women and children had already been killed by individual units since late July. For several weeks the number of killings remained relatively steady, but the threshold to genocide was crossed at the end of August. At that time, Jeckeln offered Wehrmacht commanders to relieve the crisis in Kamenets Podolsky, the destination of mass deportations by Romanian and Hungarian authorities, before the formal transfer of the city to the civil administration on September 1. As a result, about 23,600 Jews (mostly expellees from Hungary and including women and children) were murdered in that city between August 27 and 30 by Jeckeln's Stabskompanie (staff company), a detachment of Einsatzgruppe C, and Police Battalion 320.²⁵⁷ The victims of the Kamenets Podolsky massacre constituted more than half the number of Jews killed up to that date in Ukraine by SS and police units. In late September, Jeckeln's, Blobel's, and Reichenau's men reached the peak of their genocidal cooperation with the murder of more than 33,000 Jews—men, women, and children—in the ravine of Babi Yar near Kiev.

dered 5,900 Jews in Slutsk and Kleck in the last half of October. At around the same time, Karl Jäger sent from Lithuania to Belorussia a detachment of his EK 3, which killed 620 male Jews, 1,285 Jewish women, and 1,126 children. In roughly three weeks, Lechthaler's and Jäger's men had massacred at least 14,400 men, women, and children.²⁴⁷

The basic problem faced by German authorities in Belorussia was not how to initiate but how to coordinate pacification in order to achieve better results while avoiding negative consequences. Concern with efficiency—not moral scruples—explained why Gebietskommissar Carl complained in late October about the action by Police Battalion 11 that killed several thousand Jews in Slutsk.²⁴⁸ This concern grew in relation to the scope of the task that German officials had set themselves. In a letter to Lohse, Braemer stated that “despite the harsh measures” taken by Bechtolsheim, “a significant easing of the situation has not occurred yet.”²⁴⁹ With units of Einsatzgruppe B and the army following the advancing troops into Russia proper, the task of “pacifying the Ostland” had to a large degree be left to the police forces of the civil administration—the Security Police and SD units that, as BdS and KdS offices, had become stationary, the parallel structure of the Order Police apparatus (Befehlshaber and Kommandeur der Ordnungspolizei, BdO and KdO, respectively) and its local auxiliaries—and the overarching office of the HSSPF. It was this attempt at coordination that prompted Bechtolsheim to order in late November that “the carrying-out of *large-scale* Jewish actions is not the task of the units of the [707th Infantry] Division,” but instead would have to be performed by or on behalf of the civil authorities. “Where smaller or larger groups of Jews are encountered on the flat land,” Bechtolsheim added, “we can dispose of them either on our own or concentrate them into designated ghettos in larger places where they will be handed over to the civil administration or the SD.”²⁵⁰

A slightly different pattern of destruction emerged in Ukraine, where more rural Jewish communities existed than further north. East of the river Dnieper, most of the Jews had managed to get away before the arrival of the Germans.²⁵¹ When, beginning in September, Reichskommissar Koch's men took up their positions as civil administrators, they, like their colleagues in the Ostland, found in place procedures jointly established by the Wehrmacht, SS, and police. Army Group South was fighting its way east, killing Jews, “partisans,” and captured Red Army soldiers along the advance routes. In the region that remained for the time being under military administration, the mass killings reached a new height in September.²⁵² Einsatzgruppe C acted in an intermediate function by attaching some of its units to the advancing armies (SK 4a to the 6th Army under

Zelewski marked the turning point toward genocide in Belorussia. Units of Einsatzgruppe B had since late August begun killing women and children; in early October HSSPF Bach-Zelewski pushed for the “de-Jewification” of entire areas, to the extent that by the end of the year Jews were virtually extinct on prewar Soviet territory.²⁴¹ While the Security Police and the SD, most notably EK 8, moved from city to city and targeted Jewish communities (for example, in Vitebsk and Borisov in October, and in Gomel (Homyel’), Bobruysk, and Kritschev in November/December), Order Police battalions and Wehrmacht security divisions swept through the countryside, killing Jews, as Christian Gerlach writes, “almost incidentally” in their search for “politically suspicious civilians (Bolsheviks, Jews and Gypsies).”²⁴² Further west, army and police units “cleansed” the area under civil administration. According to Bechtolsheim, Jews had to “vanish from the flat land and the Gypsies too have to be exterminated.”²⁴³ By the end of the year, the total death toll in Belorussia amounted to 190,000 Jews, while close to 320,000 were still alive; in the area under civil administration, approximately 60,000 Jews had been murdered—30,000 by detachments of Einsatzgruppe A—while 145,000 survivors remained alive for the time being.²⁴⁴

The deployment of forces across geographical and administrative boundaries indicates the task-oriented, flexible approach adopted by regional and local German officials. Following requests from leading military commanders—von Bock, Braemer, von Schenckendorff—to support the efforts of Bechtolsheim’s 707th Infantry Division in the area under civil administration, SS and police units were sent to Belorussia from the north. In early October 1941 the Kaunas-based Reserve Police Battalion 11 in conjunction with two Lithuanian Schutzmannschaft battalions performed a series of killings in the area around Minsk. Major Lechthaler, the battalion commander, had since August built up the auxiliary police force in Lithuania as part of the Order Police apparatus established under the civil administration.²⁴⁵ Following its arrival in Minsk, the battalion joined forces with Bechtolsheim’s security regiments for the purpose of pacifying the area. According to reports by Bechtolsheim, in the second week of October approximately 630 “suspicious elements without ID cards, communists, and Jews” were shot by Reserve Police Battalion 11 and its Lithuanian auxiliaries under the command of the army’s Secret Military Police (Abwehraussenstelle Minsk of the Geheime Feldpolizei) in the area Uzlyany-Rudensk, and at least 1,300 persons by Lechthaler’s men without the support of Wehrmacht units in Kliniki and Smilovichi.²⁴⁶ Following other actions against Jews, communists, and “partisans”—54 Jews in Pleschtschenitz, 1,000 in Kojdanov, and 1,775 in the Minsk civilian prisoner camp—Reserve Police Battalion 11 mur-

of a mental asylum in Mariampole—the killing of a German citizen married to a Jew.²³⁴

In Belorussia, which was partly integrated into the Ostland as Generalkommissariat Weissruthenien under Wilhelm Kube on September 1, 1941, the triad of Wehrmacht, ss, and police agencies were about to establish a similar pattern.²³⁵ The security divisions and police battalions under Wehrmacht commander Walter Braemer and the commander of the Rear Army Area Center von Schenckendorff, the units of Einsatzgruppe B, and HSSPF Bach-Zelewski's men became active first in the area east of the former Polish-Soviet border. In a second sweep through the Pripet marshes, the ss Cavalry Brigade killed 14,178 "plunderers," 1,001 "partisans," and 699 Red Army soldiers; only 830 prisoners were taken.²³⁶ During a joint training course on partisan warfare organized by von Schenckendorff in late September, Wehrmacht and ss officers—among them Bach-Zelewski, Nebe, and Fegelein—agreed on the inseparable link between Jews and partisans, which strengthened the need for interagency cooperation. Fegelein noted Schenckendorff's priorities in dealing with the Jewish question. Units staying in a locality for a longer period of time had to create ghettos or other confined quarters for the Jews "in case they cannot be exterminated at once." Theory and practice merged when the participants of the training course conducted a search in a village near Mogilev. In addition to "some Jews," they shot persons not living in the village.²³⁷

The efforts of Wehrmacht commanders in the field were greatly supported by the army leadership's determination to intensify pacification. In mid-September, Field Marshal Keitel (OKW) demanded "relentless and energetic measures especially also against the Jews, the main bearers of Bolshevism" (*ein rücksichtloses und energisches Durchgreifen vor allem auch gegen die Juden, die Hauptträger des Bolschewismus*).²³⁸ In his "guidelines for the fighting of partisans" issued in late October, Field Marshal von Brauchitsch (OKH) called for energetic "ruthless and merciless" action.²³⁹ While Keitel's order left little doubt about how to address the Jewish question, Brauchitsch did not mention Jews specifically. For General Gustav Freiherr von Bechtolsheim, the commander of the 707th Infantry Division deployed in the Generalkommissariat Weissruthenien, the matter had already been settled, since he understood the phrase "enemy of the Reich" to cover "communists," stray Red Army soldiers, Poles, and "Gypsies." Similar to Wehrmacht commander Braemer, Bechtolsheim presented Jews as "the sole supporters that the partisans can find" and demanded their remorseless destruction.²⁴⁰

The murder of more than 2,200 men, women, and children in Mogilev on October 2 and 3, 1941, by ss and policemen under the command of HSSPF Bach-

had been decided upon, Stahlecker expressed a view shared by his colleague Otto Rasch, the leader of Einsatzgruppe C operating in Ukraine.²²⁸ For the time being, the success of such indirect pressuring of the Berlin center was limited. On August 24, 1941, Gestapo chief Müller informed Einsatzgruppen A and B that some of the newly appointed Gebietskommissare had requested a “halt in the execution of communists and Jews” (*Einstellung der Kommunisten- und Juden-Aktionen*). While Heydrich ordered that these requests be declined and reports sent to Berlin, thus providing protection to his jealous subordinates, he did not address the question of who was to authorize the executions.²²⁹ In the absence of a clear-cut directive that could be used for the purpose of aggrandizement vis-à-vis Lohse, the best way for Stahlecker to ensure that the civil administration would give in was to convince Heydrich that his (Stahlecker’s) vision of a “radical treatment of the Jewish question possible for the first time in the east” extended beyond the Ostland. Stahlecker’s attempt, as we will see, was to have a deeper impact later in 1941.

Following Stahlecker’s intervention, Lohse inserted a clause into his guidelines stating that “further measures, especially by the Security Police” were not to be interfered with by the civil administration and that his aim was to ensure that “minimal measures” were adopted.²³⁰ These modified guidelines, sent out on August 18, 1941, to the General-, Stadt-, and Gebietskommissare in the Ostland with the caveat not to have them published but rather orally transmitted to the Jewish councils, reassured Stahlecker. “Whereas full support for the agencies of the Reichskommissar especially regarding the Jewish question is, as far as we’re concerned, self-evident,” he wrote to his officers in late August, “currently we nevertheless have to concentrate on the final solution of the Jewish question through very different measures than the ones envisaged by the Reichskommissar.” (*Wenn auch jede Unterstützung der Dienststellen der Reichskommissars gerade in der Judenfrage für uns selbstverständlich ist, müssen wir doch unser Hauptaugenmerk z.Zt. auf die endgültige Lösung der Judenfrage mit ganz anderen als den vom Reichskommissar vorgesehenen Mitteln richten.*)²³¹

With these remarks Stahlecker alluded to the ongoing killings in the ghettos and the countryside. Since mid-August, as documented by Jäger, now Kommandeur der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD (KdS) in Lithuania, entire communities including women and children had been systematically wiped out.²³² At the same time, the target group had been expanded beyond Soviet Jews. On August 2 Jäger reported the execution of a Jewish couple with U.S. citizenship in Fort VII in Kaunas, months before Jews of all nationalities were formally subjected to the same treatment as their eastern brethren.²³³ On September 1 Jäger recorded—in addition to the murder of almost 5,000 Jews and 109 inmates

presented a security threat that had to be neutralized in the interest of the “absolutely necessary, quick pacification of the east” (*unbedingt notwendige, schnelle Befriedung des Ostlandes*). In addition to a total “cleansing of the Ostland of Jews,” Stahlecker defined the prevention of Jewish procreation as a top priority of future policy. The Jews were to be resettled to “Jewish reserve areas” (*Juden-reservatsräume*) where, men and women separated, they would be available for forced labor “unless in the meantime the total cleansing of Europe of all Jews has become ripe for decision” (*[f]alls nicht unterdes die Gesamtreinigung des europäischen Raumes von allen Juden spruchreif geworden ist*). Stahlecker concluded by calling for a meeting to discuss the issue, “particularly as the draft to a great extent touches on general orders from a higher authority to the Security Police which cannot be discussed in writing” (*zumal da der Entwurf grundsätzliche, schriftlich nicht zu erörternde Befehle von höherer Stelle an die Sicherheitspolizei erheblich berührt*).²²⁵

Stahlecker’s reference to “general orders from a higher authority” could be interpreted as a hint toward a declaration of intent by the top Nazi leadership, perhaps even by Hitler, according to which, already in early August 1941, the fate of the Jews in the Ostland if not beyond was sealed. In light of contemporaneous events, as well as Stahlecker’s aim in drafting his letter, however, such an assumption seems debatable. If such an authoritative statement from Hitler had been issued, Stahlecker, instead of presenting a lengthy rebuttal of Lohse’s draft and alluding almost as an aside to a “higher authority,” could have referred to it directly and thus ended any further debate. The same applies to an order from Himmler, although in this case the civil administration would have had greater possibilities to interfere. At the same time, similar references to this directive should have surfaced in other areas. Instead, as can be seen from the Pripet sweep of late July/early August, Himmler issued unclear instructions that achieved their desired aim only because of his commanding officers’ zeal. In an earlier letter to Jäger relating to Lohse’s guidelines, Einsatzgruppe A chief of staff Karl Tschierschky had used the term “directive” (*Weisung*) instead of “order.” Other available documentation, most notably the extensive reports by Stahlecker and Jäger, does not mention any superior order that would have explained the sequence or ferocity of anti-Jewish measures.²²⁶

Later events indicate that in his response to Lohse the ambitious Stahlecker was trying to present something he hoped to receive from Berlin in the future as an order he already had in hand. For that purpose, he could use what he regarded as undue interference by the civil administration to pressure his superiors for support in enlarging his authority and role.²²⁷ In calling for the economic exploitation of Jews as forced laborers until a Europe-wide final solution

Toward that aim, "pacification of the population" (*Befriedung der Bevölkerung*) was paramount. The Gebietskommissar in Schaulen (Siauliai) in Lithuania—an area larger than Lohse's home Gau of Schleswig-Holstein—had only four policemen at his disposition, even though 50% of the population was Jewish.²²¹

By perceiving the Jewish question as part of a wider set of problems—Germanization and pacification—the chief civilian administrator in the Ostland followed the reasoning of his colleagues from the SS, police, and Wehrmacht. Yet Lohse showed little inclination to accept their leading role. On August 2, 1941, he presented "preliminary guidelines for the treatment of the Jews" to the HSSPF Ostland, Hans-Adolf Prützmann, as a means of ensuring "a uniform implementation of even preliminary measures." The draft combined anti-Jewish measures enacted in Germany since 1935 and especially in occupied Poland since fall 1939 regarding definition, registration, marking, expropriation, forced labor and concentration, with more rigid regulations specifically devised for the occupied Soviet Union. The countryside was to be "cleansed" of Jews; they were to be concentrated in urban ghettos. Lohse's guidelines envisaged that the ghettos would be hermetically sealed and that food supplies would not exceed a level necessary for keeping the inhabitants alive. In implementing the guidelines, the General- and Gebietskommissare were to take local, especially economic, conditions into account. In the entire five-page document there is no mention of the Security Police and the SD, in reference to either their previous actions or their future role.²²²

By the time these guidelines were drafted in Lohse's offices, Stahlecker's men had already gathered extensive experience with "preliminary measures" and were not willing to be pushed aside by the civil administration. Anti-Jewish regulations had been in place since the occupation of Lithuania, ghettoization had been initiated weeks ago, and executions were being carried out on a regular basis with the help of collaborators.²²³ In dealing with the Jewish question, the Security Police and SD had followed their own economic considerations, which in fact was one of the reasons why Stahlecker had been pushing since late July for the creation of concentration camps in the Reichskommissariat.²²⁴

In response to Lohse's draft, Stahlecker wrote a memorandum that, with the aim of rebuking the civil administration's claim to sole responsibility for handling the Jewish question in the Ostland, summed up what his men had done so far and why. Stahlecker criticized Lohse's draft for being too much tied to the measures applied in the General Government while neglecting the prospect of a "radical treatment of the Jewish question possible for the first time in the east" (*die im Ostraum erstmalig mögliche radikale Behandlung der Judenfrage*). With the exception of artisans, Jews were not an important labor factor. Instead, they

postwar statements by his officers and on the mistaken assumption that Berlin agencies had to be the centers of decision making in regard to the carrying out of mass murder in the east.²¹⁶ As can be seen from the Pripet sweep, Himmler, like Heydrich, faced problems in adjusting his directives to events in the field. This was less the result of insufficient communication networks between center and periphery than an inevitable consequence of the Nazi system's proneness for lower-level initiative and ad hoc decision making. With the delegation of power to his commanding officers, it was not Himmler but the HSSPF, the leaders of the Einsatzgruppen, Kommandostab units, and police battalions who, in conjunction with the military and representatives of the emerging civil administration, decided matters of practical policy. Anti-Jewish measures adopted in the following months show how the pattern of interaction between local and central authorities solidified until the end of 1941.²¹⁷

In the highly competitive Nazi bureaucracy, the newcomers of the Ostministerium had to mark their turf. This applied especially to Rosenberg himself, who was facing open hostility from Himmler and, despite their cordial farewell after the meeting with Hitler on July 16, a hardly warmer attitude from Göring. In regard to the Jewish question, Rosenberg provided the Reichskommissare with guidelines that, in addition to ghettoization, forced labor, and other discriminatory measures, called for "partial preliminary measures" (*vorbereitende Teilmassnahmen*) in anticipation of a Europe-wide solution after the war. At the same time his office stressed that the experiences gained in dealing with the Jews in the east could point in the direction of a "solution of the overall problem" (*für die Lösung des Gesamt-Problems richtungweisend*).²¹⁸

While Erich Koch, Reichskommissar in the Ukraine, did not care much about paper plans, the more bureaucratic-minded Lohse, Reichskommissar Ostland, was looking for clues on how to proceed. In late July, he received Himmler twice,²¹⁹ then on August 1 he met with Rosenberg and others to discuss the economic and political situation in the Ostland. In talking about the Jewish question, which he deemed "an important problem," Lohse presented information that must have come from the Security Police or Himmler himself. So far, according to Lohse, about 10,000 Jews had been liquidated by the Lithuanians. The remaining Jewish population, including women, was to be relocated to work camps. Himmler would decide the fate of the 3,000 imprisoned "Bolsheviks"; executions were performed every night. "According to the decision of the Führer," Lohse stated, "the Germanization of Reichskommissariat Ostland shall be the final aim; the Jews should be removed totally from this area." (*Nach der Entscheidung des Führers soll die Eindeutschung des Reichskommissariats Ostland das Endziel sein; die Juden sollten restlos aus diesem Gebiet entfernt werden.*)²²⁰

Even in the Pripet, a significant number of Jews, including men, remained alive—more than 20,000 in Pinsk—to be targeted a year later in another killing sweep.²⁰⁹ The same ambiguity applies to the involvement of the Reichsführer-SS. In addition to Himmler's exhortations, it was the fervor and adaptability of his lieutenants that mark the importance of the Pripet sweep for the overall course of events in the occupied Soviet Union.

In the attempt to clarify Himmler's role in the escalation of the killing process, historians have greatly stressed the importance of his visit to Belorussia in mid-August.²¹⁰ On Thursday, August 14, the Reichsführer, accompanied by a large entourage, spent a couple of hours in Baranovichi, where he met with HSSPF Bach-Zelewski; the commander of the 1st SS Cavalry Regiment, Fegelein; and the commander of the Rear Army Area Center, von Schenckendorff. There can be no doubt that the Pripet sweep figured prominently in their discussion. In the afternoon Himmler left by car for Minsk; for the morning of the next day, his appointment book noted "presence at an execution of partisans and Jews in the vicinity of Minsk."²¹¹

This was the closest Himmler came to directly observing the murder of the Jews in the occupied Soviet Union. After the war, as a witness before the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg, Bach-Zelewski described how Himmler became nervous when watching the execution performed by men from Nebe's Einsatzgruppe B and afterward gave a speech that legitimized the killings as a necessary means of defense for which he would bear responsibility. According to other postwar statements by members of Einsatzgruppe B, the Reichsführer on this occasion issued an order for the liquidation of all Jews in the east (*Gesamtliquidierung der Juden im Osten*) and mentioned a directive from Hitler.²¹²

In the afternoon Himmler visited a hospital with mental patients in Novinki near Minsk. There, he seems to have talked with Bach-Zelewski and Nebe about the possibility of killing methods other than shooting. Nebe's criminal technicians at the RSHA had already gathered practical experience during the murder of asylum inmates in the Reich and Poland.²¹³ In early September, more than 500 mental patients were gassed in Mogilev; on September 18 a similar "test gassing" by carbon monoxide took place in Novinki.²¹⁴

August 15, 1941, marks a caesura in the history of the Holocaust for reasons other than Himmler's visit to Belorussia, however. For on that day and the following, EK 3 in Lithuania for the first time reported the incorporation of children in mass executions. In doing so, Jäger made no reference to any directive from above.²¹⁵ The claim that Himmler issued an all-encompassing killing order in front of the murder scene near Minsk is primarily based on self-serving

derern rund 10,000 Mann erschossen).²⁰⁰ In the city of Pinsk, 5,000 to 8,000 men aged 18 to 55 were rounded up by Magill's Reitende Abteilung in cooperation with police reinforcements from the General Government (designated as Einsatzgruppe z.b.V.) and shot; shortly thereafter, another 2,000 Pinsk Jews including women, children, and older men were murdered.²⁰¹ Those commanders who did not receive Himmler's "explicit order" nevertheless knew what to do. For August 3 the 1st SS Brigade reported "Jewish actions" (*Judenaktionen*) involving some 500 executions; for the following days, after it had been subordinated to Field Marshal von Reichenau's 6th Army in agreement with the HSSPF South, the brigade reported "cleansing actions" (*Säuberungsaktionen*) that killed more than 1,500 Jews, among them at least 275 women.²⁰²

As in Lithuania, the murderers had adopted a more efficient killing practice of shooting with automatic weapons.²⁰³ The fact that the target groups were described as "plunderers," "partisans," or "Bolshevists" while certain kinds of workers were exempted helped the perpetrators to envisage the killings as economically rational. In addition, the unit commanders of the Kommandostab presented their activities as part of a move to convince the local population that the Reich would maintain a continuous presence and that any fear for the return of the Red Army was unfounded. "A neutralization of the Jews," the chief of staff of the Kommandostab advised, "will also in this respect achieve miracles." (*Eine Unschädlichmachung der Juden wirkt aber auch in dieser Beziehung Wunder*).²⁰⁴ On August 13 the first massive German descent upon the Pripet came to a preliminary end with 13,788 "plunderers," predominantly Jews, shot, and 714 prisoners captured. No fight had taken place. The entire SS Cavalry Brigade with its roughly 4,000 men had lost 2 dead (who had driven over a mine) and 15 wounded.²⁰⁵

The activities of Himmler's Kommandostab units in early August undoubtedly mark an important step in the history of the Holocaust.²⁰⁶ A vast area had been "cleansed" in several sweeps, and some rural communities had been completely wiped out. At the same time, however, the innovative aspects of the Kommandostab action should not be overrated. As Dieter Pohl rightly points out, "killings of [Jewish] women and children started already at the end of July in the Soviet Union."²⁰⁷ On the other hand, the murder of *all Jews* in a given area was not initiated on a massive scale before fall, with the notable exception of Lithuania, and in some areas of the occupied Soviet Union did not begin before spring 1942. Two of the component parts of the Kommandostab—the SS Cavalry Brigade and the 1st SS Brigade—operated independently of each other, especially after the subordination of the 1st SS Brigade to the Wehrmacht's 6th Army in early August intensified the ever present communication problem.²⁰⁸

directive from the OKH according to which any straying Red Army soldier captured after August 8 would be shot.¹⁹³ At the same time, the 1st SS Brigade under HSSPF Jeckeln submitted its first report regarding the "cleansing action" in northwestern Ukraine: some 800 male and female Jews aged 16 to 60 had been shot "for supporting Bolshevism and Bolshevik partisans."¹⁹⁴ On July 31, after visiting Hinrich Lohse, the newly appointed Reichskommissar Ostland, and HSSPF Prützmann in Kaunas, Himmler flew on to Baranovichi, where he seems to have met Bach-Zelewski.¹⁹⁵ One day later, the SS Cavalry Brigade passed on to its units the following communication: "Explicit order by RF-SS. All Jews must be shot. Drive the female Jews into the swamps." (*Ausdrücklicher Befehl des RF-SS. Sämtliche Juden müssen erschossen werden. Judenweiber in die Sümpfe treiben.*)¹⁹⁶

Unit commanders adopted different approaches toward the implementation of what Himmler presented as an unequivocal order. On the afternoon of the same day, the commander of the Reitende Abteilung of SS Cavalry Regiment 1, Gustav Lombard, saw reason to assure his men that Himmler's order "re shooting of Jews" (*betr. Judenerschiessung*) was not meant as a reprimand. So far, Jews had been found only in the area of SS Cavalry Regiment 2, with the exception of the village of Bereska-Kartuska, where the Wehrmacht's 221st Security Division was in desperate need of laborers for road construction. Nevertheless, Lombard advised for the future: "Not one male Jew is to remain alive, not one family in the villages." (*Es bleibt kein männlicher Jude leben, keine Restfamilie in den Ortschaften.*)¹⁹⁷ In his attempt to interpret Himmler's order, Lombard drew on his experience with earlier directives from Bach-Zelewski, Fegelein, and Himmler. Subsequently, his unit reported the "de-Jewification" (*Entjudung*) of several towns and villages; in most places, all Jews including women and children were killed.¹⁹⁸ Franz Magill, commander of the 2nd SS Cavalry Regiment's Reitende Abteilung, took Himmler's order more literally. In a report dated August 12, the SS-Sturmbannführer explained that only "Jewish plunderers" had been shot, since skilled Jewish laborers were in demand for the Wehrmacht. He continued: "Driving women and children into the swamps did not have the success it was supposed to have as the swamps were not deep enough for sinking under to occur. After a depth of one meter a person for the most part hit firm ground, so that sinking was not possible."¹⁹⁹

Although Himmler's "explicit order" (*ausdrücklicher Befehl*) did not precisely spell out that Jewish women and children were to be killed, some commanders interpreted it this way. Before mid-August the SS Cavalry Brigade claimed to have "shot in combat 200 Russians and additionally some 10,000 Jews and plunderers" (*im Kampfe 200 Russen und ausserdem an Juden und Plün-*

HSSPF in the area, Jeckeln in Russia South and Bach-Zelewski in Russia Center, provided the link between the military commanders and Himmler's units. Except for rather general instructions, these units had so far received few indications as to what their specific task would be. When Himmler visited the 2nd Cavalry Regiment on July 21, he spoke only in general terms about an "onerous task" (*schwere Aufgabe*).¹⁸⁶ From July 20 to 23 officers from the I c division of the Kommandostab (ss Captains May and Schneider) visited their counterparts at Army Group Center (Major von Gersdorff, Captain Henrici) for the first time. The officers of Army Group Center were already informed about the planned deployment of the ss Cavalry Brigade in Schenckendorff's rear army area and expressed their gratitude for the willingness of their brothers-in-arms to help them out.¹⁸⁷

On July 27 the chief of the Kommandostab, ss Brigadier General Kurt Knoblauch transmitted Himmler's orders for the deployment of the ss Cavalry Brigade to HSSPF Bach-Zelewski and to the commander of the 1st ss Cavalry Regiment, Hermann Fegelein.¹⁸⁸ That same day, Fegelein passed the orders on to his subordinates. For the purpose of the "pacification" of the rear army area close to the main road (*Rollbahn*), "soldiers of the Red Army in civilian clothes and plunderers as well as armed civilians or civilians performing sabotage are to be shot according to martial law on order of an officer." The Reichsführer, Fegelein continued, had issued special instructions regarding the villagers in the Pripet. Criminal elements were to be eradicated, and Jews had to be treated "for the most part as plunderers." ("Juden sind zum grossen Teil als Plünderer zu behandeln.") In contrast to Bach-Zelewski's order to Police Regiment Center issued in early July, the target group was no longer specified according to age. Exceptions could be made for highly qualified persons like bakers and doctors; women and children were to be driven out of the destroyed villages together with the livestock.¹⁸⁹ One day later, elaborating on the tasks of his cavalry units in the swamps, Himmler reiterated that if the locals were "from the national point of view inimical, racially and individually inferior," they were to be shot and their villages burned down.¹⁹⁰ Until August 1 the 1st ss Cavalry Regiment, mostly its mounted troops, or *Reitende Abteilung*, killed 788 persons; five days later, the unit's death toll had approximated 3,000 "Jews and partisans" (*Juden und Freischärler*).¹⁹¹

The operation exemplified how the Wehrmacht, ss, and police were working hand in hand. Military commanders from the Rear Army Areas Center and South applauded the actions of Himmler's men and awarded decorations.¹⁹² In an order that prohibited the participation of individual soldiers in pogroms outside the line of duty, the commander of Rear Army Area South announced a

and Poles.¹⁷⁸ Over time, the growing German fixation on eradicating “partisans” and potential sympathizers—Jews, former Red Army soldiers, “suspicious elements,” and “wanderers”—blurred the borderline separating desirables from undesirables until all locals were seen as presenting a security threat.¹⁷⁹

Three days after the July 16, 1941, meeting with Hitler on future German policy in the occupied eastern territories, Heinrich Himmler (who had not attended the meeting) started reassigning two brigades from his own Kommandostab—the ss Cavalry Brigade (consisting of the 1st and the 2nd ss Cavalry Regiments) to the HSSPF for Russia Center, Bach-Zelewski, and the 1st ss Brigade to the HSSPF for Russia South, Jeckeln. It was the task of this force of more than 10,000 men, in conjunction with several Order Police battalions subordinated to the HSSPF, to “pacify” what was regarded as the main trouble spot in the occupied territory. While the ss Cavalry Brigade was sent into the Pripet marshes, a vast, almost impenetrable area that covered parts of Belorussia and the northern Ukraine, the 1st ss Brigade was deployed at its southern edge.¹⁸⁰ Much better equipped for swift, large-scale operations than the Einsatzgruppen, these units played an important role in the transition from a policy of selective mass murder to the wholesale destruction of Jewish life in the occupied parts of the Soviet Union.

The Kommandostab Reichsführer-ss had been formed in May 1941 from units of the Waffen-ss. Stationed in occupied Poland, its men had been subjected since early 1941 to the usual dose of ideological indoctrination reinforced by daily life in the east. The Waffen-ss officers could see the image of “The Eternal Jew” not only in local cinemas but also in the nearby ghettos of Cracow, Lublin, Tarnow, or Zamosc.¹⁸¹ In the weeks before their deployment in the Pripet, the officers of the Kommandostab down to the company level were issued with guidelines that explained at great length how the military situation was to be assessed, orders given, and the “pacification of the rear army area and the territory of the political administration” achieved. By then, despite the obvious desire of the Kommandostab leaders to bolster their self-esteem vis-à-vis the Wehrmacht, there could be little doubt that theirs was not a military task in the traditional sense: “To gain ground is irrelevant. The aim of the fight remains solely the complete destruction of the encircled enemy.”¹⁸²

On July 21, 1941, Himmler had visited the commander for the Rear Army Area South, Karl von Roques, in Lwow.¹⁸³ While it is not clear what they discussed that day, the Jewish question was at least on von Roques’s agenda.¹⁸⁴ Further north, Max von Schenckendorff, commander of the Rear Army Area Center, expected to receive support from the 1st and 2nd Cavalry Regiments for “cleansing” the Pripet marshes, where partisans had been reported.¹⁸⁵ The two

istration took over from the Wehrmacht, while the areas of Bialystock and Galicia came under the control of East Prussia and the General Government, respectively. All across the occupied territory, regulations had been or were about to be issued that, following an unsystematic and locally varied pattern, set the Jews apart from the rest of the population. For those units of the Wehrmacht, the Security Police, and Order Police that were involved in "pacification," the mass murder of Jews and other noncombatants had become a matter of daily routine. The recruitment of local collaborators increased the German ability to bring death to the most remote villages. On occasion, the killings had been expanded to engulf women and children. German officials in the field envisaged an alignment or coordination of these developments toward a common goal, a *Gleichschaltung* of sorts that would transform extreme destructiveness into administrative normalcy, selective mass murder into genocide. This was to happen in the remaining months of 1941.

Beginning in late July, as a result of the failure to win a quick victory over the Red Army, German obsession with security increased. The Reich was, as Hitler put it, forced "to rule areas extending over 300 to 500 kilometers with a handful of people."¹⁷⁴ The army leadership compensated for that lack of manpower by an even more massive use of force.¹⁷⁵ In the eyes of the commanding officers, increased terror called for greater control of the troops involved. In consequence, the army addressed two issues in particular. The first was the danger of an erosion of discipline following the involvement of troops in violent acts against the civilian population. Given the eagerness of the military leadership to annihilate actual as well as imagined enemies, this danger could only be mitigated by cosmetic measures. For this purpose, soldiers and non-German auxiliaries were prohibited from participating in mass executions outside their line of duty.¹⁷⁶

The other issue related to the necessity of legitimizing increased terror directed against civilians in areas well behind the front line. One way of doing this was to put greater stress on the predetermined segregation of the local population into "desirable" and "undesirable" groups. As the I c officer of the 221st Security Division put it, the key to "total political and economic pacification" was the "skillful utilization of interethnic rivalry while at the same time eradicating Jewry" (*souveräne Beherrschung dieses Volkstumskampfes unter gleichzeitiger Ausmerzung des Judentums*).¹⁷⁷ Across the occupied Soviet Union, the military followed this strategy with varying intensity. In the south, army commanders ordered that reprisals for anti-German activities should be directed against Jews and Russians, not Ukrainians; further north, Belorussians, Lithuanians, and Latvians were to be "protected" from the activities of Jews, Russians,

tions like “Communist Jews” or “Killers of German and Romanian soldiers,” and at least half of them died.¹⁶⁹ Again, German officials tried to mold disorganized mass violence into a controlled pattern. Preventing further “executions carried out by the Romanians in an unprofessional and sadistic manner” (*die von den Rumänen durchgeführten unsachgemässen und sadistischen Exekutionen*) was one of the tasks of Einsatzgruppe D until the formal Romanian takeover of Bukovina, Bessarabia, and Transnistria following the Tighina agreement of August 30, 1941.¹⁷⁰ In order to entice the Romanians into “a more planned procedure in this direction,” Ohlendorf’s men showed the way. Targeting first “newcomers” who had arrived in Czernowitz (Cernauti) following the Soviet annexation in summer 1940, Einsatzgruppe D quickly expanded the group of Jewish victims from men to women—200 were shot in Kishinev on August 1, 1941—and, shortly thereafter, children.¹⁷¹

Clearly, the Germans did not need Lithuanians, Latvians, Ukrainians, or Romanians to tell them that the Jews in the occupied area of the Soviet Union were to be treated as enemies. Whatever crimes non-Germans committed, it was the Germans who, by establishing a pattern of systematic persecution, posed a much deadlier threat to Jewish existence. At the same time, events like the pogrom in Kaunas or the murder of Jewish women and children in Sculeni presented important lessons for German observers and participants on all levels. Such atrocities contributed to the shaping of anti-Jewish policy by providing additional stimuli. But overall, Himmler’s order of July 25, 1941, establishing auxiliary police units from within the local population—units that were to become indispensable tools for the implementation of the Final Solution—had in the long run a greater impact on the overall course of events than the pogroms or other uncoordinated killings committed by non-Germans.

TOWARD THE FINAL SOLUTION, AUGUST–DECEMBER 1941

By the beginning of August 1941, all factors were in place for passing the threshold to the murder of all Jews in the occupied Soviet Union. The German army had occupied the Baltic States and Belorussia, and in Ukraine had reached the Kiev-Kirovograd line; the encirclement battles of Uman and Smolensk/Roslavl were to add almost another half a million Soviet POWs to those already starving in German camps.¹⁷² In mid-July, Heydrich had issued guidelines for the screening of camps for Soviet POWs that called for the identification of “all Jews.”¹⁷³ At the end of the month, Göring had authorized Heydrich to prepare a “total solution of the Jewish question in the German sphere of influence in Europe.” Starting in Lithuania, Alfred Rosenberg’s civil admin-

when the surrender of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina to the Soviet Union was accompanied by outbreaks of violence against Jews.¹⁶³ In anticipation of Operation Barbarossa, commanders of the Romanian gendarmerie issued orders that called on regional officers “to cleanse the land” of Jews, to concentrate urban Jews in ghettos, and to bring about “the extermination on site of all Jews found in rural areas.” The same language prevailed in other early pronouncements by Romanian officials, who expanded the target groups for “the act of ethnic cleansing” to include Ukrainians.¹⁶⁴ On June 19 the Romanian dictator Ion Antonescu ordered that “the names of all Jewish and communist agents or sympathizers are to be listed (by county)” and that their freedom of movement was to be restricted to enable the military “to execute further orders.”¹⁶⁵

After June 22, 1941, it seems as if Romanian military and police units wasted little time implementing their prewar plans, first targeting the area of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, the territory occupied by the Soviet Union in 1940. Yet German involvement and other factors played an important role in propelling these killings. Einsatzgruppe D, lead by Otto Ohlendorf and attached to the German 11th Army adjacent to Romanian troops (3rd and 4th Armies), first observed, then tried to control and direct, the activities of their ally. Many of the executions were carried out as so-called reprisals, with a ratio of 50 Jewish victims for every Romanian or German soldier killed.¹⁶⁶ According to an estimate by Raul Hilberg, more than 10,000 Jews were murdered in July 1941 in Bukovina and Bessarabia by Romanian and German units.¹⁶⁷

Like the pogroms in Lithuania, some of these early killings pointed toward the subsequent escalation to mass murder. On June 27 the German military commander ordered the evacuation of the civilian population of Sculeni, a recently occupied village in Bessarabia (Moldova). Officers from the Romanian 6th Mountain Regiment selected the Jews from among the evacuees, robbed them of their belongings, and forced them to dig mass graves. The Romanian soldiers then shot at least 311 Jews into the pit. About a month later, when the case came under investigation by Romanian army authorities, the officers involved claimed to have acted “pursuant to orders from our superiors.” A post-war exhumation revealed corpses of men, old persons, women, and 33 children including 7 under the age of a year. One child seemed to have been burned alive.¹⁶⁸

Romanian officers competed with their German colleagues in setting new parameters on how to deal with the Jews. Beginning on June 28, 1941, soldiers, gendarmes, and civilians staged a pogrom in Iasi, a city in northeastern Romania and a stronghold of the nationalist Right, that claimed the lives of thousands of local Jews. More than 4,000 survivors were put on trains marked with inscrip-

ing control over local collaborators in parts of Belorussia and Ukraine explain to some extent why Schutzmannschaft battalions were brought in from the Baltics to bolster up the German "pacification" effort whenever large-scale actions were required.¹⁵⁴ Once the civil administration had been firmly established in the western part of the occupied Soviet Union, however, Schutzmäner became the foot soldiers of German rule on a day-to-day basis. In conjunction with the Order Police, they contributed massively to the murder of Jews in the "second killing wave," which started in spring 1942, and to antipartisan warfare.¹⁵⁵

Anti-Bolshevist partisans and auxiliary policemen were not the only locals who assisted the occupiers in their efforts to control and "pacify" the area. From the Baltic States via Belorussia to Ukraine, gentiles employed in official functions in city, town, and village administrations did their best to ensure that rules and regulations imposed by the Germans were adhered to. They became auxiliaries to the emerging administrative hierarchy, usually situated at its bottom, sometimes—as in the case of the Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian Security Police¹⁵⁶—performing functions parallel to those of German offices. Accordingly, the degree of German involvement ranged from direct intervention to general supervision. Without the active support of mayors, city councils, housing offices, and a plethora of local administrators, the identification, expropriation, and ghettoization of the Jewish population especially in rural areas would have exceeded the limited logistic capabilities of German occupation agencies.¹⁵⁷

In some cases, these local offices did more than provide preparatory help for the murder of the Jews. On June 30, 1941, less than a week after the occupation of the Lithuanian town of Alytus, the local police chief offered the German military commander to murder all the Jews in the district with the assistance of his auxiliary policemen. At this time, the Stadtkommandant did not take up the offer;¹⁵⁸ by September 19, however, more than 2,200 Jews in Alytus and surroundings had been murdered by a mobile commando of EK 3.¹⁵⁹ In August the women and children who had survived the first killings by Böhme's Einsatzkommando in the area east of the German-Soviet border fell victim to executions carried out by Lithuanian police units, partly without direct German participation.¹⁶⁰

In conjunction with the Wehrmacht, military forces of allied or associated countries fought the Red Army on Soviet territory. As with local collaborators, the behavior of these non-German troops toward the Jews was influenced by a variety of factors.¹⁶¹ While Hungarian soldiers seemed to have largely abstained from following the German example,¹⁶² Romanian units on the southern sector of the front committed large-scale killings. Romanian politics had been heavily anti-Semitic since the late 1930s, reaching a first peak in the summer of 1940,

On July 25 Himmler noted that the tasks of the police in the east could not be fulfilled by men of the police and SS alone and ordered the organization of "additional protective units from the ethnic groups suitable to us in the conquered area as soon as possible."¹⁴⁶ Himmler's order marked the official creation of the Schutzmannschaften, which over time became, in addition to the German security divisions, SS units, and Order Police battalions, a crucial element in the "pacification" of the occupied territory.¹⁴⁷ In late 1941, 26 battalions with local policemen had been created, and 33,000 Schutzmäner were serving German interests; within a year this figure had multiplied to about 300,000 local policemen, who were deployed in a variety of functions.¹⁴⁸

Containing the activism of locals and integrating them into German occupation structures sometimes created a larger problem than eliciting their initial support. The commander of the Rear Army Area North ordered in early August that, since the "pacification" of occupied Latvia had been largely achieved, there was no longer any reason "to tolerate unauthorized and uncontrolled arrests and far-reaching executive measures" by Latvian auxiliaries; henceforth, these measures had to be sanctioned by German authorities.¹⁴⁹ As the highest nonmilitary authority in the region, the HSSPF was in charge of supervising a rapidly growing auxiliary police force and integrating it into the emerging administrative structure.¹⁵⁰ After the civil administration had taken over, Rosenberg's representatives became involved in supporting these efforts. In a report written in mid-August, the Gebietskommissar (county commissar) in Mitau (Jelgava) defined it as one of his main tasks to establish discipline among local policemen, who, as a result of their involvement in the liquidation of the Jewish population, had lost all moral restraints. He took it as a sign of success that his order "to bring the surviving 21 Jews from Mitau alive to Illuxt" had been carried out despite the considerable distance between the two cities.¹⁵¹

Not just ideological affinities with the new rulers but material expectations provided from early on a major incentive for locals to join the ranks of auxiliary police units.¹⁵² Since organized plunder and robbery formed an integral element of German occupation policy in general and anti-Jewish measures in particular, it is hardly surprising that parts of the local population wanted to improve their poor living conditions by trying to get a share of the loot. This factor was especially relevant for the recruitment of Soviet POWs into auxiliary police units and in areas like Belorussia, where gentiles had initially shown little enthusiasm to support the German effort to get rid of the Jews. Unable to fully control the activities of their own auxiliaries, Einsatzgruppe B vilified the so-called Order Service (Ordnungsdienst) created in Belorussia by the Wehrmacht and the Security Police as "organized bands of robbers."¹⁵³ Problems in assert-

German reports, had previously used slogans like “Germans, Jews, and Russians out.”¹⁴⁰ More important, given the complex mix of nationalistic, opportunistic, and anti-Semitic motives at work, pogroms contained a degree of unpredictability that ran counter to any systematic anti-Jewish policy as adopted in Germany and other parts of occupied Europe. The basic ingredients recommended by the RSHA—instigating pogroms and making use of local collaborators without officially sanctioning their auxiliary function—did not strike officials in the field as a recipe for an efficient occupation policy. “Spontaneous cleansing actions,” a report by Einsatzgruppe A pointed out, “were insufficient to stabilize the rear army area, especially as the eagerness of the local population was quickly waning.”¹⁴¹ The further the Germans advanced, the less gentiles were inclined to stage pogroms. In Belorussia this tactic failed to work from the beginning.¹⁴² Given the shortage of German manpower, the envisaged “stabilization” required the transformation of pogrom participants into regular policemen.

At that time, however, it was still unclear where the line should be drawn between enlisting local populations in the service of German security and blocking their national ambitions. In late June the 9th Army had notified Wehrmacht commanders in Lithuania that on order of the Führer agencies of the provisional government should be ignored. The only task for local Lithuanian agencies was to restore “quiet and order”; armed Lithuanian units were to be dissolved except where they carried out “purely police tasks.” (“Nur Ausübung von reinen Polizeiaufgaben ist zu gestatten.”)¹⁴³ On June 28, 1941, Colonel Bobelis, the Lithuanian provisional military commander in Kaunas, issued a call for volunteers from the former Lithuanian army to replace the so-called partisans. Days later as reported by Ehrlinger, a “Battalion for the Defense of National Labor” had been formed which, growing significantly in size over the following weeks, was subordinated to Karl Jäger’s Einsatzkommando 3. As part of a unit referred to in German sources after its leader as “Rollkommando Hamann,” these men contributed massively toward the staggering figure of 133,346 mostly Jewish murder victims reported by Jäger in mid-December 1941.¹⁴⁴

While regional and local agencies were looking for a practical solution to the pressing question of how to police the occupied territory with a minimum of German manpower, the Berlin center played a characteristically ambiguous role. In the top-level meeting on July 16, 1941, Hitler had emphatically demanded that non-Germans should never be allowed to bear arms. (“Nie darf erlaubt werden, dass ein Anderer Waffen trägt, als der Deutsche! . . . Nur der Deutsche darf Waffen tragen, nicht der Slawe, nicht der Tscheche, nicht der Kossak oder der Ukrainer!”)¹⁴⁵ The Führer’s subordinates decided differently.

considerations: the auxiliary policemen had no jobs, were “without any means, partly without housing.” The entire economic situation, including food supply for the local population, remained unclear. Of the two companies subordinated to EK 1b, one was guarding “the Jewish concentration camp created in Kaunas—Fort VII [one of the old fortifications of the city]—and carries out the executions.” Several army units had adopted different policies in Lithuania. For Ehrlinger, the most pressing task was to solve the “Lithuanian question according to uniform guidelines.” (“Im Interesse der deutschen Ostraumpolitik ist es aber unbedingt notwendig, dass die litauische Frage nach einheitlichen Richtlinien gelöst wird.”)¹³⁵

The speedy integration of local pogroms into the emerging pattern of German policy makes it extremely difficult to identify their specific driving forces. As can be seen from events in Kaunas and Lwow, considerations for German interests determined local actions at least indirectly. Once units of the Wehrmacht or the Security Police had started adopting a more long-term strategy, German preponderance became much more visible. As most of the available contemporary documentation originated from the Einsatzgruppen, it is not surprising that other agencies—German as well as non-German—appear less important.¹³⁶ Nevertheless, the reports from Security Police units provide essential information on the local setting and the mix of factors. Obviously, the perpetrators of early mass killings did not restrict their activities to Jews; and even where Jews were targeted exclusively, anti-Semitism seems not to have been the sole motive. On the same day that the “partisans” of Kaunas were disarmed, the Lithuanian provisional military commander issued an appeal to the population to beware of “raging Russians and Jewish communists.”¹³⁷ In nearby Vilnius, Lithuanian aggression focused on Poles, the largest ethnic group in the city.¹³⁸

In the interest of preventing an uncontrolled mushrooming of violence by non-Germans, Heydrich stepped in. On July 1, following an inquiry from the 17th Army under General Stülpnagel, he elaborated on his order issued two days earlier regarding what he termed “the nonprevention of self-cleansing measures by anticommunist and anti-Jewish circles.” Heydrich called it “self-evident that the cleansing actions have to be directed primarily against Bolsheviks and Jews.” Poles, on the other hand, were to be exempted for the time being, “since they will be of special importance as initiators [*Initiativelement*] for pogroms as well as for gathering information.”¹³⁹

Despite his eagerness to make use of pogroms as expressions of local hatred against “Judeobolsheviks,” Heydrich was aware of their inherent dangers. Pogroms were dangerous weapons in the hands of nationalists who, according to

most frightful event that I had seen during the course of two world wars." A corporal from a bakers' company described a similar scene in Kaunas: "Why these Jews were being beaten to death I did not find out. At that time I had not formulated my own thoughts about the persecution of the Jews because I had not yet heard anything about it. The bystanders were almost exclusively German soldiers, who were watching the cruel incident out of curiosity."¹²⁹

Public scenes like these, in an area controlled by the Reich and with Germans as onlookers, were unprecedented. In Lithuania and elsewhere, Wehrmacht officers watched with a mixture of approval and apprehension. On July 1, 1941, the war diary of the 1st Mountain Division in Lwow noted that during a meeting of unit commanders shots could be heard from the direction of the GPU prison as part of a "full-scale pogrom against Jews and Russians" (*regelrechten Juden- und Russenpogrom*) instigated by Ukrainians.¹³⁰ In Drohobycz, the local military commander observed "terror and lynch justice against the Jews"; the overall number of victims remained undetermined.¹³¹ Even the most high-ranking military officers declared themselves unable to interfere. Field Marshal von Leeb, the commander of Army Group North, wrote in his diary about the killings in Kaunas that "the only thing to do is to keep clear of them." (*Es bleibt nur übrig, dass man sich fernhält.*)¹³²

Some representatives of the occupying power openly applauded such outbreaks of mass violence. From Lwow, where pogroms had been raging for days, the secret military police reported on July 7 that "the fanatic mood was transmitted to our Ukrainian translators," who had been recruited from nationalistic circles. According to the report, these Ukrainians "were of the opinion that every Jew should be clubbed to death immediately." (*Ferner waren sie der Meinung, dass jeder Jude sofort erschlagen werden müsse.*)¹³³ In a number of places, Germans did not just look on favorably but actively participated in locally instigated atrocities against Jews, Russians, and communists, thus contributing to the radicalization of German measures.¹³⁴ In the long run, however, "spontaneous" violence by locals had to be channeled into organized crime. Since Heydrich's order of June 29 provided little assistance for solving practical problems, Security Police officers in the field looked for guidance to the Wehrmacht, which had already started to make systematic use of non-German collaborators.

From Kaunas, Erich Ehrlinger of EK 1b reported to the RSHA on July 1, 1941, that the local anti-Soviet "partisans" had been disarmed a couple of days earlier on order of the German military commander. To ensure their future availability, Ehrlinger continued, the Wehrmacht Feldkommandant had created an auxiliary police unit consisting of five companies from among the ranks of reliable collaborators. Ehrlinger presented this measure as at least partly motivated by social

Bolshevists not only with a safe haven but also with opportunities to organize and direct propaganda efforts and to plan for the future following the Soviet withdrawal. One of the most well-known Lithuanian expatriates in Berlin, Kazys Skirpa, formed the Lithuanian Activists Front (LAF), which tried to transcend the longtime division separating the two bourgeois camps, the right-wing sympathizers of former president Antanas Smetona and the profascist "Iron Wolf" movement.¹²⁶ Skirpa and his men exploited anti-Jewish feeling and claimed that Jews formed the backbone of the Bolshevik system and thus had caused the loss of Lithuania's national independence. In a leaflet drafted in March 1941, the LAF gave instructions to its sympathizers across the border for the anticipated "hour of Lithuania's liberation":

Local uprising must be started in the enslaved cities, towns, and villages of Lithuania or, to put it more exactly, all power must be seized the moment the war begins. Local Communists and other traitors of Lithuania must be arrested at once, so that they may not escape just punishment for their crimes (The traitor will be pardoned only provided he proves beyond doubt that he has killed one Jew at least). . . . Already today inform the Jews that their fate has been decided upon. So that those who can had better get out of Lithuania now, to avoid unnecessary victims.¹²⁷

In the weeks before the beginning of Operation Barbarossa, the LAF intensified its propaganda efforts with German help by infiltrating anti-Soviet agitators, distributing propaganda leaflets, or broadcasting radio messages across the border. Because of its limited number of members, especially from among the prewar Lithuanian establishment, the LAF was more a symbol of anticommunism than a key political player. Even before the Wehrmacht had occupied the country, Lithuanian units of the Red Army, most notably its 297th Territorial Corps in the city of Kaunas, staged a mutiny that hastened the Soviet retreat. Following the Red Army's withdrawal, provisional military commanders and other Lithuanian agencies, including a provisional government in Kaunas, emerged to stake a claim for future self-rule if not independence.¹²⁸ Insurgents of the LAF and other anti-Bolshevists played an important role in the instigation of pogroms.

Compared with the reluctance of Germans to address their own crimes, the great number of German testimonies and photographs depicting pogrom scenes in the east is surprising. Most notorious are images and statements by bystanders on the killings that took place in Kaunas between June 23 and 28, 1941. "I became witness," a colonel stated in the late 1950s regarding the clubbing to death of male "civilians" by a young Lithuanian, "to probably the

degree of involvement in murder was not merely the result of German instigation; there were other, indigenous factors at work.

German preinvasion memoranda indicate that stereotypes about "the east" and its inhabitants allowed a certain degree of differentiation in regard to the relative qualities of different despised ethnic groups. For the dual purpose of exploitation and domination, Russians were seen, together with the Jews, as least desirable, while Ukrainians and the peoples of the Baltic States fared comparatively better. Hitler applied a similar hierarchy but, because of his political grand design regarding "the east," was unwilling to grant preferential treatment to Ukrainians, Latvians, and others regarded as racially inferior. At the same time, German policy exploited ethnic rivalries and residual local anti-Semitism, as well as national ambitions, to facilitate gaining control of the occupied territory. Using these factors helped implement the vision Hitler expressed during the meeting on July 16, 1941, of cutting up "the gigantic cake" for easier German consumption.¹²³

The absence of any sincere desire on the part of politicians in Berlin to foster non-German self-determination did not deter nationalist groups from the Baltic States and Ukraine from seeking the assistance of the Reich against Moscow. Following the annexation of their countries by the Soviet Union in 1939/40, scores of political refugees left Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and western Ukraine, sometimes using the opportunities created by the resettlement of ethnic Germans agreed upon by Berlin and the Kremlin.¹²⁴ Members of the respective security services had special reasons to escape before the Soviet NKVD took control. Pranas Lukys, who had worked for the Lithuanian secret police (Saugumas) and after the war was Böhme's codefendant in the West German "Einsatzkommando Tilsit" trial, was one of them. The available evidence, sketchy as it is, given the absence of thorough research on the activities of Baltic émigrés in Nazi Germany, suggests that Lukys's career was not an exception. Having crossed the border together with some fifty other secret policemen, he was interned in a camp near Tilsit. Preinvasion reports by the Stapostelle Tilsit prove that the Germans were aware of the potential usefulness of these Lithuanians for the pending war against the Soviet Union. The Tilsit office sent Lukys and some other Saugumas men to an assignment with the Security Police near Lublin in the General Government, where they stayed until their transfer to Memel in spring 1941. From there, one night before the beginning of Operation Barbarossa, they were sent across the border to Lithuania to prepare subversive activities against the Red Army.¹²⁵

In preparation for the attack, the Reich provided nationalists and anti-

POGROMS AND COLLABORATION

Since the early stages of the war against the Soviet Union, non-Germans—in a kind of tacit division of labor—participated in anti-Jewish violence to a significant extent. The scope of their involvement ranged from assistance in identifying, persecuting, and ghettoizing Jews to the carrying out of pogroms, “cleansing measures,” or other acts of physical violence. The perpetrators were resident gentiles, collaborators brought in from other areas, and soldiers or policemen of countries allied with or controlled by the Reich.¹¹⁶ Heydrich’s order to the Einsatzgruppen to foster “self-cleansing measures” by the local population against communists and Jews indicates that these crimes would not have been committed without Operation Barbarossa.¹¹⁷ Thus, German policy is key to the understanding of non-German involvement. It is also evident that some gentiles, despite the risks involved, provided vital support for Jews who tried to escape from Nazi persecution.¹¹⁸ Yet the question remains concerning the extent to which non-German assistance was important for shaping anti-Jewish policy at this stage in the process and later on.

Lithuania—home to the largest concentration of Jews in the Baltic and the site of early instances of mass murder—poses this question with particular urgency. Here, unlike in other parts of the occupied Soviet Union, with the exception of Latvia and western Ukraine, locals were from the beginning of German rule until its end deeply involved in the murder of the Jews. At the outbreak of the war and in some cases before the arrival of German troops, pogroms swept the country. In the city of Kaunas, according to reports by EK 3, some 3,800 Jews lost their lives in these outbursts.¹¹⁹ Neighboring Latvia, which had been completely occupied by the Wehrmacht by July 10, was the site of similar scenes, though on a smaller scale. In Riga, the capital, an auxiliary police unit under nationalist Viktors Arajs in agreement with Einsatzgruppe A killed several hundred communists, Jews, and other “undesirable” persons by mid-July.¹²⁰ In western Ukraine (Volhynia and Eastern Galicia annexed by the Soviet Union in September 1939) approximately 24,000 Jews were murdered by Ukrainians; by the end of July, pogroms supported by the Germans had claimed the lives of at least 5,000 Jews in the Eastern Galician capital Lwow alone.¹²¹ Some of the most notorious killing units of the Holocaust operated far beyond the borders of their home countries. Auxiliary police units from Latvia and Lithuania helped to carry out the mass murder of Jews deep in Belorussia, while Ukrainians (and other ethnic groups) trained in Trawniki near Lublin served as guards for German death and concentration camps.¹²² Clearly, this astonishing

the political aims. In addition Koch in Kiev, the most important city, who will lean more toward Göring than me. I have to watch carefully that my directives are followed. . . . When we parted Göring shook hands with me and expressed his hope for a good collaboration.¹⁰⁹

The meeting on July 16 can be interpreted as the clearest expression of what Browning has termed the first turning point in the decision-making process that led up to the Holocaust.¹¹⁰ Linking inclusion and exclusion—the two basic aims that had characterized German resettlement policy since fall 1939—the participants and especially Hitler presented “positive” visions for the German Volk at large that were to transform the rugged east into a “Garden of Eden” while at the same time calling for negative, in fact highly destructive, measures against any sign of noncompliance among the local population. In this context, the correlation between the east and the Jewish question in its broader meaning played an important, yet undefined role. At the time, the Nazi leadership might have shared the doubts expressed at the periphery that mass shootings of Soviet Jews were, as a report by the Kommandostab on the killings in the Baltics put it, the way in which “the Jewish problem can be fundamentally solved” (*das jüdische Problem einer grundsätzlichen Lösung zugeführt werden kann*).¹¹¹ Similarly, in early July following the pogroms in Kaunas the commander of Army Group North, von Leeb, had voiced his agreement with Franz von Roques, commander of the Rear Army Area North, that “in this manner the Jewish question will probably not be solved. The most secure means would be the sterilization of all male Jews.”¹¹² Nevertheless, Hitler and the top leadership refrained from addressing the issue and left it to their men in the field to decide how to proceed.

Although the meeting of July 16 did not result in any specific directives in regard to the Jewish question in the east, it was crucial for defining the parameters of subsequent policy. One day later, Hitler signed a set of orders that formally established the civil administration in the occupied east.¹¹³ These orders guaranteed that Himmler’s jurisdiction over security matters and Göring’s over the war economy remained intact, thus creating the precarious imbalance of agencies within which Rosenberg and his ministry had to operate.¹¹⁴ At the same time, following the appointment of the first representatives of the civil administration, the persecution of the Jews in the occupied parts of the Soviet Union took on a new, more systematic form.¹¹⁵ Rosenberg’s men found conditions that to a large degree had already been determined by events during the preceding weeks. However, not all of these events, including those leading up to the large-scale murder of the Jewish population, had been brought about solely by Germans.

Taking up Hitler's demand to transform the occupied territory into a "Garden of Eden" and his decision to hand over the area west of the river D \ddot{u} na to civil administration, Rosenberg tried to stress the importance of treating the local population differently—for Ukrainians he even envisaged a limited degree of independence.¹⁰⁵ G $\ddot{ö}$ ring objected: all thoughts would have to focus for the time being on securing the food supply. The matter was left undecided, and it might have been in that context that Hitler mentioned—as recorded by Rosenberg in his diary—that "all decrees are but theory. If they do not meet the demands, they will have to be changed."¹⁰⁶ Hitler and his cronies moved on to the issue of sharing some of the territorial spoils with Germany's allies, followed by lengthy discussions on the relative merits of the various contenders for the positions of Reichskommissare. Here again, everything depended on quick, energetic action. When Rosenberg objected to the idea of having Erich Koch, Gauleiter of East Prussia, administer the Ukraine for fear that he might act too independently, he was told by G $\ddot{ö}$ ring that he "could not *always lead* his regional representatives *around by the nose*, rather they would have to work quite independently." (*Rosenberg könne die eingesetzten Leute ja nun nicht ständig gängeln, sondern diese Leute müssten doch sehr selbständig arbeiten.*)¹⁰⁷

When Rosenberg brought up the "question of securing the administration," Hitler stated that he had repeatedly called for better weapons for the police in the east and added, "Naturally, the vast area must be pacified as quickly as possible; this will happen best by shooting anyone who even looks sideways at us." (*Der Riesenraum müsse natürlich so rasch wie möglich befriedet werden; dies geschehe am besten dadurch, dass man Jeden, der nur schief schaue, totschieße.*)¹⁰⁸ Field Marshal Keitel stressed that, since one could not guard "every barn and every railway station," the local population needed to know "that anybody would be shot who did not behave properly and that they would be held responsible." Although Himmler did not attend this meeting, his interests were taken into account by the other participants and in the order for the establishment of the civil administration drafted by Lammers, the chief of the Reich chancellery.

Rosenberg's final remarks in his diary reflect the atmosphere during the meeting:

At 8 we were nearly finished. I had received a gigantic task, very likely the biggest the Reich could assign, the task to make Europe independent from overseas countries and to make this safe for centuries to come. I did, however, not receive complete authority, since G $\ddot{ö}$ ring as plenipotentiary for the Four-Year Plan had the right, for a *short* while even precedence, to interfere in the economy, which if done without clear coordination could possibly endanger

soldiers.¹⁰² In the comparatively few instances when the Jewish question was referred to, Jews were depicted primarily in terms of official propaganda and familiar stereotypes. Accordingly, early dispatches from the east presented Jews as snipers or instigators of atrocities committed against German soldiers. One of the most graphic examples is a letter written from Tarnopol in early July 1941. The writer, after referring to mutilated bodies left by the retreating Soviets in the city's courthouse, minced no words about what happened next:

Revenge was quick to follow. Yesterday we and the SS were merciful, for every Jew we found was shot immediately. Today things have changed, for we again found 60 fellow soldiers mutilated. Now the Jews must carry the dead out of the basement, lay them out nicely, and then they are shown the atrocities. After they have seen the victims, they are killed with clubs and spades.

So far, we have sent about 1,000 Jews into the hereafter, but that is far too few for what they have done. The Ukrainians have said that the Jews had all the leadership positions and, together with the Soviets, had a regular public festival while executing the Germans and Ukrainians. I ask you, dear parents, to make this known, also father, in the local branch [of the NSDAP]. If there should be doubts, we will bring photos with us. Then there will be no doubts.

Many greetings, your son Franzl.¹⁰³

In hindsight, the available documentation for the early weeks of the campaign indeed corroborates Hitler's view that his men would function well and that the unity of the home front was not in imminent danger. At the same time, in his pronouncements before his closest advisers Hitler expressed less interest in the Jewish question than in other, broader problems. This can be seen from the course of a meeting on July 16, 1941, at which Göring, Rosenberg, Lammers, Bormann, and Keitel were to receive Hitler's view on key issues of policy making. Before addressing the specifics of the issues at hand, Hitler made some general remarks: German propaganda would again have to stress that the Wehrmacht stepped in to restore order and that the Reich was taking over a mandate. However, "all necessary measures"—including shootings, forced resettlement—were to be accelerated, since "we will never leave these areas again." To achieve "a final settlement" (*endgültige Regelung*) of German control over the area, it was essential "to cut the gigantic cake into manageable pieces so that we can, first, dominate it, second, administer it, and third, exploit it." Using Stalin's call for partisan warfare as a pretext, Hitler stressed the "possibility of *eradicating whatever puts itself against us.*" (*Möglichkeit, auszurotten, was sich gegen uns stellt.*)¹⁰⁴

he feared that the persistent use of extreme violence posed a threat to the coherence, loyalty, and postwar effectiveness of the troops. Fourth and most important, given the Nazi leadership's obsession with preventing a situation similar to 1918, the quiet on the home front was not to be endangered. Economic considerations that already in the planning stages of the war enabled the branding of entire groups of the local population as redundant and dispensable were not an end in themselves but resulted to a significant degree from the Nazi leaders' determination to avoid putting an undue burden on the German Volk. Concern about potential unrest led to the official stop of the "euthanasia" killings (Aktion T4) in August 1941. "The Führer," Heydrich explained to his subordinates in early September, "has repeatedly stressed that all enemies of the Reich use—like during the [First] World War—every opportunity to sow disunity among the German people. It is thus urgently necessary to abstain from all measures that can affect the uniform mood of the people." Heydrich ordered that "my approval is sought before taking any especially drastic measures" but left a loophole in cases of "imminent danger."⁹⁸

As before, Hitler himself displayed trust in the rapid adaptation of his men and the population at large. While he initially expected that some Wehrmacht soldiers still harbored sympathy for communism,⁹⁹ he was nevertheless sure that the situation across the border would have the desired effect of removing remaining inhibitions. His orders regarding the treatment of Soviet POWs and the civilian population contributed decisively toward this development. In addition, the German propaganda machine expanded on existing stereotypes by stressing that "millions of German soldiers are witnesses today of the barbarity and wretchedness of the Bolshevist state." (*Heute sind Millionen deutscher Soldaten Zeugen der Barbarei und der Verkommenheit des bolschewistischen Staates.*) What they saw there went, according to the official line, far beyond anything known so far about "the Jewish slave state." (*Ihre furchtbaren Einblicke in die Verhältnisse dieses jüdischen Sklavenstaates stellen das in den Jahren bisher dem deutschen Volk bekannt gewordene noch weit in den Schatten.*)¹⁰⁰

Recent evaluations of letters and photographs by Wehrmacht soldiers point to a certain discrepancy between propaganda slogans and the more complex "eastern experiences" of many Germans. Jews did not figure prominently as objects of photographic imagery or as topics in the correspondence between German soldiers and their families back in the Reich.¹⁰¹ Much more dominant in this phase of the war were the primitive conditions, filth and the lack of hygiene, which over time retreated into the background thanks to what Omer Bartov calls the "barbarization of warfare" that especially affected frontline

Heydrich's obsession with monitoring the activities of his units behind the advancing front line stemmed largely from the fear of going too far too quickly, a fear he shared with Himmler. At this stage, instead of providing explicit orders for the rapid expansion of the killing process, the SS and police leadership in Berlin seems to have followed a course that can be described as controlled escalation. The delegation of power in the absence of unambiguous guidelines from above greatly increased the danger of subordinate officers getting out of control; thus, reliable information about what went on in the field was crucial. The incoming reports from the Einsatzgruppen were edited at the RSHA and, in the form of the so-called *Ereignismeldungen*, distributed to other government agencies in order to inform them about as well as adapt them to the course of events in the east. Himmler's infamous speech of October 1943 in which he talked to a large audience of Nazi officials about the implementation of the Final Solution was not his first attempt at spreading responsibility for the murder of the European Jews.⁹³

Officers at the periphery could expect that their reports would be received by an influential circle of high-ranking officials. For the purpose of presenting it to Hitler, the RSHA gathered "illustrative material" (*Anschauungsmaterial*) on the "work of the Einsatzgruppen in the east."⁹⁴ On July 4 Heydrich reiterated his supreme interest in functioning communications between periphery and center while announcing that local Security Police and SD offices in the border region were authorized to perform "cleansing actions" in occupied territory after consultation with the Einsatzgruppen. Heydrich might have had the case of Böhme's Einsatzkommando Tilsit in mind when he threatened to withdraw this authorization if these additional units intended "further actions" (*ein weiteres Vorgehen*) beyond those agreed upon with the Einsatzgruppen "for the purpose of operational coordination" (*zwecks einheitlicher Ausrichtung der zu ergreifenden Massnahmen*).⁹⁵ As late as mid-August the Reichsführer-SS sent out reminders for regular reports to his most trusted officers deployed in the east.⁹⁶

In the minds of Himmler and Heydrich, the potential dangers of excessive zeal were manifold. First, despite the cordial relations in the field and the agreement between Wagner and Heydrich, the army could still be antagonized to such a degree that the conflicts of the Polish campaign might reemerge. Second, the thin, but for internal as well as external reasons essential, veil of secrecy could tear, exposing the true nature of German measures in the east. Richard Breitman has recently shown that this fear was indeed well founded, since the British had broken the German Order Police code for radio messages and intercepted execution reports and other incriminating material.⁹⁷ Third, Himmler was committed to caring for the psychological needs of his men, and

skilled Jewish laborers were to remain employed in the war industry only if they were crucial for maintaining the required level of production and could not be replaced.⁸⁶ In late July, Berlin economic planners abandoned the grand designs for economic policy developed before the war in favor of practical measures for the immediate benefit of the war effort. For the Jews, that meant concentration in ghettos and forced labor in work columns.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, there was uncertainty about which Jews should be killed and which should be regarded as temporarily indispensable. As the Wirtschaftsstab Ost phrased it in its first report: "Unresolved is the question of the Jews who at this time remain deadly enemies, but who are at least temporarily needed economically owing to their large number." (*Ungelöst Frage der Juden, die diesmal Todfeinde bleiben und doch wirtschaftlich wegen grosser Zahl mindestens vorläufig notwendig.*)⁸⁸ Those responsible for the enactment of anti-Jewish measures noted that their victims tried to make sense of the confusing and contradictory German measures, often by assuming "that we will leave them alone if they eagerly do their work."⁸⁹

In this rapidly changing situation, contact between the command centers and the units in the field were of mutual benefit. When on June 29, 1941, Heydrich reminded the Einsatzgruppen chiefs of the need for "self-cleansing measures" by the local population, he also insisted that leaders of advance units had to have "the necessary political sensitivity" (*das erforderliche politische Fingerspitzengefühl*) and requested regular reports.⁹⁰ On July 1 Heydrich demanded "a maximum of mobility in the organization of tactical operations" (*grösste Beweglichkeit in der taktischen Einsatzgestaltung*) by pointing to his unsatisfactory experience in Grodno, where during a visit four days after the occupation of the city, he and Himmler had not found one representative of the Security Police and the SD.⁹¹ The following day he notified "in condensed form" the HSSPFs—who had been dispatched to the east after having met with Dalugee, but not with Heydrich—about the "most important instructions" issued to the Einsatzgruppen: to further the final aim of "economic pacification" (*wirtschaftliche Befriedung*), stern political measures were to be adopted. The list of persons to be executed comprised functionaries of the Communist Party, people's commissars, "Jews in party and state positions," and "other radical elements (saboteurs, propagandists, snipers, assassins, instigators etc.)."⁹² We can tell from the reasoning for mass killings offered in the reports from the Einsatzgruppen, Wehrmacht, and police units that Heydrich's categories in fact described the prime target groups. It is not clear, however, whether incoming reports from the field were tailored to meet the instructions from Berlin or whether Heydrich tried to adapt his somewhat belated notification to the actions of his subordinates behind the German front line.

and Russians including women and children" were murdered in the streets by Ukrainians.⁷⁶ From Lithuania, Jäger's EK 3 was reporting small but increasing numbers of women among the victims of executions.⁷⁷ In late July significant numbers of women seem to have been among the victims of pogroms in Lwow and Grodek Jagiellonski.⁷⁸ Police Regiment Center ordered its subordinate police battalions to provide execution statistics specifying the number of Russian soldiers, Jews, and women shot.⁷⁹ Around the turn of July / August 1941, other units—the 1st SS Brigade subordinated to HSSPF Jeckeln, Einsatzgruppe B (EK 9) and C (SK 4a)—started to shoot women and children in larger numbers.⁸⁰ In early August the previously quoted member of Reserve Police Battalion 105 from Bremen wrote: "Last night 150 Jews from this village were shot, men, women, and children, all killed. The Jews are being totally eradicated."⁸¹

By that time, a standardized method of mass murder had been adopted. The Jews were first rounded up, then brought, in groups of varying size depending on circumstances, to a more or less remote execution site, where the first arrivals were forced to dig a pit. The Jews had to undress and line up in front of the mass grave; they were then either shot into the pit or were murdered after being forced to lie on top of those already killed.⁸² What the perpetrators presented as an "orderly" execution procedure was, literally, a bloodbath. In the vicinity of cities, what could be called "execution tourism"—all kinds of Germans on or off duty looking on and taking pictures—abounded despite orders to the contrary.⁸³ Unlike the execution in Garsden, in later killings the reading of a verdict, however fabricated, was dispensed with. No officer gave a command to fire; instead, the executioners shot randomly, often with submachine guns. Coups de grâce were rarely delivered, and those who were shot but not immediately killed were left to die from their wounds or from suffocation after the pit was covered with soil. "Order" was restored for the murderers at the end of the day when they reentered the world of seemingly normal values or when they attended, as advised by Himmler, their "social gatherings."⁸⁴

As in the planning stages of Operation Barbarossa, economic considerations were but one factor that guided German policy toward the Jews. While the army and later the civil administration stressed the need for qualified Jewish laborers, early experiences pointed to their dispensability. For the Wirtschaftsstab Ost, the case of the oil refinery in Drohobycz (Drogobych) initially seemed to prove that Jewish experts were needed only for a short transition period. Since things worked well without any Jews (*ganz judenfrei*), it recommended that they should be confined to ghettos.⁸⁵ Ghettoization had the additional advantages of providing economic opportunities for Germans and reliable locals and of excluding Jews from the food market. According to Göring's economic experts,

Lithuania, German security agencies continued setting precedents that were later to become a standard part of the overall process. In early July 1941 SS Colonel Karl Jäger of EK 3 reported that 7,800 Jews had been killed so far in Kaunas “partly by pogrom, partly by mass executions.” To systematically “cleanse” the countryside of Jews, a small mobile unit was set up; in Kaunas, a ghetto was to be created within the next four weeks.⁶⁶

All along the front line, German military and police agencies executed Jews in reprisal for alleged attacks on troops or for being plunderers, members of the intelligentsia, saboteurs, or communists. Beginning in mid-July, Jewish communities were confined to “Jewish quarters” in segregated parts of towns and cities.⁶⁷ Central though hardly coherent guidelines regarding ghettoization were issued weeks later.⁶⁸ How great an area could be “secured” and “pacified” depended to a large extent on the working relationship between leading Wehrmacht and Einsatzgruppen officers.⁶⁹ In the Latvian city of Liepaja, where shots were occasionally fired at Wehrmacht soldiers, the navy commander in late July requested and received the help of police forces for solving the Jewish problem.⁷⁰ Einsatzgruppe B leader Arthur Nebe reported that the “excellent” (*ausgezeichnet*) cooperation with the Army Group Center “has proven to be successful especially in the liquidation actions in Bialystok and Minsk and has not failed to affect other commandos.” (*Diese Methode hat sich besonders bei den Liquidierungs-Aktionen in Bialystok und Minsk gut bewährt und ihre Wirkung auf die übrigen Kommandos nicht verfehlt.*)⁷¹ Dieter Pohl has estimated that in Eastern Galicia SS and police units killed more than 7,000 Jews by the end of July 1941, before the area was incorporated into the General Government.⁷² At the same time, Einsatzgruppe B reported 11,084 murder victims, predominantly Jews.⁷³ For all the Einsatzgruppen, the total at the end of July was 63,000 persons, about 90% Jews.⁷⁴ The perpetrators no longer thought of total annihilation as a utopian idea. In early July a member of Reserve Police Battalion 105 wrote home to Bremen that “the Jews are free game. . . . One can only give the Jews some well-intentioned advice: Bring no more children into the world. They no longer have a future.” (*Die Juden sind Freiwild. . . . Man kann den Juden nur noch einen gut gemeinten Rat geben: Keine Kinder mehr in die Welt zu setzen. Sie haben keine Zukunft mehr.*)⁷⁵

The killings in the first five weeks of Operation Barbarossa were of crucial importance for the later sequence of events. What had previously been regarded as logistically difficult, morally questionable, and politically dangerous became a new point of reference for German occupation policy. Starting in Garsden and Bialystok, the last taboo—the killing of women and children—eroded. On July 3 the I c officer of the 295th Infantry Division reported from Zloczow that “Jews

regionally varied sequence of measures characterized on the part of German officials by increasing violence and its acceptance as normality in "the east."

The destructive energies released by the German attack on the Soviet Union were primarily directed against the enemy army. In any military campaign troops can perpetrate atrocities, but Operation Barbarossa was an exceptional war for which the German leadership had deliberately defined new parameters of conduct. Criminal orders from above and violent impulses from below created a climate of unmitigated violence. This can be seen from the available evidence on the killing of captured Red Army soldiers by frontline troops and the conditions in camps for Soviet POWs and civilians.⁵⁹ In late June in the city of Minsk the local military commander established a camp that housed at times up to 100,000 Soviet POWs and 40,000 civilians, predominantly men of military age. Conditions in the camp were terrible; even Germans voiced their disgust.⁶⁰ In the following weeks, units of the Security Police and SD in conjunction with the army's Secret Military Police (Geheime Feldpolizei) screened both prisoner groups, taking out an estimated 10,000 for execution. Many of the men selected were Jews; however, a significant number of Jews were also among the approximately 20,000 persons released from the Minsk camp in mid-July.⁶¹

As in preinvasion memoranda and plans, German officials in the field hid ideological bias behind practical rationalizations, mostly by presenting anti-Jewish measures as part of a wider policy of "pacifying" the occupied area. This is true of the events in Bialystok and of a number of other killings. In late June/early July, units of the Waffen-SS Division "Wiking" were, according to a report by a staff officer of the 295th Infantry Division, randomly shooting large numbers "of Russian soldiers and also civilians whom they regard as suspicious," among them most likely 600 Jews in Zborov in Ukraine.⁶² Following a request from the 6th Army, SK 4a of Einsatzgruppe C killed 17 non-Jewish civilians, 117 "communist agents of the NKVD," and 183 "Jewish communists" in Sokal. According to Hoepner, commander of Panzer Group 4, "individual communist elements, especially Jews," were responsible for the "rather rare instances of sabotage."⁶³ In Drobomil, EK 6 arrested approximately 100 persons, mostly Jews, under the pretext of retaliation for NKVD murders and shot them. Reports on events in Kaunas (Kovno), Lwow (Lemberg), and Tarnopol (Ternopol) linked the execution of Jews to earlier killings of prisoners by Soviet authorities, thus artificially creating a causal connection that ignored the Jews among the NKVD victims and helped to gloss over the anti-Jewish feeling of German units.⁶⁴ Sometime before mid-July, 4,000–6,000 male Jews in the western Belorussian city of Brest were arrested and shot by men of Police Battalion 307 and the 162nd Infantry Division as part of a "cleansing action."⁶⁵ In

The following piece of advice Bach must have received, directly or indirectly, from Himmler, whose concern for the well-being of his officers was notorious: "Battalion commanders and company chiefs have to make special accommodations for the spiritual care of the men participating in such actions. The impressions of the day have to be blurred by having social gatherings. In addition, the men have to be continuously lectured about the necessity of measures caused by the political situation." (*Die seelische Betreuung der bei dieser Aktion beteiligten Männer haben sich die Batls.-Kdre. und Kompanie-Chefs besonders angelegen sein zu lassen. Die Eindrücke des Tages sind durch Abhaltung von Kameradschafts-abenden zu verwischen. Ferner sind die Männer laufend über die Notwendigkeit der durch die politische Lage bedingten Massnahmen zu belehren.*)⁵⁶

By visiting their men behind the front line, Himmler and some of his closest associates both provided and gathered important information on how to synchronize the "pacification" efforts. But while backing what had been done already and appealing to the men's sense of initiative in a rapidly escalating situation, they did not call directly for the killing of unarmed civilians irrespective of age or gender. The absence of specific orders from Berlin to kill all the Jews east of the border is reflected in the fact that the incoming reports described the first victims of physical annihilation as local Jewish men of military age, especially Jewish intelligentsia in leadership positions in the community.⁵⁷ However, from the beginning the delineation of the target group was not clear-cut. The massacre in Bialystok on June 27 shows the perpetrators' lack of inhibitions about killing even those Jews who were the least suspicious and the most vulnerable. And among the 201 persons shot in Garsden on June 24 there were a boy, one woman, and several Jews from Memel who but for the Nuremberg laws were German.

To some extent, the sequence of German anti-Jewish measures adopted in the occupied Soviet Union followed the model first established in Poland. In contrast to the Polish campaign and its aftermath, however, during Operation Barbarossa arrests, confiscation of property, exclusion from certain professions, introduction of badges or other markings, and separation from the gentile population were from the beginning directly linked with numerous acts of mass murder perpetrated by different agencies. Recent research has confirmed that in many cases units of the Wehrmacht delivered the first blows.⁵⁸ More-systematic steps were later taken by the Security Police and the SD as well as, in the Reichskommissariate, by representatives of the civil administration. What might appear from a post-Holocaust perspective as a centrally planned and uniformly applied pattern of stigmatization, dispossession, concentration, and annihilation was in the first months of Operation Barbarossa an incoherent, locally and

leading officers fomented the local killing process, often in more subtle ways than by directly ordering what was to be done. Frequent visits by Himmler, the HSSPF, Heydrich, or Daluege ensured that word about the "success" of radical measures got around quickly and that officers who were reluctant or tardy adapted to the new possibilities.⁴⁹

How the presence of high-ranking officials influenced the course of events in the field can be seen from the visits by Himmler, Daluege, and Bach-Zelewski to Bialystok in early July 1941. Hours before Himmler arrived in the city, Police Battalion 322 had looted the Jewish quarter, taking out 20 truckloads of food and other supplies, but it did not massacre Jews like Police Battalion 309 just days earlier. In fact, the three persons shot by Police Battalion 322 were Poles.⁵⁰ After his arrival the Reichsführer-SS addressed Bach-Zelewski; the commander of the Rear Army Area Center, von Schenckendorff;⁵¹ the commander of Police Regiment Center (to which Police Battalion 322 belonged), Max Montua; and the officers of Police Battalions 322 and 316 as well as of the SD. According to postwar testimonies by participants, Himmler talked about the organization of the police in the east and inquired about the measures taken that day in the Jewish quarter. One witness claimed to have heard from others at the time that Himmler had complained about the small number of Jews arrested and had called for a more active course in that direction.⁵² One day later, on July 9, Order Police chief Daluege came to visit Police Regiment Center in Bialystok and delivered a speech on the fight against the "world enemy of Bolshevism." Between July 8 and July 11, perhaps even starting on the evening of Himmler's visit, at least 1,000 Jews—all men of military age—were driven to the outskirts of the city, where they were shot by members of Police Battalions 322 and 316 under the direction of the Security Police and the SD.⁵³ This sequence of events in Bialystok seems to imply a causal connection, but at the very least encouragement from above had the effect of speeding things up. However, in light of the earlier massacre in Bialystok in late June and other mass killings in localities that high-ranking officers from Berlin had not visited, it seems evident that the presence of the Reichsführer-SS and his lieutenants was not required to trigger the murder of Jews.⁵⁴

On July 11, 1941, possibly in reaction to the earlier killings by Order Police units in Bialystok,⁵⁵ the commander of Police Regiment Center, Montua, transmitted an order by HSSPF Bach-Zelewski according to which all Jews age 17 to 45 convicted of plunder were to be shot ("alle als Plünderer überführten Juden im Alter von 17-45 Jahren sofort standrechtlich zu erschiessen"). To prevent "places of pilgrimage" (*Wallfahrtsorte*), the executions had to be carried out in a clandestine way and reported daily; no photographs or onlookers were allowed.

his company commander as a "cowardly weakling," and made no secret of his conviction that the Führer would "no longer feed these dirty Jordan slouchers" (*diese dreckigen Jordanlatscher nicht mehr am Fressen halten*). Together with Behrens, Schneider transformed his ideas into action. Jewish men whose outward appearance corresponded to anti-Semitic stereotypes became their first victims: beards were set on fire, some Jews were forced to dance or to cry "I am Jesus Christ," and Orthodox Jews were shot in the streets. A police officer who expressed discomfort at such acts was rebuked with the words "You don't seem to have received the right ideological training yet." (*Du bist wohl ideologisch noch nicht richtig geschult.*) Higher-ranking officers—among them the battalion commander and the commanding general of the 221st Security Division—stood by. The general did not begin to take notice that men under his command were running amok until the executions had reached a park next to his headquarters, and he later tried to cover up the massacre as a reprisal.⁴⁵

The mass murders in Garsden and Bialystok in late June reflect most of the features of what Raul Hilberg has called the "first killing sweep."⁴⁶ The perpetrators used their image of the "enemy" and the pretexts of "retaliation" and "pacification" to legitimize the selection and execution of undesirable persons, primarily Jews, without waiting for specific orders from above. If the murder of Jews on occupied Soviet territory did not result from a preconceived master plan,⁴⁷ the sequence, speed, and scope of the killings must have been connected to regional factors and the dynamics of ad hoc decision making. In the process, traditional elements of hierarchy lost their importance. Men from different agencies—the Security Police, the Wehrmacht, the Order Police—interacted. The authority to inflict suffering and death on civilians became detached from military rank and status, with lower- and middle-ranking officers taking the initiative while their superiors provided support, encouragement, or ex post facto legitimization. In this way the limits of what was regarded as acceptable in dealing with selected groups within the civilian population were expanded.

This approach did not become standard procedure overnight. At the time of the killings in Garsden, the 10th Regiment of the 1st SS Brigade, which as part of the Kommandostab was deployed further south, understood its task of "cleansing the border regions" in a much narrower way than Einsatzkommando Tilsit. Instead of killing civilians, it seems to have merely guarded bridges.⁴⁸ Through the month of July, however, additional units available to Himmler—his Kommandostab and battalions of Order Police—increasingly became involved on a massive scale in mass murder, thus marking the end of the first stage of destruction.

As they did in the meeting with Böhme in Augustowo, Himmler and his

Jews in the border area including women and children.⁴² However, wartime evidence suggests that this was not the case. In a report sent to Berlin about a week after the first mass execution, Böhme wrote only that Stahlecker gave his “general approval to the cleansing actions” (*grundsätzlich sein Einverständnis zu den Säuberungsaktionen erklärte*) close to the border.⁴³

From Garsden, Böhme’s unit, now referred to as Einsatzkommando Tilsit, moved on. After joining the Wehrmacht in shooting 214 persons including one woman in the town of Krottingen and 111 “persons” in Polangen for allegedly attacking German soldiers, Böhme’s men met with Himmler and Heydrich in Augustowo on June 30. Again, the wording of Böhme’s report on what was discussed is crucial for understanding the situation at the beginning of Operation Barbarossa: “The Reichsführer-ss [Himmler] and the Gruppenführer [Heydrich] who by coincidence were present there [in Augustowo] received information from me *on the measures initiated by the Stapostelle Tilsit* [italics mine] and sanctioned them completely.” (*Der Reichsführer-ss und der Gruppenführer, die dort zufällig anwesend waren, liessen sich über die von der Staatspolizeistelle Tilsit eingeleiteten Massnahmen unterrichten und billigten diese in vollem Umfange.*) Böhme also mentioned consultations with state officials—the Regierungspräsident in Gumbinnen, the East Prussian Oberpräsident and Gauleiter Erich Koch, who was soon to become Reichskommissar for the Ukraine—about incorporating parts of the occupied border regions into Eastern Prussia. Böhme’s unit continued its killing spree in Lithuania, claiming by July 18, 1941, a total of 3,302 victims.⁴⁴

South of the Lithuanian sector of the front, equally destructive precedents were being set. Few of the early killings show as obvious a link to Jew-hatred as the mass murder of Jews in Bialystok on June 27, 1941, in which men of Police Battalion 309 and other units subordinated to the Wehrmacht’s 221st Security Division killed at least 2,000 Jews. More than 500 persons including women and children were driven into a synagogue and burned alive; those trying to escape were shot. Wehrmacht units blew up adjacent buildings to make sure that the fire did not spread across the city. The scarcity of wartime documentation on this massacre is to some extent compensated for by investigative material compiled by a West German court after the war.

After an order had been given to search for Red Army soldiers and Jews, a few determined officers initiated the murder and dragged others along. The West German court identified some of the perpetrators within the ranks of Police Battalion 309 as “fanatic Nazis,” such as “Pipo” Schneider, a platoon leader in the 3rd company; and Captain Behrens, commander of the 1st company. Schneider showed little respect for military obedience, openly dismissing

The next morning, while Berlin remained undecided about what to do, the leader of the Stapostelle Tilsit, Hans-Joachim Böhme, the officer who had transmitted reports from Lithuanian informers to Berlin before the war, ordered the border police to select 200 male Jews from among the detainees. They were then marched, together with one woman, across the border to a field where they were guarded by members of the German customs service. It is not clear what instructions were issued to the Stapostelle Tilsit before the attack. During his trial in the late 1950s, Böhme claimed to have received three orders from the RSHA: one regarding the closing of the border, a second outlining the tasks of the Einsatzgruppen—to which his unit did not belong—and the third regarding executions in the border area. Since the Tilsit Stapostelle and SD did not have enough men for the execution of the 201 Garsden Jews, the police commander in Memel supplied upon request a Schutzpolizei (Schupo) platoon of one officer and 25 men. On June 23 the platoon rehearsed the execution in the police barracks before driving the next day to Garsden, where Böhme and the Tilsit SD leader Werner Hersmann were waiting for them. While waiting for their execution, the Jews—among them old men, the wife of a Soviet commissar, and at least one 12-year-old child—had to hand over their possessions and dig their grave. Security Police and SD men of the Stapoleitstelle Tilsit abused the victims, especially an old rabbi with a beard and caftan; one person was shot for not digging fast enough.

In the early afternoon of June 24, the remaining 200 Jews were executed in a court-martial-like procedure that included the reading of the death sentence “for crimes against the Wehrmacht on order of the Führer” and the Schutzpolizei officer, with sword drawn, giving the order to fire. Victims and perpetrators were no strangers to each other. Many of the Jews living in Garsden at the time of the German attack had escaped from Memel after its incorporation into the Reich in early 1939. Decades later, some of the defendants and witnesses in the West German court case remembered the names of the victims. According to the verdict, the soap manufacturer Feinstein from Memel called out to his former friend and neighbor, a police sergeant who stood in the firing squad: “Gustav, shoot well!” After the execution, the Memel Schutzpolizei men discussed what they had done. In reassuring each other, comments were made like “Good heavens, damn it, one generation has to go through this so that our children will have a better life.” (*Menschenskinder, verflucht noch mal, eine Generation muss dies halt durchstehen, damit es unsere Kinder besser haben.*)⁴¹

On June 24 Böhme and Hersmann met with Brigadeführer Franz Walter Stahlecker, the chief of Einsatzgruppe A. During the postwar judicial proceedings, the defendants claimed that Stahlecker had ordered Böhme to shoot all

rected against the Polish population.³⁷ Based on this experience, in 1940 Heydrich issued more stringent guidelines for the deployment of Security Police and SD in Norway. While “enemies of the Reich” were to be neutralized, the “necessity for an absolutely correct conduct” had to be taken into account. All measures had to be implemented “with the greatest sensitivity toward tact,” since this was not “a campaign on enemy territory.”³⁸ For the Balkan campaign in spring 1941, no such caveat seemed necessary; in fact, Heydrich came up with a much wider definition of enemy groups that included communists and Jews.³⁹ In planning for Operation Barbarossa, it must have been clear to the leader of the Security Police and the SD that the likelihood of his officers in the field committing acts of violence against the civilian population increased with the vagueness of the guidelines issued to them.

EARLY ANTI-JEWISH MEASURES AND THE MID-JULY TURNING POINT

Despite the design of the campaign as a war of destruction against the Red Army, potential enemies of German rule, and millions of unwanted civilians, some remaining barriers still had to be overcome on the way to the Final Solution. In June 1941 a solution to the Jewish question was still envisioned by the German leadership in terms of forced resettlement that, though inherently destructive, did not amount to the systematic mass murder of all Jewish men, women, and children. Precedents set in the early weeks of the Barbarossa campaign would prove crucial in the turn to systematic and total mass murder.

The area first affected by the German war machine’s deliberate targeting of civilians was the German-Lithuanian border strip. In the early morning hours of June 22, a battalion of the 176th Infantry Regiment launched its attack on the town of Garsden (Gargzdai) but faced heavy resistance from Soviet border troops. Surprised by the Germans and armed only with handguns, these units defended parts of the town until, in the afternoon, they were almost completely wiped out by the overwhelming force of the enemy. Infantry Regiment 176 suffered more than 100 casualties on this first day of the war—among them 7 dead officers. In advancing further east, it left securing the town to German border police (Grenzpolizei) from the city of Memel. The Memel unit, with the assistance of local Lithuanians, separated 600 to 700 Jews from the rest of the civilian population. The border police were not sure how to proceed, and telegraph messages were exchanged between Memel, the Stapostelle Tilsit, and the RSHA.⁴⁰

of street violence against Jews after January 1933, the police formed an integral part of the machinery that generated the "Final Solution." Even if policemen harbored no anti-Semitic feelings beyond what was considered "normal" in prewar Germany, the activities of Nazi thugs, opportunistic profiteers, and eager bureaucrats deeply affected individuals of all ranks as well as the police as an institution. Prejudices, indoctrination, and the ever increasing administrative practice of persecution made SS and policemen perceive the Jewish question not in abstract terms but as a pressing problem that—for the benefit of the regime, the security apparatus, and their own careers as well—needed to be addressed. The focus on transmitting applicable as opposed to abstract knowledge meant that many of the teachers and students at SS and police schools were members of the Einsatzgruppen and that, in turn, officers involved in "field-work," like Adolf Eichmann, lectured at these schools.³⁵

Ideological factors operated on many levels. In compiling reports on what happened on Soviet territory before Operation Barbarossa, German agencies could rely to some extent on the help of local informers. In the Baltic States or western Ukraine, annexed to the Soviet Union after 1939, the anti-Semitic bias of nationalists dovetailed with the prejudices of German officials. Lithuanian activists who had fled their country as a consequence of the Soviet takeover formed an especially important group. Via the Stapostelle Tilsit, the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) Amt IV (Gestapo) in Berlin received regular reports from across the border with Lithuania that were sometimes read by Heydrich and Himmler. In late May 1941 the Tilsit Stapo office under Hans-Joachim Böhme noted changes in the composition of communist functionaries in Lithuania in favor of Russians and Jews. "The Jews in Soviet Lithuania," Böhme concluded, "are primarily active as spies for the Soviet Union."³⁶

Prewar orders by the German military leadership regarding the future treatment of captured Red Army soldiers and political commissars leave no doubt about the importance of ideological factors preceding Operation Barbarossa. These orders were more radical than Heydrich's prewar instructions to the Einsatzgruppen, which called for the destruction of specific, though vaguely defined, groups of the population. However, Heydrich had reason to believe that Security and Order Police officers were less influenced by the wording of directives than by their own interpretation of what needed to be done in the east. Before the attack on Poland, Heydrich had charged the Einsatzgruppen with fighting all inimical elements behind the front line (*Bekämpfung aller reichs- und deutschfeindlichen Elemente in Feindesland rückwärts der fechtenden Truppe*), similar to the task of the Security Police in the Reich. This formula provided unit commanders with sufficient legitimization for acts of terror di-

signed the "commissar order" on June 6, 1941;²⁸ shortly thereafter, his department for POWs laid down plans for the treatment of captured Red Army soldiers (commissars and Jews were not mentioned) that followed the guidelines regarding the treatment of the population at large.²⁹

It is widely accepted that "the troops of ideological warfare"—the members of the Einsatzgruppen—were motivated by firm ideological convictions. Compared with the three million soldiers who flooded across the border, Heydrich's Einsatz- and Sonderkommandos seem almost insignificant in size. The majority of Einsatzgruppen personnel came from outside the Security Police and the SD. Units of the Order Police and Waffen-ss fulfilled similar functions either within or outside the Einsatzgruppen framework. The question raised by Christopher Browning in his pathbreaking case study of Reserve Police Battalion 101 as to how "ordinary" these men were needs to be extended to all direct perpetrators.³⁰ The absence of comparative research makes it difficult to come up with more than general conjectures. It seems evident, however, that the issue is very much linked to the institutional history of the ss and police in the Third Reich.

Since the mid-1930s ideological training had been part of the curriculum of German policemen. After 1936 when Himmler was appointed chief of the German police, in addition to his position as Reichsführer-ss, he felt the need to integrate more firmly the component parts of his empire. On the organizational level, these efforts proved largely futile owing to the intense rivalry between the different agencies within his apparatus. The office of HSSPF, designed to link ss and police functions, in fact increased the degree of decentralization by creating "little Himmlers" bound into the existing structure by their personal allegiance to the Reichsführer rather than by bureaucratic ties.³¹ On the ideological level, however, the self-image of a Staatsschutzkorps (state defense corps)—a diversified security agency that would defend the Reich against inner enemies just as the Wehrmacht provided protection against external foes—began to take root among the officers of the ss and police even before the war.³² Regarding the Jewish question, the term "education for murder" coined by Konrad Kwiet aptly describes the long-term effects of this process.³³ As Ian Kershaw has pointed out, propaganda "was above all effective where it was building upon, not countering, already existing values and mentalities."³⁴ Like Wehrmacht soldiers and the German population at large, members of the ss and police were subjected daily to anti-Semitic messages. Gripping images like in the 1940 movie *Jud Süß* (The Jew Süß) reinforced what was taught in police and ss schools.

Indoctrination was not an end in itself, but closely linked to political practice. Beginning with the enactment of the first anti-Jewish measures and the upsurge

ligenz), Hitler advised his officers to give orders "in harmony with the sentiment of the troops" (*im Einklang mit dem Empfinden der Truppe*).²⁰ In mid-September 1941, in one of his nightly musings about the recent past, Hitler conceded that at the time of the attack he had expected expressions of procommunist sentiments within the Wehrmacht. "Those who took part in it," he assumed, "have now surely learned their lesson, but before no one knew how it really looked over there."²¹

The Nazi concept of ideological war implied replacing traditional rules of discipline and subordination with a more flexible system that allowed German functionaries on all levels to act promptly and aggressively. In early May 1941 Colonel General Hoepner, commander of Panzer Group 4, which was to be deployed with Army Group North, legitimized the coming war as a "defense of European culture against a Muscovite-Asiatic deluge" (*Verteidigung europäischer Kultur gegen moskowitzisch-asiatische Überschwemmung*) and a "warding off of Jewish Bolshevism" (*Abwehr des jüdischen Bolschewismus*).²² Days later, General Müller stated, in regard to the treatment of commissars and the local population, that this campaign would be different from previous ones; the Wehrmacht had to expect resistance from the "carriers of Jewish-Bolshevist ideology," and it was called upon to shoot "locals who participate in the fighting as partisans or intend to do so . . . during battle or while trying to escape." Any crimes committed by members of the Wehrmacht as a result of "exasperation about atrocities or the decomposition efforts by the carriers of the Jewish-Bolshevist system" were not to be persecuted as long as they did not threaten discipline.²³ This was the tenor of the *Erlass über die Ausübung der Gerichtsbarkeit und über besondere Massnahmen der Truppe* (Decree on the exercise of military court jurisdiction and special measures of the troops) signed by Keitel on May 13, 1941, and sent down by Brauchitsch to the level of army commanders on May 24.²⁴

The line drawn between "legitimate" and "unacceptable" activities of the local population remained elusive, allowing a wide range of interpretation. In a meeting of intelligence (I c) officers, General Müller's leading legal expert explained that in deciding whether a crime committed by a German soldier threatened the discipline of the troops, his motivation for the crime should be the key factor.²⁵ The OKW's Abteilung Wehrmachtspropaganda (Division of Military Propaganda) had issued guidelines for the conduct of the campaign in Russia which called for "ruthless and energetic measures against Bolshevist instigators, partisans, saboteurs, Jews, and total eradication of any active or passive resistance."²⁶ In their final version, the guidelines stressed the "sub-human nature" (*Untermenschentum*) of the future enemy.²⁷ OKW chief Keitel

the Wehrmacht's rank and file. For young recruits of 1941, World War I, though an important part of family history, school education, and national memory, seemed remote. Most of them knew "the east" only from books, school lessons, and propaganda. The German attack on Poland in September 1939 had been orchestrated by a campaign of lies about what the Poles had done to a former (and future) area of German settlement. So far, little research has been done on the role of ideological indoctrination in the behavior of Wehrmacht soldiers or, for that matter, any other group deployed in the east; the prevailing though largely unsubstantiated assumption has been that efforts in this direction were largely futile.¹⁵

It has to be taken into account, however, that beginning with the Polish campaign, Nazi propaganda had its strongest ally in German occupation policy itself. As the measures adopted rapidly worsened conditions in the east, despised elements of the local population appeared increasingly subhuman, and this in turn helped to erode remaining moral scruples among German soldiers who had to deal with them. Nowhere was this vicious circle of dehumanization more obvious than in the case of Polish Jews, who came to be presented and perceived as the personification of the Nazi caricature of the "eternal Jew." Atrocities committed by both SS and Wehrmacht in the Polish campaign were at least partly the result of this imagery and the "master race" or *Herrenvolk* mentality systematically fostered since 1933.¹⁶

After the conclusion of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact on August 23, 1939, anti-Bolshevism had to be toned down in public.¹⁷ At the same time, the death toll during the Polish and other campaigns had started to erode the relative homogeneity of the prewar officer corps, a development greatly accelerated after the beginning of Operation Barbarossa with its heavy losses, especially among lower-ranking troop officers.¹⁸ Even if, as is often claimed, the success of deliberate attempts at selling Nazi notions to the soldiers was limited before June 1941, the ideologically highly charged atmosphere and the conditions at the eastern front had a massive impact on how the members of the Wehrmacht perceived and legitimized what they did. At least until Stalingrad, German soldiers mentally endured the hardships of the campaign against a determined enemy not only out of sheer obedience or compliance with group pressure but also because of certain convictions, including the projection of their own destructive impulses onto the enemy.¹⁹

In this respect, the political leadership's sense of reality turned out to be correct. In his speech before army leaders on March 30, 1941, in which he called for the "destruction of Bolshevik commissars and the communist intelligentsia" (*Vernichtung der bolschewistischen Kommissare und der kommunistischen Intel-*

gandists like Alfred Rosenberg and Joseph Goebbels tried to paint communism as an aberration from European history, an Asiatic phenomenon alien to all accepted moral categories of the West.¹⁰ Affinity to these notions explains to some extent why, compared with the loyalty displayed toward the Nazi state well into its final hours, German military officers had few problems disregarding their oath to protect the democratic system of the Weimar Republic. Hitler's movement offered promises to all strata of the nationalist elite but had special appeal for the military, since it called for more than a revision of Versailles and offered a chance for rapid remilitarization. Early indications of the army's eagerness to support the Nazi regime include acquiescence to the murder of political opponents, among them former chancellor and army general Kurt von Schleicher during the so-called Röhm Putsch in late June/early July 1934; and the military's attitude toward Jews. Not waiting until the Nuremberg laws, the army was quick to enact its own anti-Jewish measures, which excluded Jews from military service and prohibited officers from being married to "non-Aryans."¹¹

Staff officers of bourgeois upbringing might have resented "Stürmer"-style slogans and the actions of Nazi thugs, but they had no sympathy for either Jews or communists. In late 1935, in a leaflet drafted by the Reichskriegsministerium, Soviet party functionaries were referred to as "mostly dirty Jews" (*meist dreckige Juden*).¹² Four years later, the Allgemeine Wehrmachtsamt of the Wehrmacht High Command (OKW), subsequently heavily involved in the planning of Operation Barbarossa, published a training brochure titled "The Jew in German History" that spelled out what remained to be done regarding the "Jewish question." All traces of "Jewish influence" were to be eradicated, especially in economic and cultural life; in addition, the "fight against world Jewry, which tries to incite all peoples of the world against Germany," had to be continued.¹³ Firmly enshrined in anti-Jewish policy and supplemented by a barrage of propaganda, the phantom of "Jewish Bolshevism" had by June 1941 assumed a life of its own that drastically diminished the military's ability to perceive reality. The involvement in the murder of Jews and other civilians during Operation Barbarossa of staff officers who were later to support the military opposition against Hitler indicates their acceptance of basic Nazi notions.¹⁴ In view of the willing self-integration of leading Wehrmacht officers into the upper echelons of the Third Reich and their support for Hitler's course toward war, Nazi ideology with its focus on an internal and external enemy provided not a strait-jacket but a fitting new uniform for traditional sets of belief.

If the German army's commanding officers harbored a deep-seated animosity toward communist Russia combined with an ingrained as well as politically motivated anti-Semitism, this cannot be said with the same certainty of

followers.⁵ It is much more difficult to gauge the mind-set of Germans outside the narrow, Berlin-based circle of Nazi leaders. Despite their fragmentation along social, organizational, and other lines, the representatives of the occupying power—military officers, soldiers, administrators, policemen—shared perceptions and expectations that formed the background to German policy in the Soviet Union.⁶

Images of “the east” had influenced German policy making since World War I, when the German army first occupied parts of the Russian empire. This element of continuity is most obvious when looking at the attitudes toward Russia of commanding Wehrmacht officers, the majority of whom had served during the Great War. Afterward, military conflict between the two countries was perceived as being deeply rooted in history, a struggle in which Germanic peoples fought Slavs for “the defense of European culture against the Muscovite-Asiatic deluge.” The occupation of eastern Poland, parts of the Baltic area, Belorussia, and Ukraine during World War I had also confronted German soldiers with the peoples of eastern Europe. Members of the officer corps in particular regarded the local population not only as different but as degraded and unable to appreciate western values. On the sliding scale of backwardness, the lowest place was reserved for the eastern Jews. Urban ghettos appeared to German soldiers as remnants of medieval times, their occupants filthy and repulsive.⁷

During World War I, the German army had been unable to secure the captured areas. The threat by *franc-tireurs* (irregulars) in the west seemed small compared to the danger posed by “bandits” and later communist infiltrators in the east.⁸ For many officers more than twenty years later, the lessons of the Great War loomed large. In mid-June 1941 the Army High Command’s (Oberkommando des Heeres, OKH) legal expert Lt. General Müller told officers of Panzer Group 3 that the expected severity of the coming war called for equally severe punitive measures against civilian saboteurs. To prove his point, he reminded his audience of the brief Russian occupation of Gumbinnen in Eastern Prussia in 1914 when all inhabitants of villages along the route from Tilsit to Insterburg were threatened with execution if the railway line was damaged. It did not matter that the threat was not executed. “In cases of doubt regarding the perpetrator,” the general advised for the future, “suspicion frequently will have to suffice.” (*In Zweifelsfragen über Täterschaft wird häufig der Verdacht genügen müssen.*)⁹

Another crucial element of ideological continuity after 1918—the identification of Jews with Bolshevism—linked old anti-Semitic stereotypes with the new fear of a communist world revolution. Right-wing ideologues and Nazi propa-



3. OCCUPIED SOVIET TERRITORY, DECEMBER 1941

areas. Reliable estimates on total Soviet losses are difficult to arrive at; a figure of at least 20 million people seems likely.²

In looking for answers to the questions how, when, and why the Nazi persecution of the Jews evolved into the Final Solution, the importance of the war against the Soviet Union can hardly be overestimated. Ever since Operation Barbarossa became an object of research, it has been stressed that the murder of the Jews in the Soviet Union marks a watershed in history, a quantum leap toward the Holocaust.³ Still, despite new research based on sources from east European archives, historians continue to struggle with key questions: What turned men from a variety of groups—Wehrmacht, ss, German police and civil agencies, allied troops, local collaborators—into perpetrators, and how did they interact in the course of this “realization of the unthinkable”?⁴ How important were orders, guidelines, and instructions issued by Berlin central agencies compared with factors at the local and regional level? What were the driving forces of this process and what were their origins? In addressing these questions, historians have to confront the inappropriateness of monocausal and linear explanations as well as the impossibility of comprehensive understanding. In looking for reasons how, when, and why the “Final Solution” came about, this chapter focuses on developments that were especially relevant for Germany’s crossing the threshold from instances of physical abuse and murder to systematic extermination.

GERMAN PERCEPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS REGARDING “THE EAST”

Ideological bias influenced more than just the strategic grand designs and military orders drawn up by the top leadership in preparation for the war against the Soviet Union. When Wehrmacht soldiers, ss men, and other Germans crossed the border toward the east, they brought with them more or less fixed images of the region and the people they would encounter. Combining collective stereotypes established in the 19th century with Nazi propaganda slogans and political interests that found expression in the “Barbarossa orders,” these predominantly negative images determined how reality was perceived. Both “endless vastness” and “living space,” “the east” implied a threat to the present as well as a promise for the future. In its origin and function “the east” was also closely associated with other ideological concepts—most notably “the Jew” and “Bolshevism.” Hitler’s ideas regarding “living space” or Lebensraum in the east, hardly original and with strong utopian elements, were well known through his own writings and speeches and those of his closest

Prague speech of October 2,³⁵⁷ though not according to a preconceived, consistent, or centralized plan. Politics, it seems, has rarely been as regional if not local as in these months when a uniform pattern of mass murder had not yet emerged. Middle-level officials with overarching functions—most notably Himmler's HSSPF and Einsatzgruppen chiefs,³⁵⁸ but also the rear army commanders of the Wehrmacht and the men of the civil administration—in cooperation with each other, filled the void created by the absence of a centralized decision-making process. In summing up their achievements for 1941, Einsatzgruppen officers stressed that “a radical solution of the Jewish problem” by killing all Jews had been, if only as a “vague notion,” their aim from the beginning of the campaign.³⁵⁹ By advancing in their reports all kinds of rationalizations, the Führer's men in the field confirmed that a mix of factors rather than one order from above had led to mass murder becoming a standard procedure of occupation policy. By the end of the year, the Berlin centers were fully aware of the lessons learned in the east for solving the Jewish question in other parts of Europe.