

Barbarossa Revisited: Strategy and Ideology in the East

Author(s): Jürgen Förster

Source: *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 1/2 (Winter, 1988 - Spring, 1992), pp. 21-36

Published by: [Indiana University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4467404>

Accessed: 04/12/2010 02:23

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=iupress>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Indiana University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Jewish Social Studies*.

Barbarossa Revisited: Strategy and Ideology in the East

by Jürgen Förster

It is important to emphasize the developments of recent historiographical research with respect to the relationship between Hitler and his military commanders. In the period immediately following the Second World War, historians tended to separate the Supreme Commander from the *Wehrmacht*, suggesting that the military leadership saw its role as purely professional, with no ideological component. This was not the case. The linkage between strategy and mass murder in the war policy of the Third Reich “makes it impossible to posit a clean war, planned and fought by German soldiers who somehow remained insulated from their political leadership”¹ In fact, the military commanders were caught up in the ideological character of the conflict, and involved in its implementation as willing participants and partners of the Führer. To say that the Wehrmacht was responsible for many crimes in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia is not to say that every German soldier was a criminal or was equally guilty of the crimes perpetrated in the name of the regime.

Hitler was not a disciple of Carl von Clausewitz. The Führer did not view war as a mere “continuation of political activity by other means,” but as the highest expression of the life force of a people. Fighting was a way of life, and war the necessary tool in the hands of the responsible statesman to acquire the sufficient living space by which the nation’s future would be secured: racially; economically; and militarily. Since racial survival would lead peoples to war, Hitler had pointed out to the army field commanders on 10 February 1939, the next European conflict would be “purely a war of *Weltanschauungen*, that is, totally a people’s war, a racial war.” He insisted that the officer must lead his men in this new kind of war both militarily and ideologically and that the entire officer corps form his praetorian guard to aid him, as their supreme ideological leader, in achieving specific ideological objectives. In this context Hitler quoted Clausewitz that it would be better to die in the name of honor than to surrender in the name of wisdom.² Consequently he proclaimed before his military leaders on 23 November 1939 that the “racial war has broken out and this war shall determine who shall govern Europe, and with it, the world.”³ In the light of his grand political alternative, clear victory or total destruction, with survival being contingent on military victory, politics and strategy had become indistinguishable.⁴ It was in the *Vernichtungskrieg* against the Soviet Union where militant politics and political-

ideological strategy achieved a symbiosis, where this totally new kind of war, with its social Darwinian purpose, was fully realized.

Alan Bullock has rightly pointed out that “of all Hitler’s decisions” the decision to wage war on Russia “is the one which most clearly bears his own personal stamp, the culmination (as he saw it) of his whole career.”⁵ This decision was made in the summer of 1940, when Germany – despite the crushing victory over France – was facing an unexpected strategic dilemma. Britain had made it clear that she would not surrender and was hoping to have the United States on her side one day. Time was, once again, working against Germany. If the Wehrmacht, however, as Hitler explained to his top military advisers on 31 July 1940, waged a *Blitzkrieg* against the Soviet Union in the spring of 1941, all Britain’s hopes would be dashed. “Not only would she lose her last possible continental ally but the United States would then be less likely to intervene in Europe because she would have her hands full fending off an aggressive Japan which would not fear an advance southwards once Russia was neutralized.”⁶ Given the Führer’s obsession with the acquisition of *Lebensraum* and the destruction of “Jewish Bolshevism”, it seems surprising to many historians that Hitler justified his decision for a sudden blow against Russia, aiming at the destruction of her life force, not in terms of ideological commitments but in that of global strategy. There can be little doubt that *both* ideological conviction and strategic necessity were closely intertwined in Hitler’s mind, not only in the crucial summer of 1940. The idea of acquiring *Lebensraum* through the conquest of Russia, the nucleus of Hitler’s ideology, was in itself an amalgam in which German expansion to the East, the extermination of Bolshevism and the annihilation of Jewry were combined with strategic necessity, the doctrine of economic self-sufficiency and world power ambitions.⁷

When the military preparations for Operation Barbarossa were already far advanced, Hitler defined – first within the small circle of his military advisers, and then before a large gathering of senior commanders and their chiefs of staff – this campaign as more than a mere conflict between two enemy nation-states and their armies. It would also be a clash of antagonistic ideologies and races. The liquidation of the “Jewish-Bolshevik intelligentsia” would lead to the break-up of the Russian people. Hitler stated openly that he wished to see the war against the Soviet Union conducted as a “war of destruction” against an ideology and its adherents, whether as functionaries within the Red Army or in civilian positions. These enemy cadres should be eliminated directly by the troops and not by courts-martial. The officers must understand what was involved in this kind of war, overcome their scruples and give the necessary orders in accordance with the feelings of their men.⁸ Such guidelines for the warfare in Russia came neither as a surprise to the army nor did they fall on unprepared terrain. The experience of Poland had not been forgotten. When General Franz Halder, the chief of the Army General Staff, noted in his diary the essence of Hitler’s address of 30 March 1941, he made a telling side-note: “Severity is mildness for the future.”⁹ This echoes Hitler’s remark of 17 October 1939 when he had outlined his view of the

“harsh racial struggle” against the Polish people: “Wisdom and severity should spare us another fight.”¹⁰ On 27 March 1941 Field-Marshal Walther von Brauchitsch, the commander-in-chief of the Army (who had made himself an advocate of Hitler’s programme against Poland on 7 February 1940 and thereby successfully taken the edge off the protest of individual commanders against the crimes of the SS),¹¹ told his military commanders that the troops should beware of the German-Russian war as a “struggle between two different races and [should] act with the necessary severity.”¹²

The difference between the war with Poland and that with the Soviet Union was that in the latter the line between military and political-ideological warfare was erased before the first shot. The concept of destruction formed an integral part of strategic planning. The Wehrmacht was to be used as an instrument alongside the SS. There was to be a division of labor. The *Einsatzgruppen* were entrusted with the systematic extermination of “Jewish Bolshevism.” The different means of the Wehrmacht, the swift pincer movements to destroy the bulk of the Red Army west of the rivers Dnepr and Dvina, the liquidation of the political commissars and brutal force against Bolshevik inciters, partisans, saboteurs, and Jews, served the common end: the quick break-up of the Soviet state and the pacification of the conquered territory. This conscious fusion is not only obvious in the well-known orders of certain army commanders in the autumn of 1941, it can also be studied in senior commanders’ addresses, deployment directives, and orders of the day before the attack. They had been present at the gathering at the Reich Chancellery on 30 March 1941 and took the initiative before the High Commands had cast Hitler’s intentions into legally valid form. For example, General Erich Hoepner, who had been a member of the military opposition in 1938 and who died hanging by piano wire from a meat-hook for his part in the coup of 20 July 1944, wrote on 2 May 1941:

The war against Russia is an important chapter in the struggle for existence of the German nation. It is the old battle of the Germanic against the Slav peoples, of the defense of European culture against Moscovite-Asiatic inundation, and the repulse of Jewish Bolshevism. The objective of this battle must be the destruction of present-day Russia and it must therefore be conducted with unprecedented severity. Every military action must be guided in planning and execution by an iron will to exterminate the enemy mercilessly and totally. In particular, no adherents of the present Russian-Bolshevik system are to be spared.¹³

The relationship between the Wehrmacht and Hitler with regard to the Soviet Union was determined in large measure by a considerable consensus both on ideological matters and Germany’s role in world politics. The military leaders did not merely comply with Hitler’s dogmatic views, they were not mere victims of their own professional tradition. German expansion to the East had long been justified not only in economic, political and geographical terms, but also in the social Darwinian sense of the right of the stronger in the struggle for survival. The military leaders, too, believed that the dangers of Russia and Bolshevism should be eliminated for ever. The adversary in the East was considered the enemy *per se*. Had it not been Jewry and Bolshevism that

had stabbed the armed forces in the back and had caused the downfall of Imperial Germany in 1918? Thus, Operation “Barbarossa” assumed a higher justification than the war against the “hereditary enemy” France. Yet it was “Hitler’s triumph [in the West in 1940 that] acted as an additional pacemaker for moral indifference.”¹⁴ Moreover, “the idea of the vital needs of the German *Volksgemeinschaft* provided the Wehrmacht with something like a ‘clear conscience’ in its brutal conduct of the war in the East.”¹⁵

After his pronouncements on 3, 17 and 30 March 1941, Hitler played no visible role in transforming Operation Barbarossa into a war of destruction against Bolshevism and Jewry. The implementation was left to his military staffs and the SS. Here we have another typical example of the “mechanism of destruction” (Raul Hilberg) in the Third Reich. Military administration was to be restricted to the area of operation, that is the combat zone and the rear areas of the armies and the army groups. The SS was entrusted with “special tasks” within the army’s area of operation. The army command accepted the draft without any protest, even though they knew since the Polish campaign what the “special tasks” of the SS meant. Thus, on 13 March the *Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht* (OKW) issued “Guidelines for Special Subjects” which also announced special orders for Operation Barbarossa governing the conduct of soldiers and the functions of courts-martial.¹⁶

The directives which gave the war in the East its singular character emerged out of a routine bureaucratic process within the relevant departments of the Wehrmacht such as: “Decree concerning the Exercise of Military Jurisdiction and Procedure in the Barbarossa Area and Special Measures for the Troops in Russia” of 13 May 1941; and “Guidelines for the Treatment of Political Commissars” of 6 June 1941. Only the “Regularization of the Deployment of the Security Police and the SD within the Army” of 28 April 1941 had required consultation with the SS.¹⁷ In the center of the Army’s preparations for the war of destruction against the Soviet Union stood General Halder, not Field Marshal von Brauchitsch or his oft-mentioned “General Officer for Special Duties,” General Eugen Müller. Müller had been subject since October 1940 to Halder’s directives “regarding the military jurisdiction within the army and against the population of occupied territories.” Since the chief of the Army General Staff was convinced that the troops must participate in the ideological war, the Army High Command drafted a decree concerning the restriction of military jurisdiction and the treatment of political commissars on 6 May 1941. Courts-martial were to be confined to the maintenance of discipline. The troops were expected to deal themselves with civilians impeding or inciting to impede the Wehrmacht. In cases where such “criminal elements” could not be shot “while fighting or escaping,” an officer was to decide whether they were to be shot. The commissars, the “bearers of the Jewish-Bolshevik world view” within the Red Army were to be executed after being taken prisoner on the orders of an officer who had to identify the commissars in consultation with two other officers or NCOs.

Whereas, in the case of the limitation of military jurisdiction the legal branch of the OKW had formulated the first draft, the initiative for the execution of the polit-

ical commissars clearly came from the Army High Command. This evidence makes it highly unlikely that the massacres carried out by the *Einsatzgruppen* can be based on the Commissar Order, as Hans Mommsen claims.¹⁸ Although the commissars within the Red Army wore uniform, they were not regarded as combatants, but as political functionaries. The fear that if taken prisoner, such hardliners might continue disseminating propaganda in the Reich was a major factor dictating the shooting of political commissars. Also important was the hope for a speedier and less costly advance that might be created through driving a wedge between the apparently decent Russian soldier and his criminal political leadership. It was precisely because officers and officials in the High Commands with their distorted version of post-1918 German history had authorized the abandonment of international law in favor of political expediency that they justified these illegal measures with the need to ensure absolute security for the German soldier. Hitler had pardoned sentenced soldiers in Poland with his decree of 4 October 1939. In the war of destruction against the Soviet Union soldiers were given a pardon *in advance* for shooting mere suspected partisans and prisoners of war, meaning, the commissars. Such a preemptive amnesty was a component of the operational preparations.

In the formulation of the final decrees of 13 May and 6 June 1941 the OKW accepted concepts offered in the draft of the OKH (Army High Command) of 6 May 1941. Brauchitsch made amendments to both decrees before he passed them on to the army. On the one hand, he laid the burden for segregating and executing the commissars within the Red Army “inconspicuously” on the shoulders of any officer. On the other hand, the commander-in-chief of the Army stressed the duty of all superiors to prevent arbitrary excesses of *individual* soldiers against the Soviet population. “Timely action by every officer must help to maintain discipline, the basis of our successes.” Viewed against the background of the experience in Poland, the army’s concern for the discipline of the troops was well founded. In the more ideological war against the Soviet Union the attempt to preserve the institutional control of violence while calling for ideologically motivated measures must be seen as “riding the tiger.”

That the whole complex of *ius in bello* was viewed as an irksome obstacle to *military necessities* becomes evident from the personal instructions about the “criminal orders” given to intelligence officers and judge-advocates on army level by General Müller and his legal advisor, Dr. Erich Lattmann. On 11 June 1941, for example, Müller stated that “feelings of justice must in certain circumstances give way to military necessity.” Military justice would be suspended and the troops were to deal with guerrillas and partisans by “going back to the old customs of war. . . . One of the adversaries must remain dead on the field. Adherents of a hostile attitude must not be preserved, but liquidated.” The right of a population to spontaneous, voluntary use of arms against an aggressor, according to paragraph 2 of the Hague Conventions of October 1907, would not be respected in this war. Any civilian impeding or inciting others to impede the Wehrmacht would be considered a guerrilla and shot by the troops. Müller stressed,

however, that the troops should not be “unnecessarily agitated or go berserk,” an attitude for which General Blaskowitz had criticized the SS in Poland on 27 November 1939.¹⁹ It is also interesting to note that the Wehrmacht denied the Soviet population a right which in early 1924 some *Reichswehr* planners had considered as a “desperate means” in the case of a French attack against Germany. Then, popular resistance was seen as an integral element in an operational concept of total war at the end of which a grand battle would lead to the “triumph of German mind over French matter.”²⁰ Returning from Müller’s and Lattmann’s instructions on the “criminal orders,” the judge-advocate of the 11th Army summed up before the divisional commanders on 18 June 1941: “Each soldier must know that he has to defend himself against all attacks in battle: that in case of doubt he can either liberate or shoot arrested persons. Each officer must know that he can shoot or liberate arrested persons, but that political commissars must be segregated and liquidated. Each battalion commander must know that he can order collective punishments.”²¹ The last paragraph stemmed from one of Halder’s suggestions and meant that in cases of guerrilla attack where the individual offender could not be quickly identified, the burning of villages and/or mass executions could be ordered.

On the eve of the attack on Russia, the German soldiers were informed about Hitler’s order of the day and about the “Guidelines for the Conduct of the Troops” of 19 May 1941, which had been issued by the OKW. In the latter, Bolshevism was defined as the “deadly enemy of the National Socialist German Nation. It is against this destructive ideology and its adherents that Germany is waging war. This battle demands ruthless and vigorous measures against Bolshevik inciters, guerrillas, saboteurs, Jews and the complete elimination of all active and passive resistance.”²² These guidelines and Halder’s amendment to the draft agreement between the army and the SS make it clear that Jews and Communists were singled out as a hostile group long before the memorandum of understanding between the Wehrmacht and the SS of 28 June 1941 that allowed for their selection and execution by the Einsatzkommandos in the prisoner-of-war camps.²³

The mixture of the traditional and the ideological attitude toward Eastern foe becomes evident in two orders issued by General Joachim Lemelsen, commander of XLVII Panzer Corps. Just a few days after the beginning of Operation Barbarossa he condemned the “irresponsible, senseless and criminal” shootings of prisoners of war, deserters and civilians:

This is murder! The German Wehrmacht is waging this war against Bolshevism, but not against the united Russian peoples. We want to bring back peace, calm and order to this land which has suffered terribly for many years from the oppression of a Jewish and criminal group. The instruction of the Führer calls for ruthless action against Bolshevism (political commissars) and any kind of partisan! People who have been clearly identified as such should be taken aside and shot only by order of an officer. . . . A Russian soldier who has been taken prisoner while wearing a uniform and after he put up a brave fight, has

a right to decent treatment. . . . [Descriptions] of the scenes of countless bodies of soldiers lying on the roads, having clearly been killed by a shot through the head at point blank range, without their weapons and with their hands raised, will quickly spread in the enemy's army.²⁴

The German notion of an ideological and ruthless fight was countered by Stalin with his own concept of a merciless people's war against "German Fascism," a war which would decide the future of Socialism. This people's war would be led by the Communist party. Stalin's appeal for a partisan war behind the front was immediately viewed by Hitler as an opportunity to disguise his extermination programme as anti-partisan measures, that means as a military necessity.²⁵ On the other hand, the excesses of the Soviet state police's special forces against captive German soldiers and Soviet political prisoners seemed to demonstrate to the German soldier that the Red Army in fact employed "Asiatic-barbarian" methods, as had been assumed before the outbreak of the war. The Army High Command rejected the Sixth Army's request for reprisals against Soviet prisoners of war for the shooting and mutilation of German captives on the ground that "even the execution of large numbers of them would have – in contrast to the Western allies – no effect on the Russians," it would only lead to more "violent anger" on both sides.²⁶

German security policy in the occupied territories in the East was a complex matter from the very outset of the campaign. Military security and administration either overlapped or were jointly conducted by the army and the SS. According to their pre-invasion agreement, the SS had a free hand to carry out their task of eliminating Communist functionaries, Jews, and subversive elements without restraint within the area of operations. The army's own plans for military security were influenced from the beginning by the vast expanse of Russian territory. So huge was the Soviet Union, that the SS could be viewed as an additional help for the pacification of the country. Despite Stalin's call for a partisan war, which the Soviets had made clear to the German troops by leaflets printed in German, the Wehrmacht saw only a small number of sabotage incidents in the western part of the Soviet Union. In fact, the Germans were actually welcomed in some villages. This was reason enough to avoid measures that would make the population hostile toward the German invader. The commanders tried to strike a "bargain," ensuring the interests of the Wehrmacht and those of the peaceful population. If the people remained quiet, worked, and obeyed given orders, then the Germans would minimize the unavoidable suffering by combatting resistance activities with reprisal executions chiefly of Communists, Jews and Great Russians.

The Army High Command was dissatisfied with this bargain. For them, German troops had not dealt energetically enough with acts of resistance. Moreover, they knew of detailed Soviet instructions to political functionaries to form partisan units. Hence, the Army High Command supplemented the relevant directives of May and June 1941 with a special order for the "treatment of enemy civilians and of Russian prisoners of war" in the army group rear areas. Within this order of 25 July 1941, Field-Marshal

von Brauchitsch again mixed military and ideological, punitive and preventive measures: "The essential rapid pacification of the country can only be achieved if every threat on the part of the hostile civilian population is dealt with ruthlessly. All pity and softness are weakness and constitute a danger. . . . The virulent work of the supporters of the Jewish-Bolshevik system in the first place" would lead to the renewal of guerrilla activities in already pacified areas. The guiding principle in all German actions should be the "absolute security of the German soldier." The commander-in-chief of the Army expressly stated that the preventive taking of hostages as a guarantee against future offenses was unnecessary. Instead he justified reprisals and collective punishments.²⁷ Military commanders still tried to avoid arbitrary measures which would only drive the population back into the hands of the Bolsheviks. General Karl-Heinrich von Stülpnagel, for example, warned his troops against making collective punishments indiscriminately: "If the Ukrainian inhabitants of a locality cannot be convicted of the initial act of violence, the village mayors will be requested to name Jewish and Communist inhabitants in the first instance. . . . In particular, the Jewish Komsomol members are to be considered the main exponents of any sabotage movement and of forming youth bands."²⁸ That reprisal executions nevertheless exceeded the set frame becomes evident from an Army Group Center order of 7 August 1941. The understandable irritation of the troops after attacks by guerrillas must not lead to retaliation against localities "just because they happened to be in the vicinity" of the scene of the crime. Significantly the Second Army reacted to this directive with pointing out that the troops would give up overreaching collective punishments, if they were given a guarantee that the "experienced specialists," meaning the SS, would carry out energetic measures against the "dangerous elements" in their rear.²⁹

The conscious use by the army of Jews and Communists as scapegoats in the Ukraine, White Russia and in the Baltic States proves that it was not only Hitler and the SS who construed a causal connection between "Jewish Bolshevism" and the resistance against the German conquest. In September 1941, General Max von Schenckendorff, commander of the rear area of Army Group Center, initiated an "exchange of experiences" in combatting partisans between the army and the SS. Senior SS officers such as Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski and Arthur Nebe lectured on "apprehending commissars and partisans" and on the "Jewish Question with special reference to the partisan movement." Even the "correct" screening of the Soviet population was realistically demonstrated. It could not be denied that participants in this course had learned their lesson: "The partisan is where the Jew is."³⁰ After a mop-up operation near Mirgorod in the rear area of Army Group South, for example, the 62nd Infantry Division shot the "entire Jewish population (168 souls) for associating with partisans," in addition to executing 45 partisans.³¹ The same division advocated the killing of the 120 Jews in Gadjac by SS units, because there were "bandits" in this area.³² Christopher Browning has convincingly proved that similar things happened in Serbia. In Sabac,

“central European Jewish refugees, mostly Austrians, were shot by troops predominantly of Austrian origin in retaliation for casualties inflicted by Serbian partisans on the German army!”³³ The reprisal policy of the military commanders in Serbia was not merely in compliance with the guidelines issued by Field-Marshal Wilhelm Keitel on 16 September 1941, which demanded massive reprisals and summary executions of Communists for attacks on German soldiers;³⁴ but the military commanders had already carried out reprisal executions against Communists and Jews prior to Keitel’s instruction, which did not mention Jews explicitly. Such Anti-Jewish measures by the Wehrmacht thus distinguish the German occupation policies in Serbia and the Soviet Union from that in France. Professionalism and ideology went together well in the East. As long as the mass shooting of Jews and Communists was “perceived and construed as a military measure against Germany’s enemies, it did not require nazified zealots (though surely those were not lacking), merely conscientious and politically obtuse professional soldiers to carry them out.”³⁵ A distinction should be made between the extermination policies in the Soviet Union and Serbia. While in the latter, “the mass murder of male Jews was accomplished primarily by the German Wehrmacht, though it certainly received willing help from the *Ordnungs- und Sicherheitspolizei* of the SS,”³⁶ in the former it was the other way round. Babi Yar, the name of a gorge near Kiev, has become the symbol not only of the crimes of the *Einsatzgruppen* in the Soviet Union, but also of the support they received from the Wehrmacht.³⁷ The frequent orders of military commanders to prevent individual soldiers from taking part in the murder of Jews by the SS point in the same direction.³⁸ The main concern of commanders like von Reichenau, von Salmuth and Karl von Roques was the disruption of discipline, not the ordered “constant close cooperation” with the *Einsatzgruppen*. There were, of course, commanders like von Tiedemann who tried to draw a distinct line between military actions and police measures. It was to prove a futile fight.

The deliberate intermingling of ideological warfare with military actions in the East, which Hitler had advocated and which the Army High Command had willingly accepted in their short war illusion, took on a new form in the autumn of 1941. At that time, the Wehrmacht was not only facing organized and trained “partisan units and diversion groups” under the leadership of regional party functionaries or government officials, but was also short of troops in the vast rear areas. The solution was ever more ruthless actions against actual and suspected “supporters of the hostile attitude,” meaning Jews and Communists. This becomes especially clear in the well-known orders of the commanders of the 6th, 11th and the 17th Armies, Field-Marschals Reichenau and Manstein, and General Hermann Hoth. They all knew that they had to fight a fierce and stubborn enemy and called for the complete annihilation of the Soviet war machine as well as for the destruction of the Jewish-Bolshevik system, and instructed their soldiers to show understanding for the “necessity of the severe punishment of Jewry.” This could only be understood by the troops as justification of the

mass murder of Einsatzgruppe C. Being even more concrete than Reichenau and Manstein,³⁹ Hoth turned his soldiers' thoughts to German history, to the guilt (as he saw it) of the Jews for the domestic conditions after the First World War: "The destruction of those same Jews who support Bolshevism and its organization for murder, the partisans, is a measure of self-preservation."⁴⁰ Those orders naturally had consequences on the level of the troops which the commanders had known since September 1939 and against which Manstein's appeal at the end of his order, to maintain discipline and preserve military honor, could not accomplish much.

There were, of course, other voices too. Each commander had considerable latitude to prove himself although the Army High Command had distributed Reichenau's order to all armies and army groups, with the request that similar orders be issued. General Eberhard von Mackensen, commander of the III (motorized) Army Corps, acted on 24 November 1941. He demanded the "ruthless combatting and extermination of hostile elements," yet he warned the troops not to consider every one as their enemy just because he would look like a Bolshevik: in rags, unhygienic, unkempt. The decision would rest with the officers, who should be careful of denunciation. This particular paragraph, however, was only one out of ten. The other nine were guided by the traditional understanding of the treatment of the population of an occupied country. The fact that their initially friendly attitude toward the Wehrmacht had nearly come to an end was explained by the unjust or psychologically wrong conduct of the German troops in the rear areas, as well as to the unavoidable consequences of warfare. The troops should not transfer their hate of Bolshevism on to the population which was not an "object of exploitation," but a "necessary part of the European economy" (sic!). The German soldier should treat civilians and prisoners of war in the same manner in which he wished to be treated in hard times.⁴¹ The important question here is which impact this differentiating order has had.

It is not sufficient to justify the arbitrary and ruthless reprisal policy of the Wehrmacht in the Soviet Union by the need for "absolute security for the German soldier" against partisan attacks or acts of sabotage by an incited population. Nor can it be explained by the fact that German military doctrine since 1871 had advocated policies of indiscriminate retaliation and of preventive repression as the best means of checking partisan activity.⁴² The considerable discrepancy between the number of "partisans" killed and German casualties on the one hand, and the minor difference between the numbers of persons arrested and later executed on the other in the reports of German combat or security divisions, both point to the ideological background of the Wehrmacht reprisal policy. Its disproportion is most strikingly demonstrated by one report of the 707th Infantry Division, deployed in White Russia. In one month it shot 10,431 "captives" out of a total of 10,940, while in the claimed combat with partisans the division suffered only seven casualties, two dead and five wounded!⁴³ Among the shot "captives" were Soviet soldiers who, cut off from the main body of their army, had

not reported to German authorities by set date, escaped prisoners of war and civilians arrested during mop-up operations. This practice more closely approached Hitler's formula of 16 July 1941 for the pacification of the Eastern Territories: to shoot every one "who merely looks suspicious"⁴⁴ than anti-partisan measures conducted according to military rules and practice. While many reports can be classified as examples of self-corroboration and self-fulfilling prophecy in the destruction of "Jewish Bolshevism," there is one that points to the opposite. Although the Jews hated the German administration and the army, which was not astonishing, wrote General Hans Leykauf to the War Economy Office on 2 December 1941, it could not be claimed that "the Jews as such represented any threat to the Wehrmacht."⁴⁵

Although liquidations on a much larger scale than the shooting of Soviet commissars was carried out by the Wehrmacht during anti-guerilla operations, the efforts to play down the effect of the Commissar Order after the war were much greater than to deny the army's ruthless reprisal policy. Highly-placed political officials and commissars could be shot not only as suspects in a hostile act, but also for merely holding a position in the Red Army or in the Soviet power system, a practice illegal by all international rules. Are we still to believe that the troops circumvented the implementation of the "criminal order," found ways to ignore it, as some historians maintain,⁴⁶ or that official reports were deliberately manipulated, as former soldiers apologetically claim? The large number of executions listed by the intelligence officers speak in too clear a language. Moreover, the corps frequently simply reported "negative." This indicates that no false reports had to be made. The documentary evidence, for example, contradicts both the statements of General Heinz Guderian and Colonel (ret.) Hans Roschmann.⁴⁷ Guderian's Panzer Group 2 is reported to have shot 183 commissars up to the end of October 1941,⁴⁸ and the LII Corps, of which Roschmann was the quartermaster, is reported to have executed at least 15 commissars and politruks.⁴⁹ In his action report, the intelligence officer of Panzer Group 3 tersely wrote in mid-August 1941 that the "carrying out of the special treatment of the political commissars did not entail any problem for the troops" and that 170 commissars had been "separately sent off."⁵⁰ That these terms camouflaged the execution becomes evident from another report of the same formation. On 17 July 1941, Panzer Group 3 informed its superior army that the staff had seized two commissars in plain clothes and had shot them. Another intelligence officer viewed the liquidation of the political commissars within the Red Army as the prerequisite of the German victory.⁵¹

A month later, there was growing criticism among some field commanders of the practical result of the Commissar Order. They argued, as Rosenberg did later with regard to the ill-treatment of Soviet prisoners of war, that the implementation had led to a stiffening of the Red Army's resistance. On 23 September 1941, the Army High Command requested a reconsideration of the OKW. Hitler refused this and similar later requests. It was only in May 1942 that the professional pressure exerted by senior

commanders showed results. The Commissar Order was suspended in the area of operations in order to encourage the tendency of Soviet soldiers to desert. Military necessity had led to an alteration of an ideological goal. The same applies to the treatment of Soviet prisoners of war.

Responsibility for prisoners of war during the Operation Barbarossa was shared by the High Commands of the Wehrmacht and of the Army. Within the Reich, in occupied Poland and in the two civil administrative provinces in the East, the Reich Commissariats, responsibility was borne by the OKW, and in the area of operations by the OKH. On 17 July 1941, the OKW, having reached agreement with the SS, decreed that the armed forces were to

get rid of all those elements among the prisoners of war considered to be Bolshevik driving forces. The special situation of the Eastern campaign therefore demands special measures While so far the regulations and orders concerning prisoners of war have been based solely on military considerations, now the political objective must be attained, which is to protect the German nation from Bolshevik inciters and forthwith take the occupied territory strictly in hand.⁵²

After an initial separation of civilians and prisoners of war by Wehrmacht personnel according to nationality and political trustworthiness, the “specially trained” Einsatzkommandos then took over further selection and liquidation. The SS guidelines provided for the elimination of commissars and functionaries of all ranks, agitators, fanatical Communists and all Jews. Although the camps in the army’s area of operations had been included in OKW’s decree, the Army High Command forbade the participation of Einsatzkommandos in the selection of prisoners of war. Instead, the camp commanders were responsible for the “immediate isolation of politically intolerable and suspicious elements, commissars and agitators” and were expected to deal with them “in accordance with the special directives,” that is to say, to shoot them in line with the decrees of 13 May and 6 June 1941. “This decision [of 24 July 1941] shows that the Army leadership, unlike that of the Wehrmacht, was prepared to participate in the systematic extermination of the political enemy, but not in the destruction of the ‘racial enemy’.”⁵³ The Jews were to be separated from the other prisoners and to work at the front. On 7 October 1941, however, the Army High Command revoked this ruling and gave the Einsatzkommandos access to the camps in the area of operations, thus adopting the practice obligatory in the Wehrmacht provinces since July 1941.

It is very likely that we shall never know the exact figures of those Soviet prisoners of war who were selected and liquidated. Apologetic estimations speak of “some ten thousands”; other assessments begin at 140,000 and go up to 600,000 prisoners of war who were handed over to the SS. Likewise, the overall figure of Soviet prisoners of war who perished while they were under German control is debated. It ranges from 1.68 million over at least 2.53 million up to 3.3 million, out of a total of 5.7 million

Soviet soldiers taken prisoner between June 1941 and February 1945.⁵⁴ Behind this controversy over the extent of the mass killings and the mass death lies, of course, the debate over the causes. The mass death was not caused by a relevant pre-invasion order. Yet it would be grossly misleading to explain the great rise of the mortality rate, which began at the end of September 1941, solely with circumstances in the area of operations owing to war. Forty-seven per cent of the prisoners that died up to the spring of 1942 died in camps within the Reich! The mass death must be ascribed to the priorities of the German exploitation policy, which were influenced by the ever-present trauma of 1918. Millions of prisoners of war and large parts of the Soviet population were condemned to death by starvation and endemic diseases in order to feed the Wehrmacht and the German population. Even Alfred Rosenberg advocated a change of policy in a letter to Field-Marshal Keitel on 28 February 1942. The minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories thought that the past ill-treatment of prisoners was responsible for the stiffened resistance of the Red Army “and thereby also for the deaths of thousands of German soldiers.”⁵⁵ The change of attitude toward the Soviet prisoners of war cannot, however, be credited to moral considerations; it was caused by the necessities of war, the immense casualties of the German army at the Eastern Front and the shortage of laborers in the German war economy. The increasing “worth” of Soviet prisoners of war brought about an improvement in their treatment. The Germans not only made large use of them as workers in the Reich, but also as “volunteers” (*Hilfswillige*), in the Wehrmacht, beginning in October 1941. Two years later, 50,000 prisoners of war were even employed in the service units of the Replacement Army in the Reich.⁵⁶ What a change of policy compared to Hitler’s remarks on 16 July 1941, that it must never be allowed that any one else than a German carry a weapon west of the Ural Mountains!

How does this documentation about the planning and implementation of a war of destruction against the Soviet Union fit into the wider historiographical debate on National Socialism? In my opinion the contrasting positions of so-called “intentionalists” and “functionalists” are unduly polarized. I would side with Christopher Browning’s middle position.⁵⁷ The development of Lebensraum politics can be viewed as evolutionary rather than programmatic but at the same time Hitler must be credited with making the key decisions in the summer of 1940, and in the spring and summer of 1941. The transformation of long-range concepts like Lebensraum, Vernichtung der Juden, and Weltanschauungskrieg must not be seen in a post-Barbarossa perspective. “Nazi racial policy was radicalized in quantum jumps”⁵⁸ between 1939 and 1941, with war acting as a stimulant. The war not only opened up favorable conditions for ideologically fixed aims, but also shaped those objectives by its own momentum. It speeded solutions for them, while it also brought forth many difficulties which then were to have an impact on the ideological goals. The linkage between mass murder and strategy was not realized before 1941. The ideology of Lebensraum was transformed by the invasion of Russia “from a doctrine of gradual racial consolidation into one of limit-

less expansion. In the process the Nazi view of a final solution to the Jewish Question was radicalized as well.”⁵⁹ In September 1939, the Polish intelligentsia had been the foremost target of the Einsatzgruppen. The Wehrmacht had already acted ruthlessly against insurgents, but the “elimination of all active and passive resistance” had not been determined on ideological grounds. In the confrontation with “Jewish Bolshevism” in June 1941, there was to be a division of labor. While the Einsatzgruppen were targeted to carry out the elimination of both the biological and political manifestations of “Jewish Bolshevism,” the Wehrmacht was to destruct the “Jewish-Bolshevik intelligentsia” within the Red Army and the potential carriers of resistance. In the wake of the spectacular victory over France, the same senior officer corps that had complained about the atrocities wrought by the SS in Poland took no offense at waging a Vernichtungskrieg against the Soviet Union. It was declared a military necessity. Strategy and ideology had achieved a symbiosis. This points to the “dialectical dimension” of the Wehrmacht’s role in the “mechanism of destruction.” It was inspired by ideology, but was rational in its implementation and in need for justification on non-ideological grounds. Jews and Communists were in fact and a priori classified as suspected partisans and shot.

There was to be another fusion through the invasion of Russia: the achievement of Lebensraum and the Vernichtung der Juden. The vision of a purified Germanic empire through the destruction of its foremost enemy was backed by the euphoria of a victory over Russia. Strategy and the mass murder of European Jewry were closely connected. Auschwitz was defended at Stalingrad too.

NOTES

1. Peter Paret in his review of *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, *German Studies Review*, 8 (1985), 314.

2. *Bundesarchiv*, Koblenz, NS 11/28. Cited in Jürgen Förster, “New Wine in Old Skins? The Wehrmacht and the War of ‘Weltanschauungen’, 1941,” Wilhelm Deist, ed., *The German Military in the Age of Total War* (Leamington Spa, 1985), p. 305.

3. Helmuth Groscurth, *Tagebücher eines Abwehroffiziers 1938–1940* (Stuttgart, 1970), p. 414.

4. Cf. Michael Geyer, “German Strategy, 1914–1945,” Peter Paret, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton, NJ, 1986), pp. 583–84 and Jürgen Förster, “The Dynamics of Volksgemeinschaft: The Effectiveness of the German Military Establishment in the Second World War,” Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray, eds., *Military Effectiveness*, vol. 3, *The Second World War* (Boston, 1988), p. 181.

5. Quoted by J. P. Stern, *Hitler: The Führer and the People* (Glasgow, 1975), p. 216.

6. William Carr, *Poland to Pearl Harbor: The Making of the Second World War* (London, 1985), p. 116. Cf. Jürgen Förster, “Hitlers Entscheidung für einen Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion,” *Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt*, ed., *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, vol. 4, *Der Angriff auf die Sowjetunion* (Stuttgart, 1983), pp. 3–18.

7. Karl Dietrich Erdmann, *Die Zeit der Weltkriege* (Stuttgart, 1976), p. 337 and Carr, *Poland to Pearl Harbor*, p. 121.

8. Cf. Jürgen Förster, "Das Unternehmen 'Barbarossa' als Eroberungs- und Vernichtungskrieg," *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, IV, 413–16 and 426–27.
9. Generaloberst Halder, *Kriegstagebuch: Tägliche Aufzeichnungen des Chefs des Generalstabes des Heeres 1939–1942*, vol. 3, n.p.
10. *International Military Tribunal (IMT)*, vol. 26.
11. Cf. Helmut Krausnick and Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges: Die Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD 1938–1942* (Stuttgart, 1981), pp. 103–104.
12. See Charles B. Burdick's important review, "Tradition and Murder in the Wehrmacht," *Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual*, 4 (1987), 329–36.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 446.
14. Krausnick/Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges*, p. 112.
15. Manfred Messerschmidt, "The Wehrmacht and the Volksgemeinschaft," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 18 (1983), 735.
16. Walther Hubatsch, ed., *Hitlers Weisungen für die Kriegführung 1939–1945: Dokumente des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht* (Frankfurt, 1983), no. 21a.
17. Cf. Förster, "Das Unternehmen 'Barbarossa,'" pp. 421–40 and Krausnick/Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges*, pp. 116–41.
18. Hans Mommsen, "The Realization of the Unthinkable: The 'Final Solution of the Jewish Question' in the Third Reich," Gerhard Hirschfeld, ed., *The Policies of Genocide: Jews and Soviet Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany* (London, 1986), p. 121.
19. Cf. Krausnick/Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges*, pp. 97–98.
20. Cf. Heinz Hürten, ed., *Das Krisenjahr 1923: Militär und Innenpolitik 1922–1924* (Düsseldorf, 1980), no. 184, pp. 266–72 and Michael Geyer, *Aufrüstung oder Sicherheit: Die Reichswehr in der Krise der Machtpolitik 1924–1936* (Wiesbaden, 1980), pp. 85–88.
21. Quoted by Förster, "Das Unternehmen 'Barbarossa,'" pp. 438–39.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 441.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 423 and Christian Streit, "The German Army and the Policies of Genocide," *The Policies of Genocide*, p. 4.
24. Orders of 25 and 30 June 1941. Quoted by Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941–45: German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare* (London, 1985), pp. 116–17.
25. *IMT*, vol. 38, p. 88.
26. Order of 9 July 1941. Quoted by Jürgen Förster, "Die Sicherung des 'Lebensraumes,'" *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, IV, 1,035.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 1,035–39.
28. Order of 30 July 1941. *Ibid.*, pp. 1,039–40.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 1,041–42.
30. Quoted by Krausnick/Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges*, p. 248.
31. Cf. Förster, "Die Sicherung des 'Lebensraumes,'" p. 1,055.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 1,046.
33. Christopher R. Browning, "Wehrmacht Reprisal Policy and the Mass Murder of the Male Jews in Serbia," *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen*, 33 (1983), 39.
34. *IMT*, vol. 34, pp. 501–504.
35. Browning, "Wehrmacht Reprisal Policy and the Mass Murder of the Male Jews in Serbia," p. 38.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
37. Cf. Krausnick/Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges*, pp. 235, 237–38.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 239–40.
39. Cf. Matthew Cooper, *The Phantom War: The German Struggle against Soviet Partisans, 1941–1944* (London, 1979), appendices 4 and 5.
40. Quoted by Förster, "Die Sicherung des 'Lebensraumes,'" pp. 1,052–53.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 1,054.

42. Cf. Geoffrey Best, *Humanity in Warfare: The Modern History of the International Law of Armed Conflicts* (London, 1980).

43. Cf. Förster, "Die Sicherung des Lebensraumes," pp. 1,055–56 and Förster, "New Wine in Old Skins?," p. 317.

44. *IMT*, vol. 38, p. 88.

45. *Ibid.*, vol. 32, p. 73.

46. See for example Ernst Nolte, *Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche* (Munich, 1963), p. 437. He simply ignores historiographical evidence even in his most recent publication, *Der europäische Bürgerkrieg 1917–1945: Nationalsozialismus und Bolschewismus* (Berlin, 1987), p. 467.

47. Heinz Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten* (Heidelberg, 1951), p. 138; Hans Roschmann, *Gutachten zu den Verlusten sowjetischer Kriegsgefangener in deutscher Hand von 1941–1945 und zur Bewertung des Beweiskraft des sogenannten 'Dokument NOKW 2125'* (Ingolstadt, 1982), Annex 3.

48. *Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv*, Freiburg i. Br., RH 21-2/v. 638.

49. *Ibid.*, LII Corps, 16041/43–45 and 16041/47. Roschmann supports his assertion with the quartermaster's records and leaves aside the reports of the intelligence officer.

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*

52. *IMT*, vol. 26, pp. 111–15.

53. Christian Streit, "The Army and the Policies of Genocide," p. 4 (Note 23 above).

54. Cf. Jürgen Förster, "Rückblick auf das 'Unternehmen Barbarossa': Die besondere Qualität des Krieges im Osten," Jörg Friedrich and Jörg Wollenberg, eds., *Licht in den Schatten der Vergangenheit: Zur Enttabuisierung der Nürnberger Kriegsverbrecherprozesse* (Frankfurt, Berlin, 1987), p. 128.

55. Quoted by Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia 1941–1945: A Study of Occupation Policies* (London, 1957), pp. 417 and 421–22.

56. Cf. Förster, "Die Sicherung des Lebensraumes," pp. 1,058–61 and the order of 27 January 1943, *Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv*, RH 53-23/58.

57. See his article on "Nazi Resettlement Policy and the Search for a Solution to the Jewish Question, 1939–1941," *German Studies Review*, 9 (1986), 497–519.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 519.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 517.