

Narratives of Totalitarianism: Nazism's Anti-Semitic Propaganda During World War II and the Holocaust

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In recent decades, historians have probed the kinds of narratives that they tell in constructing the past. In the process, we have devoted too little attention to the ways that historical actors themselves translate beliefs and ideologies into narratives of events, which themselves become causal factors of great importance. In this essay, and the longer work from which it is drawn, I examine this translation as it emerged in Nazi Germany's anti-Semitic propaganda campaigns during World War II and the Holocaust. In so doing, I argue that the concept of totalitarianism, when applied to the Nazi dictatorship, remains an indispensable and fruitful category of analysis. No term better captures the translation of ideological fanaticism into the political decisions that produced the Holocaust or helps to explain why Europe's longest hatred, anti-Semitism, produced mass murder in place of customary centuries of persecution.¹ Nazi propaganda repeatedly quoted from *Mein Kampf*, but just as, if not more, important than these references to Hitler's sacred text were his attempts and those of his leading propagandists to translate its bundle of hatreds into an interpretive framework that served to make sense and nonsense of ongoing events.

Nazism's anti-Semitic narrative was totalitarian insofar as it offered an internally consistent story in which paranoia and projection were the handmaidens of aggression and mass murder. While Hitler and his regime were the sole cause of World War II, at a time when Europe's Jews had no political power, not to mention armed forces, with which to defend

1. This paper draws on my forthcoming work, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda During World War II and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2006). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

themselves, Nazism's narrative was nevertheless one of self-denying subjectivity.² It completely inverted the causal relationship of perpetrator and victim. Its key points were as follows: "International Jewry," though dispersed among the nations, was a racially unified political subject and the driving force of modern world history and international politics. It had seized power in the most powerful countries in the world—England, the Soviet Union, and the United States—and it was driving them toward a war with Nazi Germany. The Nazi regime, by merely responding to the acts of aggression and hostility that international Jewry had been waging against Germany for decades, had aroused the wrath of this powerful international conspiracy. In the 1930s, international Jewry had whipped up international anger at the Third Reich. Jewry was therefore responsible for the outbreak of World War II and for its escalation from a strictly European war into an actual world war, encompassing the odd coalition of the Soviet Union and the Western democracies. The war that the Jewish enemy was waging against Germany was no ordinary war; rather, it was a war whose purpose was to "exterminate" and "annihilate" the German people. Therefore, the Nazi regime was retaliating in a justified war of self-defense against international Jewry and its stooges in England, the Soviet Union, and the United States. This retaliation took the form of what was commonly known as World War II as well as a never empirically described intention to "exterminate" and "annihilate" the Jews of Europe.

As World War II continued and the toll of death and destruction on Germany's armed forces and home front grew, the Nazi anti-Semitic narrative focused its rage and hatred, which were by-products of the war that the Allies were waging against the Third Reich, on the supposedly actual decision maker, international Jewry. Hitler ordered implementation of the Final Solution in a spirit of self-righteous indignation, which translated this most extraordinary of events into an ordinary story of attack and defense in "war." This paranoid conspiracy theory constituted a narrative that connected ideology to mass murder. For its adherents in Germany between 1941 and 1945, World War II appeared to confirm the truth of the idea that international Jewry was intent on the extermination of the German people. Hence they publicly proclaimed the goal of "exterminating"

2. On Hitler's sole responsibility for starting World War II, see Gerhard Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany: Starting World War II, 1937–1939* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980); and Weinberg, *Germany, Hitler and World War II* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1995).

and “annihilating” the Jews, while offering no factual details about the policy’s implementation. At the end, the Nazi true believers concluded that international Jewry had indeed won the Second World War.

In her classic work on the subject, Hannah Arendt understood the centrality of this paranoid, conspiratorial view of history and politics for totalitarianism in Nazi Germany.³ The ideology eliminated all contingencies of history. Once its basic premises were accepted, everything was explicable and all riddles solved. Why did Britain ally with the Soviet Union after Germany attacked in June 1941? Why did Roosevelt help the English and do all that he could to prevent an early Nazi victory? Why did an alliance emerge between the Soviet Union, on the one hand, and the arch capitalist societies, England and the United States, on the other? Why did the anti-Hitler coalition persist even after 1943, as the Red Army began to move toward and then into Europe and Germany? In Michel Foucault’s terms, here was a “delirious discourse” whose internal consistency proved immune to empirical refutation and which saw “behind” surface appearances to the deeper realities supposedly determining them.

This story was elaborated in speeches by Nazi leaders, in editorials and articles in the government-controlled press, and in ubiquitous wall posters, propaganda pamphlets, journals, radio broadcasts, and newsreels. Understanding this narrative calls for a fresh look at the relationship between totalitarianism, propaganda, and the Holocaust, and for a reassessment of the meaning of a phrase *The War Against the Jews*. Made famous by Lucy Dawidowicz in her book by that title, the phrase identifies the Holocaust as a “war” alongside of and in addition to the major conventional war called World War II.⁴ As the narrative described above demonstrates, for Hitler and the Nazi leadership as a whole, there were not two distinct wars—one against the Soviet Union, Britain, and the United States, called World War II, and another against the Jews, called the Final Solution. Rather, the cataclysm of 1939 to 1945 was one undivided war that an actual historical subject, “international Jewry,” had unleashed and escalated. “Jewry” was the driving, active historical subject working behind the scenes in Moscow, London, and Washington. In their minds and in their propaganda, the war against the Jews, or what on occasion they called “the Jewish war,” was World War II, and the Final Solution as an inseparable war of defense

3. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Meridian, 1958).

4. Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews, 1933–1945* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975).

against an aggression launched, escalated, extended, and then fought to a victorious conclusion by an immensely powerful international Jewish conspiracy. Radical anti-Semitism offered the Nazis an explanation for what they viewed as the central paradox of World War II in Europe, namely, the emergence, deepening, and persistence of what Churchill called “the unnatural alliance” between the Soviet Union and the Western democracies. In the eyes of common sense, Franklin Roosevelt and Churchill had decided to make a pact with one devil, Stalin, in order to defeat a greater evil, Hitler. From the perspective of Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda, this anti-Hitler coalition, along with the entry into the war of the United States, was powerful evidence that international Jewry had created and sustained “the unnatural alliance.”

The connection between the Jews and World War II in Nazi propaganda is central to understanding why this totalitarian regime became genocidal when it did. Necessary preconditions for the implementation of the Holocaust included the existence of a dictatorship that had destroyed all political opposition and democratic institutions, abolished the rule of law, destroyed the free press, and used its power to diffuse and intensify hatred of the Jews based on frequent anti-Semitic propaganda. This describes Nazi Germany from 1933 to 1939—and, insofar as the mass murder of Jews is concerned, up to June 1941. That totalitarian regime produced an era of anti-Semitic persecution, not mass murder. It was the conjuncture of a radical anti-Semitic ideology with the events of World War II that helps to explain why the regime turned to mass murder from June 1941 until the end of the war. In this paper and in the larger study from which it draws, I focus on the interpretation, within Nazism’s anti-Semitic propaganda, of the causes and nature of World War II in order to understand why this totalitarian regime crossed the Rubicon from persecution to mass murder in 1941. From the beginning to the end of the war that he and his government had launched, Hitler and his associates concluded that their paranoid fantasy of an international Jewish conspiracy was, indeed, the key to contemporary history.

From 1919 to January 30, 1939, Hitler hurled terrible abuse and threats of violence at the Jews. In a speech to the Reichstag, while he was making plans to begin a second European war, he publicly threatened to “exterminate” all the Jews of Europe should they provoke such a war.⁵ In their public

5. Adolph Hitler, *Reden und Proklamationen, 1932–1945*, ed. Max Domarus (Wiesbaden, 1972), p. 1058.

statements, the Nazis repeatedly asserted that the connection between the Second World War and the Jews was causal and necessary—and thus, by implication, not an accident of timing and geography. Though Hitler had long planned to launch the war at a time and place of his choosing, he and his propagandists asserted that the “extermination” of the Jews was a justified response to a war launched against Germany by “international Jewry.” A blend of hatred, self-righteous indignation, and paranoia was at the core of Nazism’s wartime justification for genocide. Nazi propaganda presented Germany’s war against the Allies and the intention to “exterminate” the Jews of Europe as part of one interconnected war of retaliation and defense. This radicalization of Nazi policy from persecution to extermination was accompanied and prefigured by a radicalization of Nazi Germany’s public language about the Jews.

The abyss between Nazi propaganda, which presented the Third Reich as the innocent victim of others, and the reality of Hitler’s long-planned policy of expansion and aggression led many of his contemporaries and some subsequent historians to assume that the former was merely a manipulative tool used by cynical men who were fully aware that it reversed the chronology of events that their own aggressive plans had set in motion. Yet some contemporary observers concluded that the Nazis believed in their own paranoid logic. The literary scholar and diarist Viktor Klemperer wrote in his diary in June 1944, soon after D-Day: “However much I resisted it, *the Jew* is in every respect the center of the language of the Third Reich, indeed *of its whole view of the epoch*.”⁶ Klemperer recognized that anti-Semitism was not only a set of prejudices and hatreds but was also an explanatory framework for historical events. The young E. H. Gombrich, who subsequently gained fame as an eminent art historian, worked at the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) translating and analyzing German wartime propaganda. A quarter century later, Gombrich wrote that Nazi propaganda created a mythic world by “transforming the political universe into a conflict of persons and personifications” in which a virtuous young Germany fought manfully against evil schemers, above all the Jews. The Jews were the cement that established the consistency of this myth, first in the political battles within Germany and then on the international plane. It was “this gigantic persecution mania, this paranoiac

6. Victor Klemperer, *I Will Bear Witness: 1942–1945, A Diary of the Nazi Years*, trans. Martin Chalmers (New York: Knopf, 2000), p. 335; and Klemperer, *Tagebücher 1944* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1995), p. 85.

myth that [held] the various strands of German propaganda together.” He concluded that what was characteristic of Nazi propaganda was “less the lie than the imposition of a paranoid pattern on world events.”⁷ During World War II, the propaganda of the Nazi regime repeatedly asserted that an actual political subject called “Jewry” or “international Jewry” was “guilty” for starting and prolonging the war and that a Jewish international conspiracy was intent on exterminating Germany and the Germans. In the context of World War II, these beliefs transformed centuries-old European anti-Semitism from a justification for traditional forms of persecution into what the historian Norman Cohn called a “warrant for genocide.”⁸

In the early years, Hitler denounced the Jews as alien to the German nation, and as the cause of Germany’s problems, from defeat to depression. Speaking to a Nazi Party meeting on April 6, 1920, he said, “we don’t want to be emotional anti-Semites who seek to create a mood for pogroms. Rather, we’re driven with a pitiless and fierce determination to attack the evil at its roots and to exterminate it root and branch. Every means is justified to reach our goal, even if it means we must make a pact with the devil.”⁹ Between 1920 and 1939, and often in the most vicious terms, he called for the “removal of the Jews from the midst of our people.”¹⁰ Toward the end of *Mein Kampf*, he famously wrote that “if at the beginning of the war and during the war twelve or fifteen thousand of these Hebrew corrupters of the people had been held under poison gas, as happened to

7. On paranoia and Nazi wartime propaganda, see E. H. Gombrich, *Myth and Reality in German War-Time Broadcasts* (London: The Athlone Press, 1970). On paranoid politics among the Jacobins in the French Revolution, see François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. Elborg Forster (New York: Cambridge UP, 1981); and in American politics, see Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics, and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1965). See also the discussion of anti-Semitism and paranoia in Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), pp. 187–200.

8. See Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the Jewish World-Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

9. Adolf Hitler, “München, 6 April 1920: Diskussionsbeitrag auf einer NSDAP-Versammlung,” in Hitler, *Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen: 1905–1924*, ed. Eberhard Jäckel and Axel Kuhn (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1980), pp. 119–20.

10. See Reginald H. Phelps, “Hitlers ‘grundlegende’ Rede über den Antisemitismus,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 16 (1968): 417; and Hitler, *Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen*, pp. 184–204. See also the discussion of the speech in Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitler’s World View: A Blueprint for Power*, trans. Herbert Arnold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1981), pp. 50–52.

hundreds of thousands of our very best German soldiers in the field, the sacrifice of millions would not have been in vain.”¹¹

Yet however vicious his language or profound his hatred, he did not repeat the threat to kill all the Jews in Germany or Europe between April 1920 and January 1939, even though he often spoke of “world” or “international Jewry” as an actually existing political subject that possessed vast power and was hostile to Germany.¹² This subject had played a role in Germany’s defeat in World War I, and it helped to bring about the Bolshevik Revolution, Germany’s postwar inflation, and the economic crisis of 1929. Between 1933 and 1939, “international Jewry” was responsible for the criticism, advanced by Europe’s major powers and the United States, of Nazi Germany’s domestic policies, including but not limited to its anti-Semitism. Before 1939 Hitler made no secret of his violent hatred of the Jews and of his determination to drive them out of public life, the professions, and the economy, deprive them of German citizenship, and then, with force if need be, drive them out of Germany. Indeed, during the era of anti-Jewish persecution between 1933 and 1939, the Nazi regime, through its Transfer (Haavara) Agreement with some Jewish organizations, encouraged and allowed the movement of 60,000 German Jews and about one hundred million marks from Germany to Palestine.¹³ Hitler justified every escalation of persecution against the Jews as a response to what he alleged was a prior act of aggression by “international Jewry.” Yet from January 1933 to January 1939, through six years that included increasing anti-Semitic persecution, boycotts, arbitrary arrests, theft and impoverishment, purges, and the pogrom of November 1938, Hitler repeated his assertion

11. Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1971), p. 679.

12. For a representative example of Hitler’s denunciations of “Jewish domination,” see Hitler, “29. February 1928, Dok. 237. Rede auf NSDAP-Versammlung in München,” in Hitler, *Reden, Schriften, Anordnung: Februar 1925 bis Januar 1933*, ed. Bärbel Dusik, vol. 2, *Juli 1926–Mai 1928* (Munich: K. G. Sauer, 1992), pp. 681–716.

13. See Francis R. Nicosia, *The Third Reich and the Palestine Question*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1999); Nicosia, “Zionism and Palestine in Anti-Semitic Thought in Imperial Germany,” *Studies in Zionism* 13, no. 2 (1992): 115–131; Nicosia, “Ein Nützlicher Feind: Zionismus im Nationalsozialistischen Deutschland 1933–1939,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 37, no. 3 (1989): 367–400; Nicosia, “Zionism in National Socialist Jewish Policy in Germany, 1933–39,” *Journal of Modern History* 50, no. 4 (1978): 1253–82; and Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, vol. 1, *The Years of Persecution, 1933–1939* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), pp. 62–63.

about the threat posed to Germany by international Jewry without declaring war against the Jews.¹⁴

On January 30, 1939, in a speech to the Reichstag broadcast on German radio and printed in the German and world press, Hitler struck a distinctly more radical and murderous tone. He made his first unequivocal public threat not to remove, deport, or defeat the Jews but to exterminate—that is, murder—“the Jewish race in Europe” in the event that “international finance Jewry inside and outside Europe” brought about a new world war. He publicly repeated this genocidal prophecy on at least seven different occasions between January 30, 1939, and February 24, 1943.¹⁵ In contrast to his public practice from 1919 to 1939, Hitler in wartime spoke and wrote with unprecedented clarity, bluntness, and frequency about implementing his threats to exterminate the Jews of Europe. He played the prophet who asserted that the outbreak of World War II was further proof that “international Jewry” was indeed out to destroy Germany and the Germans. Hitler and his leading propagandists were able to entertain completely contradictory versions of events, one rooted in the grandiosity of the idea of a master race and world domination, the other in the self-pitying paranoia of the much-besieged innocent victim.¹⁶ Grandiosity and paranoia were two poles of one underlying ideological fanaticism.¹⁷ Moreover, the Nazis projected their own aggressive and murderous intentions and policies onto their victims, the Jews above all. In their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno captured this aspect of Nazism when they wrote in 1944 that the “blind murderer has always seen his victim as

14. See Friedländer’s balanced assessment of the mixture of fanaticism and calculation in Hitler’s public denunciations of the Jews up to 1939, in *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, 73–113.

15. For the text of the January 30, 1939, speech and the repetitions and variations of the prophecy (on January 30, 1941; January 30, 1942; February 15, 1942; September 30, 1942; November 8, 1942; and February 24, 1943), see Hitler, *Reden und Proklamationen*, pp. 1058, 1663–64, 1843, 1920, 1937, and 1992.

16. The concluding chapter of Hitler’s *Second Book*, written in 1928 but not published until 1961, offered a summary of the kind of anti-Semitic narrative of “Jewish domination” over world affairs that emerged in Nazi propaganda of the Second World War. See Gerhard L. Weinberg, ed., *Hitler’s Second Book: The Unpublished Sequel to Mein Kampf*, trans. Krista Smith (New York: Enigma Books, 2003), pp. 229–34.

17. The coexistence of such contradictory motivations is a familiar theme of psychoanalysis. See Sigmund Freud, *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: Norton, 1989), pp. 594–626, 722–72.

a persecutor against whom he must defend himself.”¹⁸ From beginning to end, Hitler’s narrative of paranoia was the handmaiden and justification of the regime’s wars of aggression and genocidal policies.

It follows from this analysis of Nazi propaganda and its narratives that we also need to revise some conventional wisdom about the nature of language, both in the Nazi regime and in totalitarian regimes more generally. The first part of this conventional wisdom was that Hitler and other mass murderers did not publicly reveal the crimes that they intended to commit and were committing. For example, the day after Hitler spoke to the Reichstag on January 30, 1941, the editors of the *New York Times* wrote that “inside Germany or outside, no one in the world expects truth from Adolf Hitler. . . . [T]here is not a single precedent to prove he will either keep a promise or fulfill a threat. If there is any guarantee in his record, in fact, it is that the one thing he will not do is the thing he says he will do. . . . Nobody expects consistency from Hitler.”¹⁹ The journalists’ skepticism was followed by the analysis of professional historians, who focused on the interoffice memos in the archives rather than on the public lies. Yet amidst their lies, the Nazi leaders and propagandists spoke in public to millions of people in a far more blunt, forthright, and perversely honest manner than many officials and journalists at the time, as well as historians since, have acknowledged. Not only did they mean what they said when it came to their plans for European Jewry, but to a far greater degree than the historical scholarship indicates, they said what they meant—and did so without the euphemisms that became so famous in postwar analyses of the language of totalitarianism.

George Orwell established the conventional wisdom on this topic when he wrote that the language and propaganda of totalitarian dictatorship is that of “euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness.” In efforts to “defend the indefensible,” such regimes substitute clinical abstractions for straightforward proper nouns and visceral verbs that refer directly to violent and criminal acts.²⁰ The bureaucratic language of the interoffice memos of the Reich Security Main Office, the agency of the Nazi regime that implemented the genocide of European Jewry, has long

18. Horkheimer and Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 187.

19. “When Hitler Threatens,” *New York Times*, January 31, 1941.

20. The classic texts are George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language,” in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, vol. 4, *In Front of Your Nose, 1945–1950* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Janovich, 1968), pp. 127–40, and, of course, Orwell’s *1984*.

become common knowledge, with now infamous abstractions, such as “final solution” (*Endlösung*), “special handling” (*Sonderbehandlung*), and “deportation to the east.”²¹ In his recent discussion of the term “final solution” and other expressions associated with the Holocaust, the philosopher Berel Lang continues in Orwell’s tradition when he writes of “the blatant disparity between the normal connotation of the word and its reference” in Nazi vocabulary and of the “‘language rules’ explicitly designed to conceal literal meaning.”²² He emphasizes that this language of euphemism and deception was used not only in internal communications among officials or in messages intended to deceive the Jews, but “also in addresses to the outside world. . . . [T]he orders for larger and more abstract plans of killing under the general aegis of the Final Solution were almost always couched in diffuse and abstract terms,” in keeping with the euphemistic language rules of Nazi vocabulary.²³

To be sure, the language of euphemism and deception was a crucial aspect of the Holocaust. Yet, in an insight that she did not develop, Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* hinted at another way of thinking about Nazi language. She wrote that “in order not to overestimate the importance of the propaganda lies one should recall the much more numerous instances in which Hitler was completely sincere and brutally unequivocal in the definition of the movement’s true aims.” These assertions, she continued, “were simply not acknowledged by a public unprepared for such consistency.”²⁴ Nevertheless, the image persists of a regime that spoke in code, replaced clear speech with euphemism, and gave few clear clues as to its intentions.²⁵ To be sure, when the officials charged with implementing the Final Solution wrote to one another, their secret memos were filled with euphemism and code.

21. See “Endlösung der Judenfrage” and “Sonderbehandlung” in Cornelia Schmitz-Bering, *Vokabular des Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1998), pp. 174–76, 584–87.

22. Berel Lang, *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 88. Lang points to infamous euphemisms for killing, such as *entsprechend behandelt* (“treated appropriately”), *Aussiedlung* (“evacuation”), *Befriedigungsaktion* (“special pacification”), and *Ausschaltung* (“removal”).

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 92–93.

24. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 343.

25. For evidence to the contrary, see Caesar Aronsfeld, “Perish Judah! Extermination Propaganda,” in *Patterns of Prejudice* 12, no. 5 (September–October 1978): 17–26; and Aronsfeld, *The Text of the Holocaust: A Study of the Nazis’ Extermination Propaganda, 1919–1945* (Marblehead, MA: Micah Publications, 1985).

In fact, the public language of the Nazi regime was an often brutal, sometimes crude declaration of murderous intent, associated always with projections of the policies of mass murder onto “international Jewry.” Two key verbs and nouns in the German language were at the core of this vocabulary of mass murder. Neither, in any context, is a euphemism. They were the verbs, *vernichten* and *ausrotten*, which meant to annihilate, exterminate, totally destroy, and kill; and the corresponding nouns, *Vernichtung* and *Ausrottung*, which meant annihilation, extermination, total destruction, and killing. Whether interpreted according to their dictionary definitions or placed in the context of the speeches, paragraphs, and sentences in which they were uttered, the meaning of these terms remained unambiguous. When Hitler and other Nazi leaders and propagandists uttered them, they invariably did so in the context of a projection of these very intentions and plans onto “world Jewry”—plans that aimed to “exterminate” or “annihilate” not just the Nazi regime, the Nazi party, or the German armies, but the German people as a whole. When the Nazis imputed a policy of *Vernichtung* or *Ausrottung* to the collective singular noun “international Jewry,” the clear meaning of the words in that context was that the Jews supported a policy of mass murder of the German people. Whether we rely on dictionary definitions, the connotation of the words in individual sentences and paragraphs, or the context in which texts as a whole appeared, their meaning is clear. In the standard understanding of the German language at the time, such terms were not euphemisms or metaphors. The use of the word *Vernichtungskrieg* in the Clauswitzian tradition referred to the destruction of the enemy’s armed forces. When Hitler, Goebbels, and others publicly spoke of the *Vernichtung* and *Ausrottung* of the Jews, they were saying things that were extraordinary and unprecedented to German audiences. Even against the background of German militarism and anti-Semitism, Nazi language was exceedingly brutal, blunt, shocking, and violent with regard to the regime’s general policy aims toward European Jews. This surprisingly gangster-like boasting about mass murder was a decisive yet under-examined element of Nazi totalitarianism. This blunt speech about general policies went hand in hand with a complete suppression of any factual reporting about any actual information related to the Final Solution, from the mass murders by the *Einsatzgruppen* and police battalions behind the lines of the Eastern Front, to the operations of the death camps in Poland. Not a single detail of any of the ongoing mass murders appeared in a German newspaper or was heard on German radio.

Nazi propagandists devoted enormous time and effort to bring the arcane scenes of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* up to date, and to people the international Jewish conspiracy with the names of Jews who were active in public life during the 1930s and 1940s. The names and faces of this alleged Jewish conspiracy adorned Nazi posters, widely distributed “wall newspapers” (*Wandzeitungen*), and newspaper headlines. They included Soviet politburo member Lazar Kaganovich; former Soviet Foreign Minister Maxim Litvinov; former British Minister of War Leslie Hore-Belisha; and especially American Jews, such as financier and government adviser Bernard Baruch; Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter; Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau; and even the “half-Jew” Mayor of New York (so designated because his mother was Jewish) Fiorello LaGuardia. The Nazis presented them as the men behind the scenes, the “wire pullers” who directed their non-Jewish “accomplices” and “stooges” in a vast conspiracy of unequals. In a bizarre mixture of ideological distortion and apparent political realism, the message of the propaganda was that only the naïve thought Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin were the real sources of power. In fact, according to Nazi propaganda, they were merely the tools of Jewish power operating behind the scenes.²⁶

One episode of Nazi propaganda illustrates these themes with remarkable clarity. On July 24, 1941, the official Nazi newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, announced “An enormous Jewish annihilation program [*Vernichtungsprogramm*]; Roosevelt demands sterilization of the German people; The Germans are supposed to be exterminated in Two Generations.” The author of *Germany Must Perish*, a book that advocated a plan to “exterminate” the German people, was one “Jew Theodore Kaufman,” described as the President of something called the “American Federation of Peace.”²⁷ Kaufman, the newspaper continued, was a “close associate

26. For a discussion and presentation of images, see Herf, *The Jewish Enemy*. See “Das jüdische Komplott,” December 10, 1941, “Parole der Woche” Wandzeitung, Landeshauptarchiv Koblenz, Bestand 712 (Plakate), no. 1709, Folge 50; “Die Drahtzieher! Es sind nur Juden!” May 27, 1942, “Parole der Woche” Wandzeitung, Landeshauptarchiv Koblenz, Bestand 712 (Plakate), no. 1800, Folge 22; “Wer ist am Kriege schuld?” November 18–24, 1942, “Parole der Woche” Wandzeitung, Institut für Zeitungsforschung, Stadt Dortmund, Folge 29/22; and “They will stop laughing!!!” (*Das Lachen wird ihnen vergehen!!!*), November/December 1942, “Word of the Week” Wall Newspaper, Reich Propaganda Directorate of the Nazi Party, Hoover Institution Archives, GE 3848.

27. “Ein ungeheuerliches jüdisches Vernichtungsprogramm, Roosevelt fordert Sterilisierung des deutschen Volkes, Binnen zwei Generationen soll das deutsche Volk ausgerottet sein,” *Völkischer Beobachter*, July 24, 1941.

of the New York Jew Samuel Rosenman,” who was an adviser to President Roosevelt. In “Jewish-literary circles in New York, it was an open secret . . . that Roosevelt himself inspired the main theses of the book and had personally dictated the most important parts of this shameful work.”²⁸ The plan called for sterilizing German prisoners of war, sending them to labor camps to work on postwar reconstruction of other countries, sterilizing the remainder of the German population so that the Germans would die out in two generations, and then dividing up German territory among the neighboring countries. Official American policy called for an “enormous program of annihilation.” This story about Kaufman’s book was carried in other German papers, such as the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, *Münchener Neuesten Nachrichten*, Julius Streicher’s *Der Stürmer*, as well as the more high-toned weekly *Das Reich*.²⁹

Although Kaufman and his book did exist, he was hardly the influential figure depicted by Nazi propaganda. *Germany Must Perish!* was the real Theodore Kaufman’s first and only book. No American publisher would publish it. Kaufman founded Argyle Press and printed and distributed the book himself through the U. S. Post Office rather than in bookstores. The book received only a few, highly unsympathetic reviews. Though sales figures are not available, its mode of distribution suggests that they were minimal. There was no such organization as the “American Federation of Peace” nor was Kaufman known to be involved in any other American Jewish organizations, major or peripheral, or any that were connected in some way to the Roosevelt administration.³⁰ He was an understandably very angry, independent Jewish writer who published his own book. But his book had no importance in American politics and intellectual life, inside or outside of the Roosevelt administration.

Goebbels, however, leaped at the chance to assign another proper name, face, and a specific text to the abstraction of the international Jewish conspiracy and its alleged plans to exterminate the Germans. In his diary entry of July 24, 1941, he linked Kaufman to American policy, and in doing so he also made a telling mistake in the title of the book: “In the

28. Ibid.

29. On the uses of Kaufman’s book in Nazi propaganda, see Wolfgang Benz, “Judenvernichtung aus Notwehr? Die Legenden um Theodore N. Kaufman,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 29, no. 4 (1981): 615–30. See Theodore Nathan Kaufman, *Germany Must Perish!* (Newark, NJ: Argyle Press, 1941). Goebbels left off the author’s less obviously Jewish-sounding first name.

30. See Benz, “Judenvernichtung aus Notwehr?” pp. 627–29.

United States a book by the Jew Kaufman has just been published under the title, ‘Germany must be annihilated!’ which clearly prophesies what threatens. . . . The book seriously makes the proposal to exterminate the entire German population by sterilization. As stupid and absurd as this project is, it shows the mentality of our enemy.”³¹ Goebbels had transformed Kaufman, the independent writer from New Jersey, into a barometer of the mentality of “the enemy.” After reading Kaufman’s book in English, Goebbels confided to his diary on August 3, that

he really could not have done it better and more advantageously for us than if he had written the book on order. I will have this book distributed in millions of copies in Germany, above all on the front, and will write a preface and afterword myself. It will be most instructive for every German man and for every German woman to see what would happen to the German people if, as in November 1918, a sign of weakness were given.³²

In an August 19, 1941 conversation with Hitler, Goebbels brought up the idea of a German publication of fragments of Kaufman’s book. Hitler approved.³³ Goebbels then assigned Wolfgang Diewerge, director of the radio division in the Propaganda Ministry, to edit and comment on Kaufman’s book.³⁴ He thought Diewerge’s commentary was “excellent.” He would have it published in a print run of five million copies. “Above all,” Goebbels wrote, “this brochure will finally and definitively do away with the last rudiments of a still existing softness. When reading this brochure, even the stupidest idiot can figure out what threatens us if we become weak.”³⁵

The daily press directive of September 5, 1941, from the Reich Press Office, which was sent to editors and journalists at every German newspaper, was entitled “Judas Satanical Murder Plan.” It referred to “Jewish plans for extermination against the Germans,” and it repeated the accusation that the plan was “encouraged” and even had some of its “key sections

31. Joseph Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, ed. Elke Fröhlich, vol. 2, pt. 1 (Munich: K. G. Saur, 1996), pp. 116–17.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 168–69.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 271.

34. See “Wolfgang Diewerge,” in Ernst Klee, *Das Personenlexikon zum Dritten Reich: wer war was vor und nach 1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2003), p. 111.

35. Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, vol. 2., pt. 1, pp. 168–69.

personally dictated by President Roosevelt.” The directive urged editors to bring the offending passages from Kaufman’s book to their readers attention.³⁶ In September 1941, the Propaganda Ministry published Wolfgang Diewerge’s pamphlet with the title, *The War Aim of World Plutocracy: Documentary Publication of the Book of the President of the American Peace Society, Theodore Kaufman, “Germany Must Perish.”*³⁷ The front cover collage done by the Nazi poster artist Hans Schweitzer himself, stands as one of the defining anti-Semitic visual images of the era of the war and the Holocaust. It displays a photograph of a middle-aged man wearing glasses, vest, and tie, and working at a typewriter. One presumes it is Kaufman himself. In the lower right is a photo of Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and various military leaders, perhaps singing “Onward Christian Soldiers” during their meeting off Newfoundland, at the ceremony of the signing of the Atlantic Charter. The collage depicts a key anti-Semitic trope: the Jewish brain, safely at home behind the scenes, writes the lines sung by witless non-Jewish front men. Lines from the English-language edition of the book, including the underlined phrase “Germany must perish forever from this earth!” are printed at the center and right of the image. The thirty-two page pamphlet interspersed quotations from Kaufman’s book with Diewerge’s comments, which “revealed” the book’s message concerning “the extermination of the German people including women and children and the division of Greater Germany among its neighbors.” This plan was to be carried out by Germany’s disarmament, followed by “the sterilization of all men, women and children able to procreate.”³⁸ In view of the thousands of forced sterilizations that the Nazi regime had already done and was continuing to do, this charge was a particularly grotesque case of projection onto the victims of the sins of the perpetrators.³⁹

36. “Judas satanischer Mordplan,” *Zeitschriften-Dienst*, September 5, 1941, Issue 123, no. 5283.

37. Wolfgang Diewerge, *Das Kriegsziel der Weltplutokratie: Dokumentarische Veröffentlichung zu dem Buch des Präsidenten der amerikanischen Friedensgesellschaft Theodore Nathan Kaufman, “Deutschland muß sterben”* (Berlin: Zentral Verlag der NSDAP, F. Eher Nachf., 1941).

38. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

39. On forced sterilization in Nazi Germany, see Gisela Bock, *Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1986); and Dieter Kuntz and Susan Bachrach, eds., *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2004).

Diewerge claimed that Kaufman's book was further proof that "world Jewry in New York, Moscow and London agree on demanding the complete extermination of the German people."⁴⁰ He described Kaufman as an advocate of "Jewish genocide." He had "openly uttered what world Jewry wished and hoped for: the murder of the German people."⁴¹ Germany now faced the option of "victory or death." By 1941 the Germans understood that "the international Jew" stood behind the war aims of "world plutocracy and war mongers in all the world." Yet the Germans were determined not to perish. "Who should die, the Germans or the Jews?" asked Diewerge. There were "about 20 million Jews in the world. What would happen if instead of 80 million Germans, 20 million Jews were treated according to the proposals of their racial comrade Kaufman? Then peace would be secured. For around the whole world the Jew is the one who causes trouble and who destroys peace."⁴² Goebbels wrote in the unsigned afterword that the Germans knew what "your eternal enemy and opponent intends for you. There is only one instrument against his plans for annihilation [*Ver-nichtungspläne*]: Victory! Reading this Jewish plan for murder will steel your strength and only strengthen your will for victory."⁴³

In addition to Hitler's wartime speeches mentioned above, Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels's public speeches and weekly editorials offered the core anti-Semitic narrative. His essay, "The Jews Are Guilty" (*Die Juden sind Schuld*), published in the November 16, 1941, issue of the weekly paper *Das Reich*, was one of his most important contributions to the Holocaust. In this essay, Goebbels continued with his prior assertions

40. Diewerge, *Das Kriegsziel der Weltplutokratie*, p. 9. Wolfgang Benz writes that the neo-Nazi and radical-right wing figures after 1945, including Paul Rassinier, Erich Kern, and most prominently Adolf Eichmann, referred to "the Kaufman plan" as if it were an expression of American policy. See Benz, "Judenvernichtung aus Notwehr?" pp. 623–26. In his posthumously published memoirs, Eichmann wrote that "Kaufman intended to bring about the complete extermination of our people by total sterilization. . . . If this plan was intended as a provocation, then one can only say that the Jews accomplished their goal. For it is probable that in our highest leadership circles, the Kaufman plan served as a stimulating factor for (our) own extermination plans." Rudolf Aschenauer, ed., *Ich, Adolf Eichmann: ein historischer Zeugenbericht* (Leoni am Starnberger See: Druffel-Verlag, 1980), pp. 177–78.

41. Diewerge, *Das Kriegsziel der Weltplutokratie*, p. 25.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

while at the same time setting the framework for his subsequent attacks.⁴⁴ By then, according to leading historians of Holocaust decision-making, Hitler had ordered Himmler to expand the mass shootings of Jews on the Eastern front, which had occurred during the summer and early fall of 1941, into a program of genocide against all European Jews.⁴⁵ Goebbels's essay marks the first time that a leading official of the Nazi regime publicly announced that the "extermination" (*Vernichtung*) of European Jewry was taking place. The if-then hypothetical structure of Hitler's famous prophecy gave way to an assertion of ongoing action. Three weeks before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Goebbels said that "the historical guilt of world Jewry for the outbreak and expansion of this war has been so extensively demonstrated that there's no need to waste any more words about it. They wanted their war, and now they have it."⁴⁶

The text presents an active subject, "international Jewry," on the offensive against an innocent, victimized German object. Nazi Germany would wage war on the Jews in response to the war that the Jews had launched against Germany. The Final Solution, in the Nazi ideological universe, was the culmination of a war of national self-defense, one which grew in intensity and ruthlessness in response to the war that the Jews were supposedly waging against Germany. Goebbels put it as follows:

By unleashing this war, world Jewry completely misjudged the forces at its disposal. Now it is suffering a gradual process of annihilation, which it had intended for us and which it would have unleashed against us without hesitation if it had the power to do so. It is now perishing as a result of its [i.e., world Jewry's] own law: Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth. . . . In this historical dispute, every Jew is our enemy, whether he vegetates in a Polish ghetto or scrapes out his parasitic existence in Berlin or Hamburg or blows the trumpets of war in New York or Washington. Due to their birth and race, all Jews belong to an international conspiracy against

44. Joseph Goebbels, "Die Juden sind Schuld!" in *Das Eherne Herz: Reden und Aufsätze aus den Jahren 1941/42* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, Franz Eher, 1943), p. 85.

45. Richard Breitman dates the crucial decisions to spring of 1941, while Christopher Browning argues that Hitler made them in late summer. See Breitman, *The Architect of Genocide: Himmler and the Final Solution* (New York: Knopf, 1991); and Browning, *The Path to Genocide: Essays on Launching the Final Solution* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1992).

46. Goebbels, "Die Juden sind Schuld!" p. 85.

National Socialist Germany. They wish for its defeat and annihilation and do everything in their power to help to bring it about.⁴⁷

The Jews had started the war. They were “now” suffering a “gradual process of extermination,” one which they had originally intended to inflict on Germany. Two weeks later, on December 1, 1941, Goebbels delivered a two-hour lecture to diplomats, government officials, members of the Nazi Party, Wehrmacht officers, journalists, industrialists, and members of the *Deutschen Akademie*, all assembled in the main lecture hall of the Friedrich Wilhelm University of Berlin. The speech and the full text was front page news in the *Völkischer Beobachter* and other German papers. It was soon published as a separate pamphlet with the title “The Iron Heart” (*Das Eherne Herz*).⁴⁸ Goebbels stressed that if Germany were to lose the war, her enemies were united “in the firm will that Germany must be subjugated, exterminated, killed, and wiped out.”⁴⁹ Faced with this looming catastrophe, the Germans must unite behind Hitler and the Nazi regime in order to prevent their own annihilation and extermination. In the context of Goebbels’s speech, his reference to “extermination” clearly meant murder. When he justified the German attack on the Soviet Union, he used the noun *Vernichtung* to indicate that the Soviet Union would murder masses of Germans if Hitler had not struck first. The literal meaning of the text was that the German government was now engaged in the mass murder of “the Jewish race in Europe.” It strains credulity to imagine that the university professors, high ranking military and government officials, and carefully selected journalists in attendance had failed to understand the meaning of Goebbels’s words.

The idea that the whole of the German people would be exterminated as a consequence of losing World War II remained a leitmotif of Nazi propaganda. In evoking this nightmare, Goebbels obscured the unique dimensions of the Final Solution by presenting the intent to exterminate,

47. Ibid., p. 88.

48. Joseph Goebbels, *Das Eherne Herz: Rede vor der Deutschen Akademie* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1942). On Goebbels’s pleasure with the reception of the speech, see the diary entries for December 2 and 3, 1941, in Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, vol. 2, pt. 2, pp. 416, 420. See also “Dr. Goebbels vor der Deutschen Akademie, ‘Wir können, müssen und werden siegen,’” *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, December 2, 1941.

49. Goebbels, *Das Eherne Herz: Rede vor der Deutschen Akademie*, p. 41. The German reads as follows: “in dem festen Willen und Entschluss daß Deutschland, gelingt es noch einmal, uns niederzuwerfen, vernichtet, ausgerottet und ausgelöscht werden muß.”

annihilate, and wipe out the enemy as a war aim of Germany's adversaries. In this sense, the denial of the uniqueness of the Final Solution by pointing to the actions of others—a theme that became controversial in West Germany in the 1980s—was itself a major theme of the propaganda. It was also central to Goebbels's most famous speech of the war, the three-hour oration "Do You Want Total War," delivered in the Berlin Sport Palace on February 2, 1943, and broadcast over German radio.⁵⁰ In the wake of the German defeat in Stalingrad, Goebbels raised the threat posed by the Soviet Union to a Europe that had been abandoned by England and the United States. From an early point, he reminded the faithful, the Nazis had pointed out that "the connection between international plutocracy and international Bolshevism was not a contradiction. Rather it had a deep and causal meaning. The superficially civilized Jewry of Western Europe and the Jewry of the Eastern ghettos have already grasped hands over our country. That is why Europe is in danger."⁵¹ The war was not only one to save European or Western civilization from the Jewish Bolshevik threat. It was now a war for survival. "Everyone knows that if we lose this war, we would all be exterminated," Goebbels claimed.⁵² Faced with the threat of total annihilation, the Germans had to respond with total war.

Stark fear of extinction remained an enduring theme of the Nazi narrative until the end. Goebbels's "The War and the Jews" (*Der Krieg und die Juden*), published in *Das Reich* of May 9, 1943, appeared in the midst of the most intense anti-Semitic propaganda offensive of the war years, one which lasted from March to August 1943.⁵³ He expressed exasperation and surprise that there were people who were "still too naïve" to understand what the war was about and what role the Jewish question played in it. The "Jewish race" and its "helpers" were waging war against "Aryan humanity as well as against Western culture and civilization." The Jews "wanted this war." They were its instigators and "agitators working behind those exponents standing in the foreground of the enemy war leadership." They developed "programs for annihilation and extermination aimed at the axis powers. It is from their [i.e., the Jews'] ranks that

50. Joseph Goebbels, *Reden, 1939–1945*, vol. 2 (Munich: Wilhelm Heyne Verlag, 1972), pp. 172–208.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 181.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 195.

53. Joseph Goebbels, "Der Krieg und die Juden," in *Der Steile Aufstieg: Reden und Aufsätze aus den Jahren 1942/43* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, Franz Eher, 1944), pp. 263–70.

the bloodthirsty, enraged, and revenge-seeking agitators and political wild men in England and the United States and the terrorist GPU commissars in the Soviet Union are recruited. Hence, they form the glue that holds the enemy coalition together.”⁵⁴ The “Old Testament threats of revenge with which they fill their newspapers and radio broadcasts” were not “mere political literature. If they had the power to do so, they would fulfill these desires down to the last point.” The Jews, the “glue” that held the enemy coalition together, had started a “race war,” which had “no other goal but the annihilation and extermination of our people. We stand now as the only barrier against Jewry on its path to world domination. If the Axis powers were to lose this struggle, then the dam that could save Europe from the Jewish-Bolshevik danger would no longer exist.”⁵⁵ Either Germany and its allies would win the war, or “countless millions of people in our own and other European countries... would be delivered without defense to the hatred and will for extermination [*Vernichtungswillen*] of this devilish race, if we would become weak and fail in the end in this battle.”⁵⁶ Thus in May 1943, he assured his thousands of readers and millions of listeners that

we are moving ahead. The fulfillment of the Führer’s prophecy, about which world Jewry laughed in 1939 when he made it, stands at the end of our course of action. Even in Germany, the Jews laughed when we stood up for the first time against them. Among them laughter is now a thing of the past. They chose to wage war against us. But Jewry now understands that the war has become a war against them. When Jewry conceived of its plan for the total extermination of the German people, it thereby wrote its own death sentence. In this instance as in others, world history will also be a world court.⁵⁷

“The War and the Jews” repeated the essential projection mechanism of Nazi propaganda: the Jews launched a war to exterminate the Germans, but instead, the Germans turned the tables and, fulfilling Hitler’s prophecies, were now exterminating the Jews.

In these and many other texts, Goebbels combined the big lies—that is, that there was something called international Jewry, which was direct-

54. Ibid., pp. 263–64.

55. Ibid., p. 264.

56. Ibid., pp. 269–70.

57. Ibid., p. 270.

ing a conspiracy against Germany; that Germany had not started the war; and that the allies were lackeys of an unseen but all-powerful international conspiracy—with the blunt and truthful assertion that Nazi Germany was at that time murdering the Jews of Europe. He presented this deed as an act of revenge and retaliation for the misfortunes that the Jews had previously visited, and were then allegedly still visiting, upon Germany. With every American and British bombing raid and every barrage from Soviet artillery and air forces, the Nazi hard core became ever more convinced that “Jewry” was indeed seeking to exterminate the Germans. The longer the war continued, the more they hated the Jews and wanted to kill them for what they were presumably doing to the Germans. The Nazi Party and regime were indeed riven with personal rivalries and bureaucratic turf battles; yet despite their conflicts, Goebbels, Dietrich, the Nazi Party ideologist Alfred Rosenberg, and the editors of the *Völkischer Beobachter* all managed to “work toward the Führer” (in Ian Keshaw’s phrase) and reinforce the key messages regarding the Jews and the war. By 1939, many of the then five million members of the Nazi Party were busily handing out leaflets, organizing meetings, putting up weekly wall newspapers, and addressing thousands of meetings. The evidence at our disposal allows us to say far more about what the Nazi regime told the German people than about how its messages were received. Much evidence about the latter is anecdotal and must be used with caution when making generalizations about popular sentiment. What we do know for sure is that despite setbacks in the war, a determined minority of the German population remained deeply convinced of the truth of the totalitarian narrative and that this conviction contributed to a fanatical determination to fight to the finish. Indeed, for the Nazis, the Allied victory in the Second World War reinforced their view that “Jewry” was indeed the all-powerful entity that they claimed it was.

Before and during World War II, the Nazi regime made an intensive effort to spread the message of radical anti-Semitism to the Arab and Islamic world. In the wake of the attacks of September 11, 2001, Paul Berman in the United States, Matthias Küntzel in Germany, and Kanan Makiya in Iraq have raised the issue of the emergence of totalitarianism and radical anti-Semitism in an Arab and Islamic context.⁵⁸ While scholars have examined the impact of Nazi Germany on the Middle East

58. Samir al-Khalil, *The Republic of Fear: The Inside Story of Saddam Hussein’s Iraq* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1989); Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberalism*

from within the military and diplomatic context of World War II, there is less research into the aftereffects of Nazi ideology in the region.⁵⁹ While much work remains to be done on Nazi propaganda aimed at the Arab and Islamic world, a substantial body of material is available from which to draw sound conclusions. First, Nazi propaganda was consistently hostile to the Zionist project and supportive of Arab and Islamist opposition to the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. And second, Nazi propaganda aimed at the Arab and Islamic world should be understood in the context of its view that there was an international Jewish conspiracy seeking to dominate the globe and exterminate Germany and the Germans. Opposition to the establishment of a Jewish state flowed logically from the belief that it would constitute a Middle Eastern branch of a global political endeavor.

In *Mein Kampf* Hitler rejected the “lie” that Zionism was primarily a movement focused only on a homeland for the Jews in Palestine:

For while the Zionists try to make the rest of the world believe that the national consciousness of the Jew finds its satisfaction in the creation of a Palestinian state, the Jews again slyly dupe the dumb *Goyim*. It doesn't even enter their heads to build up a Jewish state in Palestine for the purpose of living there; all they want is a central organization for their international world swindle, endowed with its sovereign right and removed from the intervention of other states: a haven for convicted scoundrels and a university for budding crooks.⁶⁰

For Hitler and later the Nazi regime, Jewish immigration to Palestine could never be part of a “solution,” final or otherwise, to “the Jewish question” in Europe. Under the terms of the Transfer (Haavara) agreement, the regime did foster limited Jewish emigration to Palestine in the 1930s, but this program was never intended to support the establishment of a Jewish state.⁶¹

One leading Nazi critic of Zionism, the Nazi Party ideologist Alfred Rosenberg, doubted that the Jews were capable of statecraft.⁶² His key text

(New York: Norton, 2003); Matthias Küntzel, *Djihad und Judenhaß: Über den neuen anti-jüdischen Krieg* (Freiburg: ça ira Verlag, 2003).

59. On the war in the Middle East, see Lukasz Hirszowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).

60. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, pp. 324–25.

61. On this topic, see the writings of Francis R. Nicosia, cited earlier in note 13.

62. Alfred Rosenberg, *Schriften aus den Jahren 1917–1921* (Munich: Hoheneichen Verlag, 1943). See in particular his discussions of the Jews and the Freemasons, Zionism,

on the subject was *Der staatsfeindliche Zionismus* [*Zionism: Hostile to the State*], which he published in 1921 and which the main Nazi publishing house published again in 1938.⁶³ Zionism, he wrote, was, “the powerless effort of an incapable people to engage in productive activity.”⁶⁴ However, with the convergence of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism during the Second World War, Hitler’s warnings in *Mein Kampf* regarding the danger of a Jewish state displaced Rosenberg’s contemptuous dismissal. A flood of Nazi pamphlets and books warned of the Zionist danger.⁶⁵ Giselher Wirsing’s *Engländer, Juden, Araber in Palästina* [*The English, Jews, and Arabs in Palestine*], also published in 1939 (in four editions and 10,000 copies), asserted that the Zionist goal in Palestine was “the establishment of a Vatican of world Jewry.”⁶⁶

Perhaps the most influential of the Nazi works to blend anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism was Wolf Meyer-Christian’s *Die englisch-jüdische Allianz* [*The English-Jewish Alliance*].⁶⁷ The work offered an anti-Semitic account of English history and of “the Jewification [*die Verjudung*] of the English people.” Its decisive cause lay in “Puritanism, the specific English form of Christianity,” which created a “similarity of both peoples consisting in the capitalist way of thinking and the claim to world domination,” in a long line from Oliver Cromwell to Winston Churchill and the British support for the “arming of the Jews and expulsion of the Arabs.”⁶⁸ National Socialism, he noted, had opposed the creation of a Jewish state precisely because “the Jewish intentions clearly are not aimed at a state which can incorporate all of Jewry or even its essential part. Even the

and Jewish world rule and its consequences. See also the Nazi publication of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* with Rosenberg’s forward and introduction: Rosenberg, *Die Protokolle der Weissen von Zion und die jüdische Weltpolitik* (Munich: Deutscher Volksverlag, 1933). By this fourth edition, the press had already published 25,000 copies.

63. Alfred Rosenberg, *Der staatsfeindliche Zionismus* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, Franz Eher, 1938).

64. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

65. Herman Erich Seifert [Heinrich Hest], *Weltjuda ohne Maske*, vol. 2, *Palästina: Judenstaat? England als Handlanger des Weltjudentums* (Berlin: J. Kasper and Co., 1939); and Seifert, *Der Aufbruch in der arabischen Welt* (Berlin: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, Franz Eher, 1941).

66. Giselher Wirsing, *Engländer, Juden, Araber in Palästina* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs Verlag, 1939).

67. Wolf Meyer-Christian, *Die englisch-jüdische Allianz: Werden und Wirken der kapitalistischen Weltherrschaft*, 3rd ed. (Berlin-Leipzig: Nibelungen-Verlag, 1942). By the time of this edition, 20,000 copies had been printed.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

Jewish leadership appears to understand that this goal is both unrealizable and also undesirable. This is so because the majority of the assimilated, less religious Jews will never move to Palestine and would not give up their place in Europe should a Jewish state be established.” A Jewish state, claimed Meyer-Christian, would be “nothing other than an international power center over non-Jewish peoples, a state whose citizens did not live within its borders but rather were all over the world.”⁶⁹

A Jewish state would be “only a key base for world Jewry,” which would enjoy citizenship in this state without giving up citizenship rights in Europe and the United States. There would be no “abandonment of the internationality of Jewry” or of the “positions of power it had gained in the past fifty years.” Hence such a state “would not in any way offer a solution to the Jewish question. It would do just the opposite. Each of the 17 million Jews in the world would retain the positions they conquered in England, France or America,” both in and out of government.⁷⁰ Meyer-Christian took Chaim Weizmann’s statement in September 1939 that Jews stood on the side of Britain, as well as British cabinet minister Duff Cooper’s speech in Washington, D. C., on January 6, 1940, regarding an English turn in favor of the Jews in Palestine, as further evidence of the “English-Jewish alliance.” The more Jewish leaders and organizations expressed support for Britain—and then later for the United States—the more Meyer-Christian would be confirmed in his view that the “English war is a Jewish war.”

Nazi propaganda was also aimed directly at the Arab and Islamic world. After German defeats in North Africa in 1942, while Germany was struggling to sustain its positions in the Middle East, one press directive called on editors to show deeper understanding for “the Islamic world as a cultural factor.”⁷¹ The service warned against “the danger” of underestimating the Orient’s cultural contributions. “Superficial discussions,” due to “linguistic similarities between Arabs and Jews,” had led to a conflation of the two. Much of the discussion of Islam in Germany was out of date or inspired by church polemics. The editors must “strengthen and deepen existing [i.e., Nazi] sympathies in the Islamic world. We must draw this great cultural power, which in its essence is sharply anti-Bolshevik and

69. Ibid., p. 141.

70. Ibid., pp. 142–5.

71. “Die islamische Welt als Kulturfaktor,” *Zeitschriften-Dienst*, September 11, 1942, Issue 175/44, no. 7514, p. 2.

anti-Jewish, closer to us. Through a friendly but not pandering (flattery) presentation, we must convince the Muslims of the world that they have no better friend than the Germans. In the treatment of this theme, the words semitism and antisemitism must be avoided.”⁷²

The Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin el-Husseini, played a major role in the translation of Nazi ideology into Arabic and Islamic idioms, which were used in shortwave radio broadcasts originating in Berlin and beamed to the Middle East. On March 20, 1943, the *Völkischer Beobachter* read “Appeal of the Grand Mufti against the deadly enemies of Islam, Arabs will fight for their freedom on the side of the Axis.” It reported on a lecture the previous evening delivered by the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem.⁷³ As Klaus Gensicke has documented in *Der Mufti von Jerusalem, Amin el-Husseini und die Nationalsozialisten*, the mutual bonds between the Nazis and the Grand Mufti began in 1937 and remained firm throughout the period of World War II and the Holocaust. These bonds rested on a coalescence of anti-Semitic ideology with a shared antagonism to Britain and to Jewish emigration to Palestine.⁷⁴ The *Völkischer Beobachter* story sympathetically described his appeal to the Islamic and Arab world and its fight against “occupation and cruelties by enemy oppressors.” Husseini said it was “the duty of all Muslims to lead and conduct the fight against the enemy by all means. . . . With the help of the Jews, the enemies of Islam envisage the complete domination of the Holy Lands” in order to establish a base for exploiting the neighboring Arab countries.⁷⁵ “Arabs and Muslims had the duty to defeat Jewish greed and insatiability,” he claimed. The *Völkischer Beobachter* described the Grand Mufti as “one of the great personalities of the Islamic world who had led the struggle of the Palestinian Arabs against onrushing Jewry.” Palestine had thus become “a

72. Ibid.

73. “Aufruf des Großmufti gegen die Todfeinde des Islams, Araber werden für ihre Freiheit an der Seite der Achse kämpfen,” *Völkischer Beobachter*, March 20, 1943. The Nazi regime published a sympathetic book about the Grand Mufti. See Kurt Fischer-Weth, *Amin Al-Husseini: Grossmufti von Palästina* (Berlin-Friedenau: Walter Titz Verlag, 1943).

74. Klaus Gensicke, *Der Mufti von Jerusalem, Amin el-Husseini, und die Nationalsozialisten* (Frankfurt/Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1988). On contact beginning in 1937, see pp. 45–55. For a very early and quite detailed account of Husseini’s cooperation with the Nazis, as well as criticism of the failure to bring him to justice, see Simon Wiesenthal, *Großmufti: Großagent der Achse* (Salzburg-Vienna: Ried Verlag, 1946).

75. “Aufruf des Großmufti gegen die Todfeinde des Islams,” *Völkischer Beobachter*, March 20, 1943.

symbol of the Arab freedom struggle” against “British betrayal” and “the Atlantic swindle.”⁷⁶

On December 18, 1942, Husseini gave a speech at the opening of the Islamic Institute in Berlin, an event attended by Goebbels himself. The speech had been shown to and approved by von Ribbentrop.⁷⁷ Before the event Husseini wrote to Hitler to express his “friendship and sympathy to your excellency and to the German people. We are firmly convinced of the close cooperation between the millions of Mohammedens (Muslims) in the world, and Germany and its allies in the Three Power Pact, which is directed against the common enemies, Jews, Bolshevik, and Anglo-Saxons and which, with God’s help, will lead to a victorious outcome of this war for the Axis powers. This victory will bring happiness and good fortune to the Axis powers, the Muslims, and all of humanity.”⁷⁸

Husseini met the Nazis on the common ground of shared enemies and a shared ideology of radical anti-Semitism.⁷⁹ The war was in fact “a Jewish war.” In England and the United States, “only Jewish influence is dominant. It’s the same Jewish influence that stands behind godless Communism. . . . The Muslim’s mortal enemies are the Jews and their allied English, Americans, and Bolsheviks. Their British allies, for example, who are directed by world Jewry and its capital, and whose history is filled with antagonism to the Muslims, today continue their persecution and oppression of Muslims in all countries.” The Allied attacks in North Africa demonstrated that the Jews, Americans, English, and Bolsheviks were the “irreconcilable enemy of Islam.” Yet this war, “unleashed by world Jewry,” offered Muslims their best opportunity to “free themselves from these instances of persecution and oppression.”⁸⁰

The Grand Mufti’s cooperation with the Nazis extended beyond making speeches. He urged the Foreign Ministry as well as Adolf Eichmann not to allow Jews from Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary to escape to Palestine, advising instead that they be sent to Poland. He worked with Himmler to establish an SS division of Muslims from Bosnia, appealed

76. Ibid.

77. Gensicke, *Der Mufti von Jerusalem*, pp. 134–39.

78. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 155.

79. Amin al-Husseini, “Nr. 55: Rede zur Eröffnung des Islamischen Zentral-Instituts in Berlin, 18.12.1942,” in Gerhard Höpp, *Mufti-Papier. Briefe, Memoranden, Reden und Aufrufe Amin al-Husainis aus dem Exil, 1940–1945* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2001), pp. 123–26.

80. Ibid., pp. 125–26.

to the Germans to bomb Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, and received financial support from the Nazi regime in these years.

On June 10, 1943, he wrote to Ribbentrop that the Jews wished to go to Palestine as part of a plan to dominate the world and were thus “a dangerous influence for the outcome of the war.”⁸¹ In this way he made a direct contribution to the Holocaust. On July 27, 1944, he urged Himmler “to do what was necessary to prevent the wandering of Jews to Palestine.” Doing so would be a “practical example of the natural allied and friendly stance of Germany to Arabs and Muslims.”⁸² Husseini cooperated with Himmler to establish an SS division of Bosnian Muslim volunteers.⁸³ In a speech to officers and Imams associated with the Bosnian SS division, Husseini stressed that “regarding fighting Jewry, Islam and National Socialism have moved very close to one another.” In the Second World War, “a victory for the allies would constitute a victory for Jewry and thus a great danger for the Muslims and for Islam in general. . . . Cooperation of 400 million Muslims with their real friends, the Germans, can have a great influence on the war. It is very useful for both.”⁸⁴ Conversely, for Husseini, Germany’s defeat was also a defeat for his version of the Arab and Islamic world.

At the end of World War II in Europe, Hitler and Goebbels believed that “world Jewry” was the victor. For Husseini and those who followed him after the war, such a view received even stronger confirmation when the state of Israel was founded. Established with support from “Jewish Bolsheviks” in Moscow, the “Jewish imperialists” in Washington, and the grudging acquiescence of the now weakened British Empire, the Jewish state was still one more piece of evidence to support Husseini’s argument that world Jewry had gained yet another victory. Now it was going to “build bridges” to Moscow, and, when those were broken, to New York and Washington. The Americans came to the region, eventually became Israel’s ally, and then helped to prevent the Arab states from destroying Israel in successive wars. From the perspective of a paranoid construct that spoke of a Jewish plan for world domination, the preeminence of the

81. On these contacts and activities, see Gensicke, *Der Mufti von Jerusalem*, pp. 149–212, 225–251. On the letter to Ribbentrop, see pp. 160–61.

82. Amin al-Husseini, “Nr. 101: An Himmler, 27.7.1944,” in Höpp, ed., *Mufti-Papiere*, p. 216.

83. On the Bosnian and Muslim SS volunteer division, see Gensicke, *Der Mufti von Jerusalem*, pp. 167–212.

84. Amin al-Husseini, “Nr. 104: Rede vor den Imamen der bosnischen SS-Division, 4.10.1944,” in Höpp, ed., *Mufti-Papiere*, pp. 224–25.

United States after the end of the Cold War in 1989–90 and the continued existence of Israel were yet further evidence that the international Jewish conspiracy had emerged victorious once again.

The history of the diffusion and aftereffects of Nazi ideology in the Middle East and the Islamic world has yet to be written. Recognizing that a fundamentalist revolt combined with modern technology in the European totalitarianism of the 1930s and 1940s, we now need to think more about the variations of “reactionary modernism” that emerged in the Arab and Islamic world in the postwar era, and to assess what is old and what is new in the terrorism of both Islamic fundamentalism and the former Baath dictatorship in Iraq.⁸⁵ Berman, Küntzel, and Mikaya have stimulated the intellectual project of thinking through the similarities and differences between Europe’s mid-twentieth-century totalitarian era and the secular and religious variants of totalitarianism in the Middle Eastern and Islamic world. There is more work to be done that explores the issues they have raised.

Such a project, however, extends beyond the evidence of this essay. It suffices to note here that the broader analysis of the anti-Semitic propaganda of the Nazi regime to which this essay refers brings with it a reassessment of the connection between totalitarianism and its consequences. Centuries old anti-Semitism first assumed genocidal dimensions when connected to a paranoid conspiracy theory about the alleged role of the Jews as the initiators and driving forces of World War II. It was this attack on the Jewish enemy that served as the primary legitimation for mass murder in Nazi Germany. The attack came in the form of public narratives that were noteworthy both for their blunt and frank assertions about future and then ongoing mass murder, as well as for the complete absence of any factual details about precisely what was taking place. Nazi propaganda comprised the most extraordinary, not ordinary or banal, public speech, yet it was inserted into the more ordinary and normalizing discourse of attack and justified retaliation in wartime. In the forms of the suicide bomber and the paranoia about a world Jewish conspiracy, these totalitarian legacies have become part of contemporary history as well. Despite differences of history, culture, and language, the totalitarian narrative of the Nazi regime’s

85. Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1984); and Herf, “What is old and what is new in the terrorism of Islamic fundamentalism,” *Partisan Review* 69, no. 1 (Winter 2002), pp. 25–32.

propaganda has found striking parallels in the stories told by the former Baathist regime in Iraq and in the continuing totalitarian narratives offered by radical Islamists and the terrorism that they inspire. Tragically, the concept of totalitarianism is again a category that describes ideas, movements, and regimes of contemporary history.