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# The Secret Weapons of World War II: An Analysis of Hitler's Chemical Weapons Policy

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CLAREMONT McKENNA COLLEGE

The Secret Weapons of World War II:  
An Analysis of Hitler's Chemical Weapons Policy

SUBMITTED TO

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AND

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BY

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for

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I would like to dedicate this senior thesis to my parents, Raymond and Tiare Ono, for their steadfast love and countless sacrifices so that I could receive the best education possible.

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## INTRODUCTION

Adolf Hitler almost won World War II. Hitler – the Bohemian corporal, the anti-Semite, the Megalomaniac – almost conquered Europe. By 1941, the British remained alone in the war against the Axis powers.<sup>1</sup> The British military most likely would not have defeated the Germans single-handedly. Likewise, the German invasion of the Soviet Union began with a string of military successes. However, the American entry into the war in December 1941 and Hitler's questionable decisions in Operation Barbarossa turned the tide of the war in favor of the Allies. By 1942, the Allies put the *Wehrmacht* on the defensive. In November 1942, General Bernard Montgomery and the British tank division broke the joint German and Italian line at El Alamein, Egypt.<sup>2</sup> In July 1943, British and American troops crossed the Mediterranean and successfully landed in Sicily.<sup>3</sup> Despite months of staunch German resistance, the Allied forces entered Rome on June 4, 1944, ushering in the collapse of Fascist Italy.<sup>4</sup>

On the Eastern Front, Hitler's forces in Ukraine marched on Moscow during the summer of 1942.<sup>5</sup> In July, Hitler split his forces, sending troops south to capture Stalingrad and disrupt the Soviet Union's oil resources.<sup>6</sup> By September, Hitler's forces entered Stalingrad.<sup>7</sup> However, while the *Wehrmacht* fought building to building for control of Stalingrad, Soviet reinforcements surrounded the city. In November, the Red Army closed the vice around Stalingrad and trapped the Sixth Army within the city.

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon Wright, *The Ordeal of Total War* (Harper Collins: 1968), 167.

<sup>2</sup> Wright, *Total War*, 182.

<sup>3</sup> Wright, *Total War*, 190.

<sup>4</sup> Wright, *Total War*, 193.

<sup>5</sup> Wright, *Total War*, 187.

<sup>6</sup> Wright, *Total War*, 187.

<sup>7</sup> Wright, *Total War*, 187.

Enormous losses forced General Friedrich von Paulus to defy Hitler's orders and surrender in February 1943. Finally, on June 6, 1944, the British and Americans opened the Western Front with their successful landing in Normandy.

Indeed, the Nazi Germany's situation became desperate as the Allies closed in on Berlin. Hitler truly believed that he needed to fulfill his messianic mission and subjugate Europe for the ascendancy of the "Aryan" race. In the final stages of the war, the German dictator did not hesitate to take risks in a last ditch effort to check the Allied advance. For example, in January 1945, Hitler launched the surprise Ardennes Offensive in an attempt to capture Antwerp, a major Allied supply port.<sup>8</sup> Limited success came at the expense of one hundred thousand men. The German dictator also considered organizing "suicide squads" similar to that of Japanese kamikaze pilots.<sup>9</sup> Hitler allocated a lot of resources to his "secret weapons" projects, among them chemical weapons. He also possessed the technology to disperse his poison gas over London with V-2 rockets. Based on his wartime decisions, the absence of chemical warfare remains a puzzle.

Clearly, morality did not prevent Hitler from using the asphyxiating gas Zyklon-B in the chambers of Auschwitz, Treblinka, and other killing centers. Likewise, on the battlefield, the German dictator conducted the war and perpetrated terror without any limits. For example, Hitler's blitzkrieg tactics in Poland in September 1939 pulverized Polish defenses and, more significantly, broke down the enemy's will to resist.<sup>10</sup> The German Ju-87 Stuka dive-bomber had sirens attached its the wings and on the tails of its

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<sup>8</sup> Wright, *Total War*, 201.

<sup>9</sup> Speer, *Third Reich*, 412.

<sup>10</sup> Oscar Pinkus, *The War Aims and Strategies of Adolf Hitler* (MacFarland & Co, Inc.: 2005), 73.

bombs.<sup>11</sup> The bomber's plunge made shrieks designed to cause fear, panic, and confusion.<sup>12</sup> During the blitzkrieg of Poland, the *Luftwaffe* bombed towns, villages, and refugee columns.<sup>13</sup> The German air force lay waste to Warsaw with five days of indiscriminate bombing, specifically targeting residential areas, and resulted in the deaths of 40,000 Polish civilians.<sup>14</sup>

Hitler also issued the *Kommissarbefehl* ("commissar order") in March 1941, which denied any Communist officials in the military or civil administration prisoner of war (POW) status and ordered their immediate execution.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the "Barbarossa Decree" approved collective reprisal against entire villages.<sup>16</sup> Hitler also emphasized the brutalization of Russian POWs. By war's end, the *Wehrmacht* captured 5.73 million Russian soldiers.<sup>17</sup> Once captured, thousands were executed on the spot.<sup>18</sup> German soldiers did not tend to the wounded and force-marched hundreds of thousands of POWs for weeks without food, water, or rest.<sup>19</sup> Over the course of the war, 3.5 millions Russian POWs perished from execution, starvation, thirst, or sickness.<sup>20</sup> Russian soldiers were subject to brandings and sent to clear minefields. During the Soviet westward advance, Russian POWs were gassed to prevent them from returning to the Red Army.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Pinkus, *War Aims*, 74.

<sup>12</sup> Pinkus, *War Aims*, 74.

<sup>13</sup> Pinkus, *War Aims*, 74.

<sup>14</sup> Pinkus, *War Aims*, 75.

<sup>15</sup> Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (Harper Collins: 1992), 22.

<sup>16</sup> Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 22.

<sup>17</sup> Pinkus, *War Aims*, 271.

<sup>18</sup> Pinkus, *War Aims*, 271.

<sup>19</sup> Pinkus, *War Aims*, 272.

<sup>20</sup> Pinkus, *War Aims*, 274.

<sup>21</sup> Pinkus, *War Aims*, 274.

World War II can be viewed in three separate phases: 1939-1941, 1942-1943, and 1944-1945. During the first phase of the war, Hitler did not require chemical weapons. He was winning and almost conquered Europe if not for his failure to invade Britain and his stubborn desire to subjugate the Soviet Union. However, during the second phase, the war took a decisive turn against the Third Reich. Then, during the third phase of the war, desperation set in as the Allies closed in around Berlin. Hitler began to mentally unravel in January 1945 and became suicidal. His scorched-earth policies reflected these trends. Hitler continued to assert near the end of the war that “we will not capitulate [...] we can go down, but we’ll take the world with us.”<sup>22</sup> Armaments Minister Albert Speer even recognized that Hitler grew “more and more ruthlessly determined to bring on total catastrophe.”<sup>23</sup> Clearly, Hitler refused to surrender and was determined to fight down to the last German standing. Judging by Hitler’s conduct of the war and his mental state, Hitler should have deployed chemical weapons at some point, especially during the third phase of the war. However, the German dictator did not initiate chemical warfare.

Ultimately, Hitler intended to deploy his chemical weapons during World War II. However, two men, in particular, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and architect turned Armaments Minister Albert Speer, thwarted Hitler’s designs. In May 1942, Churchill threatened mass retaliation against Germany if Hitler initiated chemical warfare against the Soviet Union on the Eastern Front. In the spring of 1945, Speer defied Hitler’s direct orders and challenged Hitler’s suicidal policies. This thesis will explore and discuss Hitler’s worldview and policies; Churchill’s threats of mass retaliation; and

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<sup>22</sup> Pinkus, *War Aims*, 471.

<sup>23</sup> Speer, *Third Reich*, 401.



Speer's acts of defiance. Many questions surrounding the use of chemical weapons during World War II still exist. This analysis will fill the gaps in the historical narrative, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of Hitler's policies during World War II.

## CHAPTER ONE HITLER'S WORLDVIEW

### Introduction

Before analyzing Hitler's chemical weapons policies and decision-making process during World War II, the reader must possess a more nuanced understanding of the man, his worldview, and his goals. Therefore, this chapter addresses the essential questions surrounding Hitler's political persona and agenda. It will also provide the reader with an in-depth knowledge of Hitler's philosophical, historical, and pseudo-scientific justifications for the atrocities subsequently committed by the Nazi regime. Tracing Hitler's life, from his childhood through World War II, this chapter examines the development of his beliefs and his influence on the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP), on the country as a whole, and on international relations leading to World War II. The evils that Hitler and the Nazi regime perpetrated were inexcusable and to a certain extent, incomprehensible. However, in many ways, Hitler's worldview was not an anomaly, but rather a product of an era of turmoil. He merely possessed the political acumen to translate his ideals and goals into reality. Hitler worshipped Germany and idealized the "Aryan" race, and although one must approach *Mein Kampf*, the primary source of material for this chapter, with certain skepticism since the work was propagandistic, one can neither deny Hitler's unceasing passion for the advancement and security of the German nation, nor the vehemence of his hatred of the people he considered undesirable. Hitler was a complicated individual capable of sanctioning the perpetration of terrible crimes against humanity. He ordered the use of chemical

weapons against civilian populations and POWs. Therefore, the question remains as to why Hitler did not initiate chemical warfare.

### Hitler in his Youth

Born on the cusp of modernity, Adolf Hitler entered a world that changed more in the last twenty years than in the previous two thousand. The fin de siècle period witnessed the rise of the modern west with combustion engines, industry, science, and chemicals. Hitler's generation was the first generation able to use the force of science and industry in warfare. His time and experiences in Austria laid the foundation for his radical political, social, and racial worldviews. Hitler was born in Linz, Austria on April 20, 1889. Hitler struggled in his schooling, but developed a talent for drawing.<sup>24</sup> His father enjoyed a successful career as a customs agent in the civil service and expected Hitler to follow in his footsteps.<sup>25</sup> Hitler had no desire to join the civil service, but instead longed for a career in painting.<sup>26</sup> Following his father's death in 1903, Hitler's mother allowed Hitler to move to Vienna in 1905 to explore his artistic ambitions. In Vienna, Hitler failed the exam to the Academy of Fine Arts twice, first in 1907 and then in 1908. Hitler's disappointment in his failure as an artist remained with him for the rest of his life.<sup>27</sup> Hitler resorted to a "bohemian" lifestyle in Vienna, selling watercolors of landmarks and working at odd jobs. In *Mein Kampf*, he often describes the different phases of his life as an eternal struggle. Hitler depicts his mean living in Vienna as his

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<sup>24</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris* (W.W. Norton & Company: 1998), 10.

<sup>25</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Stackpole Sons: 1939), 23.

<sup>26</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 24.

<sup>27</sup> Kershaw, *Hubris*, 39.

first real struggle, claiming that these experiences provided him with an iron will that would serve him in the future.<sup>28</sup> The question remains as to whether or not Hitler was a confirmed anti-Semite prior to the years spent in Vienna. Nevertheless, *Mein Kampf* contains Hitler's transformative stance against the Jewish population of Europe. Hitler claimed that he did hold negative feelings towards Jews prior to his time in Vienna. However, his exposure to Marxism, Austrian Social Democracy, and the press in Vienna opened his eyes to the "danger" that Jews posed as the "corrupter of the German people."<sup>29</sup>

Hitler considered the Social Democrats a "pestilence masquerading as social virtue and love of one's neighbors."<sup>30</sup> In one of his anecdotes, Hitler illustrates his initial contact with Social Democrats during one of his temporary construction jobs. When Hitler confronted these workers with what he considered logical and rational arguments that repudiated their opinions, the workers responded with threats of violence instead of well-reasoned rebuttals of their own.<sup>31</sup> Hitler thus concluded that Social Democrats did not listen to reason or logical arguments that contradicted their beliefs, but rather simply argued for better or worse the force-fed propaganda.<sup>32</sup> Individuals could hold reasonable views, but in masses, Hitler observed, people lost all reason – an important lesson that Hitler took into his future political career.<sup>33</sup> Following this initial exposure to the Social Democrats, Hitler turned his attention to the party's press and the propaganda. Hitler

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<sup>28</sup> Eberhard Jäckel, Hitler's *Weltanschauung* (Wesleyan University Press: 1972), 13.

<sup>29</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 71.

<sup>30</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 50.

<sup>31</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 72.

<sup>32</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 72.

<sup>33</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 70.

described this propaganda as “intellectual terrorism.”<sup>34</sup> The press bombarded the proletariat with “lies” and took advantage of the weak-minded, uneducated masses.<sup>35</sup> The Social Democrats wanted to keep the working class down and to use them as tools to further their own political ends.<sup>36</sup> Although Hitler condemned the content of Social Democratic propaganda, he also learned effective techniques from their overall success. Hitler decried this class warfare as it distracted from the priority of ethnic solidarity.<sup>37</sup> The Social Democrats sought coalitions with other ethnic political parties and did not hold the Fatherland in the same reverence as Hitler.<sup>38</sup>

Much of the first volume of *Mein Kampf* involves Hitler’s discovery of his version of truth. Hitler attempted to find the linkages between Social Democrats, Marxism, and Judaism. According to historian Ian Kershaw, Hitler “formed his newly found hatred into a conspiracy theory.”<sup>39</sup> Thus, the “recognition” of the perceived Jewish threat fed into his revulsion of the anti-nationalism of the Social Democrats. Hitler observed a cycle of unemployment that led men to convert into tools for Marxists and Social Democrats.<sup>40</sup> The weakening of the economy forced men into unemployment. They found employment only to again lose their jobs, generating a general sense of despair and hopelessness at achieving success within the current state of affairs. The collapse of self-will resulted in the susceptibility of the proletariat to Marxist ideology. Furthermore, universities under the negative influence of Jewish intellectuals did not

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<sup>34</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 54.

<sup>35</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 54.

<sup>36</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 60.

<sup>37</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 60.

<sup>38</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 51.

<sup>39</sup> Kershaw, *Hubris*, 61.

<sup>40</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 35.

teach Marxism, therefore people could not develop a suitable defense against its dangers.<sup>41</sup> Hitler claimed that the leaders of the Social Democratic Party, and thus the progenitors of Marxist ideologies, were all Jewish.<sup>42</sup> Marxist ideologies advocated the collapse of modern society. According to Hitler, men created civilization, and without the strength of individual self-preservation, civilization would collapse. Hitler theorized, as Marxism thrived on the backs of the defeated proletariat, the spread of Marxism ushered the end of civilization.

Because Hitler equated Marxism and the activities of the Social Democrats as the machinations of Jews, Hitler determined that Jews ultimately sought the collapse of civilization and the destruction of humanity.<sup>43</sup> In the words of Kershaw, Hitler often connected Jews with a disease capable of spreading into any societal institution.<sup>44</sup> Jews controlled art, the theater, the press, and all other mediums of culture and propaganda.<sup>45</sup> Through his experience interacting with Social Democrats and consuming their propaganda, Hitler drew startling conclusions. The Jews sought the conquest and domination of the world by creating chaos and manipulating politics and the economy to serve their needs.<sup>46</sup> Hitler actively struggled to challenge the Jewish threat at an individual level, but could not change the hearts and minds of people around him: “No matter where you seized one of these apostles, your hand grasped slimy ooze, which

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<sup>41</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 169.

<sup>42</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 71.

<sup>43</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 169.

<sup>44</sup> Kershaw, *Hubris*, 61.

<sup>45</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 69.

<sup>46</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 74.

poured in separate streams through the fingers, only to unite again the next moment.”<sup>47</sup>

However, from his years in Vienna, Hitler declared an eternal struggle against the Jewish threat to the German Fatherland: “By resisting the Jew, I am fighting for the Lord’s work.”<sup>48</sup> From this early period in his life, Hitler connected this struggle to moral and religious justifications. Despite the pseudo-scientific arguments in *Mein Kampf* and his expressed anti-Christian views, Hitler was surprisingly religious.<sup>49</sup> He was a confirmed member of the Catholic Church and did not leave the Church. According to psycho-historian Robert Waite, Hitler viewed the German struggle against the Jews as the forces of God battling the forces of Satan. He believed in his messianic mission and wanted to create a religion instead of a political movement. Indeed, Hitler based his religious motifs on the Catholic Church. Although Hitler’s views towards Jews were already dangerously radical by this early period in his life, his experiences in World War I only served to exacerbate this marked hate towards Jews.

Hitler matched his hate for the Jews with an equal love for Germany and the German people. One possible explanation for Hitler’s fanatical Germanophilia has been labeled the “Borderlands syndrome.” Philosopher Isaiah Berlin argued that those raised on the peripheries are more inclined towards radical nationalism than those within the center of the nation. During his years in Vienna, Hitler found the Austrian Germans in a sorry state, corrupted by the Jewish propaganda of the Social Democrats. In Hitler’s words, “Pride of the Fatherland” was essentially unavailable to the masses of German

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<sup>47</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 72.

<sup>48</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 74.

<sup>49</sup> Robert Waite, *Psychopathic God Adolf Hitler* (Basic Books: 1977), 29.

people.<sup>50</sup> However, Hitler did not criticize or blame the proletarian masses for their apathy towards or disdain of Germany. First, the abject conditions and trials to which these people were exposed distracted from nationalist sentiment.<sup>51</sup> Second, Hitler blamed the lack of education of the proletariat for the absence of German nationalism.<sup>52</sup> Because of the lower standards of living, schooling was unaffordable, breeding a continual cycle of ignorance that opened up Austrians to Jewish lies. Hitler determined that the nationalization of Austrian Germans was essential. This nationalization required creating positive social environments so that education could flourish.<sup>53</sup> Clearly, Hitler advocated the indoctrination of the German people through education from a young age. Hitler's policies with youth organizations during the Third Reich reflected this understanding of the importance of education in nationalizing the people.

Ultimately, Hitler's exposure to the Social Democrats in Vienna from 1905-1912 provided the foundation for his radical political, social, and racial worldviews. Whether an honest account of the development of his beliefs or an apocryphal tale justifying and rationalizing his ideologies, Hitler obviously connected the Social Democrats to Marxism to Judaism. Apparent from his youth, Hitler's love of Germany and the German people most influenced his attitude towards Social Democrats and Jews. Hitler saw the suffering of his ethnic brethren under the oppression of manipulative Jews and thus developed a dangerous racial worldview. However, as this chapter will continue to explore, Hitler's attitudes were not unique, but rather concurrent with the times. Nevertheless, Hitler's

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<sup>50</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 43.

<sup>51</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 43.

<sup>52</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 43.

<sup>53</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 46.



time in Vienna morphed and radicalized his worldview. In order to avoid conscription to the multiethnic Austrian military, Hitler moved to Munich in 1912.<sup>54</sup> He then found himself a German resident with the outbreak of World War I.

### Hitler in World War I

Hitler's exposure to the brutality of industrialized warfare and the utter betrayal of the "stab in the back myth" further transformed the righteous anger from his Vienna years into a more violent, more radical worldview that he carried into his political life.

Austrian by birth, Hitler's time in the military, bleeding and fighting for the Fatherland, finally solidified and cemented his desired connection to Germany. Thus, the perceived Jewish betrayal at war's end impacted his worldview at a magnitude much greater than his experiences with Austrian Social Democracy. Hitler, an avid student of military history, feared that he lived in the wrong era, one of peace, order, and geopolitical security.<sup>55</sup> Obsessed with Bismarck and the wars of German Unification like the 1871 Franco-Prussian War, he sought a conflict of immense proportions for his opportunity to secure his place in the annals of German history.<sup>56</sup> Hitler professed his love of the German Empire and the German people; however, he also yearned for the opportunity to prove this intense commitment through sacrifice and heroic deeds for the sake of his adopted homeland.<sup>57</sup> When Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated, Hitler approached the prospect of imminent conflict with a high level of enthusiasm. Following

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<sup>54</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 130.

<sup>55</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 160.

<sup>56</sup> Waite, *Psychopathic God*, 258.

<sup>57</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 164.

the outbreak of World War I in August 1914, Hitler volunteered for a Bavarian regiment under the command of the *Reichswehr*. As with much of Hitler's personal and political development, this cavalier attitude toward active combat and desire for war was not unique to Hitler. Extreme nationalism, the *zeitgeist* (spirit of the times) of the early twentieth century, engulfed Europe, creating an atmosphere ripe for conflict. Apparent through his fascination with the Franco-Prussian War, Hitler possessed a romanticized conception of war. However, like Hitler, many servicemen expected a quick campaign and approached the conflict with a degree of overconfidence. During his basic training, Hitler expressed concern that his regiment would not arrive at the Western Front prior to the conclusion of the war.<sup>58</sup> He recounted that "With love of Fatherland in its heart and song on its lips our young regiment had gone to battle as if to the dance."<sup>59</sup> Hitler seemed to revel in the sacrifice of young men for the country, as the highest of honors citing "faithfulness and obedience unto death." Hitler's final war experience came as the result of a mustard gas attack in 1918, causing him to endure temporary blindness.<sup>60</sup> He described the ordeal of suffering through the temporary blindness at some length, suggesting that this gas attack held some significance in his early life.<sup>61</sup> Perhaps, this experience affected Hitler's decision not to deploy chemical weapons when faced with the prospect of retaliation by Winston Churchill. Thus, World War I ended in 1918 while Hitler was in the hospital recovering from his being gassed.

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<sup>58</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 165.

<sup>59</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 199.

<sup>60</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 200.

<sup>61</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 201.

According to psycho-historian Robert Waite, Hitler believed that the military was where he belonged.<sup>62</sup> For the first time in his life, he experienced purpose and power as a piece of the “war machine in the history of the world.” Hitler’s superiors considered him an exemplary and courageous soldier.<sup>63</sup> However, the future dictator rarely mingled with the other soldiers. In fact, he often criticized his fellow soldiers for their lack of patriotism and discipline. Germany’s defeat was very personal to Hitler because it destroyed the one place where he belonged, despite his isolation.<sup>64</sup> Hitler was a warrior of history, and the Jews that stabbed Germany in the back stole this opportunity from him. Prior to his war experience, the Jewish threat was more intellectual in nature, but the violation of his sacred space introduced a violent, personal hate towards Jews. According to psycho-historian Rudolph Binion, the ranking military psychologist Edmund Forster believed that Hitler’s blindness was psychosomatic and not caused by the chemical gas.<sup>65</sup> Binion argued that Hitler never accepted that the war was lost, and thus, Hitler connected gas to the trauma of Germany’s surrender. Indeed, Binion tied the immense radicalization of Hitler’s worldview post-World War I to the trauma and personal nature of the involvement of Jews in the German defeat.<sup>66</sup>

The future party leader utilized the “stab in the back” myth to galvanize support for the NSDAP in the Weimar Republic. Therefore, his vehement angst concerning Germany’s surrender at the end of World War I could merely have served as a political tool. However, Hitler adored the military:

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<sup>62</sup> Waite, *Psychopathic God*, 200.

<sup>63</sup> Waite, *Psychopathic God*, 203.

<sup>64</sup> Waite, *Psychopathic God*, 204.

<sup>65</sup> Rudolph Binion, *Hitler Among the Germans* (Elsevier: 1976), 5.

<sup>66</sup> Binion, *Among the Germans*, 1.

Though tens of centuries may pass, no one shall speak of heroism without mentioning the German Army in the World War. Through the veil of the past the iron front of the grey steel helmet will appear, unswerving and unyielding, a monument of immortality. So long as there are Germans they will remember that once these were sons of their people.<sup>67</sup>

Hitler's time as a soldier held special meaning to him.<sup>68</sup> He maintained that the army was the institution closest to his heart.<sup>69</sup> Hitler also claimed that the German military in World War I was the greatest force the world had ever seen, and the cause of the German collapse was no fault of the military since it was not defeated.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, in *Mein Kampf*, he directed the blame to the civilians on the home front:

Firstly, what was the army still fighting for, if people at home did not even want a victory? For whom the enormous sacrifices and privations? The soldier is sent out to fight for victory, and at home they strike against it.<sup>71</sup>

Clearly, Hitler paid special devotion to the military and the sacrifices of soldiers during the war. Therefore, it appears that he sincerely felt the psychic blow of the sudden German surrender and subscribed to the "stab in the back" myth.

According to Hitler, liars and criminals also influenced the end of the war and the abdication of the Kaiser. Marxists, Social Democrats, and Jews stabbed Germany in the back.<sup>72</sup> He argued that the German governmental bureaucracy was filled with Jews during the war, and added that the Jews thrived financially while the rest of the general populace faced privation.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, he claimed that there were very few Jews on

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<sup>67</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 167.

<sup>68</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 167.

<sup>69</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 213.

<sup>70</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 226.

<sup>71</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 195.

<sup>72</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 204.

<sup>73</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 192.

the front. In fact, they (Jews), like many people in Germany, were very patriotic and were over-represented in terms of medals and casualties. Jews, he argued, also tried to take over the national economy during the war through their corporations by centralizing production.<sup>74</sup> However, Walther Rathenau, for example, the rations minister during World War I was a German-Jew and extended the war through his savvy management of resources on the domestic front. He, like many German-Jews, was completely committed to the war effort. Nevertheless, Hitler claimed that through the manipulation of political and economic power, Jews, under the cover of the Social Democrats, orchestrated the fall of Germany at the end of World War I. Indeed, this experience and “awareness” of the crimes of the Jews against the German people motivated Hitler to pursue a career in politics. During the Second World War, Hitler murdered millions of Jews with chemical gas in the chambers of the death camps. His hatred toward Jews continued to radicalize throughout his political career and into World War II. However, chemical warfare was absent militarily. Perhaps Hitler’s own experience with chemical gas so drastically traumatized him that he refrained from deploying chemical weapons.

### Hitler in the Weimar Republic

During the Weimar Republic, Hitler rose to political prominence within the NSDAP and then within the Weimar government by tapping into the increasing radicalization of the German people in the aftermath of World War I. Economic and political stability shifted the populace to the far left and to the far right. The foundations of the Nazi party fed on the ideologies of the far right. Through his magnetic charisma

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<sup>74</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 193.

and emotional speeches, Hitler found willing ears of people weary of instability, suffering from hardship, and no longer interested in the compromises of the Weimar government. Following the Revolution of 1918, the Social Democrats led the way in establishing the Weimar Republic. Hitler argued that President Ebert and his cronies were willing to let Germany and its people deteriorate for their own ambitions.<sup>75</sup> Hitler remained in the military until 1919. Immediately following the end of the war, he served two functions in the army. He worked as an “education” officer and as an intelligence officer. More specifically, Hitler was assigned to reintroduce discipline and nationalist sentiment within his Munich regiment following the revolution.<sup>76</sup> This episode provided Hitler with the opportunity to speak in front of sizable audiences, and Hitler discovered his talent for speaking. World War I had radicalized many Germans, as seen with the dramatic shift away from the center towards the far left and far right. Historian Ian Kershaw argued that Hitler was not an anomaly with regards to the general trend in German political ideologies of the time.<sup>77</sup> In fact, there were seventy-three nationalist parties in Germany when Hitler joined the DAP. As an intelligence officer, Hitler received orders to investigate and infiltrate the meetings of the German Workers’ Party (DAP).<sup>78</sup> During his investigations, Hitler gravitated to the anti-Semitic, anti-Marxist, anti-Capitalist, and nationalistic ideas exchanged during party meetings. During one such meeting, Hitler contributed to the conversations. Hitler then received an invitation to join the party due to the impression he left on several leaders of the DAP. Hitler claims that he was hesitant

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<sup>75</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 199.

<sup>76</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 212.

<sup>77</sup> Kershaw, *Hubris*, 137.

<sup>78</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 214.

at first to join the DAP because his initial plan was to establish his own political party.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, the DAP was small, localized, and unorganized.<sup>80</sup> Hitler ultimately decided to become a member of the DAP because he did not want to join any of the established, parliamentary parties, but did not possess the wherewithal to establish a party of his own. Although originally a deterrent, the size of the DAP provided Hitler with the opportunity to organize the party as he saw fit and lead it in the direction he felt most appropriate.<sup>81</sup>

Hitler organized and publicized the first popular meeting of the renamed NSDAP in February 1920.<sup>82</sup> Although he was not the headline speaker for the meeting, he stirred the highest level of response from the audience.<sup>83</sup> Essentially, Hitler appealed to the crowd's negative emotions and offered National Socialism as the cure to society's ills.<sup>84</sup> Hitler based the policies and goals of the NSDAP along racial lines, espousing the purity of the German people and the cleansing of the German nation of the Jewish threat. Hitler ascended to party chairman in 1921. He utilized the Treaty of Versailles as a rallying cry for the party and as ammunition against the Weimar government.<sup>85</sup> He used this "Marxist work of destruction, and enemy propaganda poison" to "put [his audiences] beyond reason."<sup>86</sup> Again, Hitler used lessons gained from his observation of the Social Democrats in Vienna to understand the power of the mob mentality over logic and reason. Hitler argued that the Jew, economic circumstances, and social constructs led to

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<sup>79</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 206.

<sup>80</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 219.

<sup>81</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 220.

<sup>82</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 353.

<sup>83</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 356.

<sup>84</sup> Kershaw, *Hubris*, 151.

<sup>85</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 449.

<sup>86</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 450.

the weakness of the people; only those with the will to struggle have the right to live in this world.<sup>87</sup> Weak people, or “half” people are defeated, whereas “whole” people succeed. Hitler claimed, “The Revolution of the year 1918 did away with the government, disorganized the army, and delivered the administrative bodies over to party corruption.”<sup>88</sup> In 1923, Hitler and General Ludendorff, one of the military leaders of the *Reichswehr* during World War I, organized a coup, known as the Beer Hall Putsch, of the Bavarian government, with the intention of then challenging the Weimar government.<sup>89</sup> On March 8, 1923, Hitler and the *Sturm Abteilung* (SA), took control of a public meeting claiming that revolution had begun and roused the audience to follow him. Ultimately, the dispersion of the demonstration resulted in the death of sixteen party members and four policemen. Clearly, Hitler had an immediate impact on the development of the NSDAP. Following his jail time, Hitler committed the party to radicalizing the German people through popular elections.

Many of the elements of these party guidelines involve the neutralization of their political and racial enemies, and the rehabilitation of self-preservation and nationalization. According to political scientist Ernst Fraenkel, Nazi Germany was a dual state. The governance of the Third Reich existed at two levels: the state and the party. Once the NSDAP assumed power in 1933, Hitler’s ideologies and the party’s ideologies developed into the ideologies of the state as well. Historian Eberhard Jäckel argued that for Hitler, the state was an end to a means.<sup>90</sup> Essentially, the assumption of authority in

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<sup>87</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 252.

<sup>88</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 501.

<sup>89</sup> Kershaw, *Hubris*, 169.

<sup>90</sup> Jäckel, Hitler’s *Weltanschauung*, 67.



Nazi Germany was for the elimination of the Jewish threat. Hitler declared his party guidelines the “Fundamental Law” of the state once the NSDAP seized power.<sup>91</sup> Thus, his worldview primarily concerned the advancement of the German nation and the Jewish purge. Thus, Hitler’s messianic and ideological mission extended into the state and into the military. In his role as Führer and commander of the armed forces, he utilized chemical gas during the Holocaust. However, Hitler did not deploy chemical warfare on the Eastern Front. The absence of chemical weapons was in opposition to his worldview and his messianic mission.

### Hitler in Nazi Germany

Hitler’s and the Nazi party’s ascension to power provided him with the opportunity to transform his ideals into reality. Most notably, Hitler’s policies leading up to World War II from 1933 through 1939 gradually radicalized and grew more violent. His decrees most often seemed to center around the cleansing of the German state and of the German people of those he considered undesirable – including Jews, political enemies, and the mentally or physically disabled. Through the exercise of his authority, Hitler began to reveal a hint of the atrocities he was capable of committing. Following Hitler’s appointment as Chancellor on January 30, 1933, the Reichstag fire in late February precipitated in the suspension of basic rights and permitted imprisonment without trial.<sup>92</sup> Then, the Enabling Act in March 1933 granted Hitler and his cabinet

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<sup>91</sup> Jäckel, Hitler’s *Weltanschauung*, 68.

<sup>92</sup> Kershaw, *Hubris*, 456

legislative powers for four years without Constitutional limits.<sup>93</sup> Thus, Hitler and the NSDAP ascended to almost absolute authority. In many ways, “cleansing” thematically described Hitler’s policies following the Nazi rise to power and the establishment of the Third Reich. Politically, the suspension of basic rights and the legal ability to detain without trial allowed Hitler and the NSDAP “cleanse” their political enemies from the Weimar government. For example, the German Communist Party was suppressed and many leaders of the party were arrested and sent to makeshift concentration camps. Hitler also banned the Social Democratic Party.<sup>94</sup> By July, the NSDAP was the only legal political party in Germany. Furthermore, the NSDAP banned trade unions in lieu of the German Workers’ Front. As Hitler learned during his years in Vienna and during World War I, Social Democrats and Marxists used unions as tools to achieve their own political ends. Union strikes can hurt the national economy and force compliance from the national government. With the ban on unions, Hitler eliminated this threat to the absolute authority of the Nazis. Lastly, Hitler organized the elimination of his own rivals to authority within the Nazi Party. On the Night of Long Knives in 1934, Hitler targeted Ernst Röhm, the head of the SA, and other dissidents within the party that disagreed with the direction in which Hitler led the state and the party.<sup>95</sup> Hitler ordered his last political opponents executed. Then, in August 1934, President von Hindenburg passed away, and Hitler quickly consolidated the roles of President and Chancellor for himself.<sup>96</sup> By 1934, no limits checked Hitler’s absolute authority.

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<sup>93</sup> Kershaw, *Hubris*, 478.

<sup>94</sup> Kershaw, *Hubris*, 455.

<sup>95</sup> Kershaw, *Hubris*, 502.

<sup>96</sup> Kershaw, *Hubris*, 529.

In addition to the political “cleansing” of his opponents and rivals, Hitler orchestrated Germany’s racial cleansing. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler argued against the crossing of races. More specifically, Hitler decried the mixing of the superior “Aryan” gene pool with those of the lesser races. As the creator of civilization, the “Aryan” race stands supreme above all others. “Aryans” possess the greatest will for sacrifice and work towards the needs of the community.<sup>97</sup> “Aryans” possess spirit instead of ego and exercise *Pflichterfelling* (performance of duty). Hitler argued that the crossing of races leads to the depression of the superior race.<sup>98</sup> The greatest races and empires collapsed because of crossbreeding. All things beautiful – art, science, and technology – were the result of one superior race.<sup>99</sup> Like a disease, the mixing of races leads to gradual mental and physical decay. Hitler believed that to befoul the master race in such a manner was a sin against God. Indeed, Hitler realized many of his radical racial policies throughout the Third Reich and into World War II. These racial policies gradually radicalized over the years. However, some of the earlier policies of the Third Reich paved the road to the Final Solution of the Holocaust. For example, in April 1933, Hitler passed the Law for the Restoration of a Professional Civil Service. Civil servants, which included professors, were liable for dismissal. Indeed, these policies radicalized until the resulting Jewish extermination.

Hitler also advocated the “cleansing” of the German population, as well. As early as July 1933, he authorized The Law for the Prevention of Hereditary Diseased Offspring. Under this law, Hitler sanctioned the forced sterilization of thousands of men

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<sup>97</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 290.

<sup>98</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 279.

<sup>99</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 281.

and women at risk for carrying hereditary diseases.<sup>100</sup> This law forced physicians to disclose all patients subject to or at risk to all diseases on a list circulated by the Nazi regime. The Führer believed that all measures “upholding the nationhood” were justified.<sup>101</sup> In 1939, Hitler also launched the T-4 Program, which ran officially from 1939 to 1941 and unofficially from 1941 until war’s end.<sup>102</sup> The T-4 Program authorized the euthanasia and murder of thousands of mentally and physically handicapped Germans. Historian Ian Kershaw argued that Hitler authorized the T-4 program and the murder of the mentally and physically handicapped as an integral piece of his “ideological mission.”<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, the T-4 program provided “a gangway to the vaster extermination program to come.” In fact, the poison gas and the crematoria were first utilized in the T-4 program prior to their implementation in the death camps. Hitler blamed the handicaps of the German people on the mixing of races. Clearly, Hitler possessed a low estimation of human life: “Really outstanding geniuses [...] permit themselves no concern for normal human beings.”<sup>104</sup>

The German dictator also engaged in bellicose foreign policy. First, Hitler violated the Treaty of Versailles and initiated the rearmament of the German military. Second, prior to the outbreak of World War II, he occupied the Rhineland and annexed both Austria and Czechoslovakia into the Third Reich. According to historian Ian Kershaw, the *Anschluss* (annexation of Austria) was the defining moment of Hitler’s

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<sup>100</sup> Gerhard Weinberg, *Visions of Victory* (Cambridge University Press: 2005), 20.

<sup>101</sup> Kershaw, *Hubris*, 487.

<sup>102</sup> Weinberg, *Visions of Victory*, 20.

<sup>103</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1936-1945: Nemesis* (W.W. Norton & Company: 2000), 253

<sup>104</sup> Frederic Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (Overlook Press: 2009), 119.

foreign policy.<sup>105</sup> The Führer proved to himself that he “could take on the world – and win.” Furthermore, the *Anschluss* provided the “impetus to radicalization” that ultimately led to the invasion of Poland in September 1939. Following his rise to power, Hitler’s “cleansing” policies and aggressive foreign policy, though on a smaller scale, revealed his grand designs for the rest of the Europe. Indeed, Hitler’s goals in World War II represented the continued radicalization and expansion of his policies.

### The Goals of World War II

Ultimately, Hitler initiated World War II for the sake of the *Lebensraum*, the living space for the German nation. In the first paragraph of *Mein Kampf*, Hitler states that the German and Austrian nations require reunification for “like blood belongs in the common realm.”<sup>106</sup> Hitler addresses the theme of the *Lebensraum* on multiple occasions throughout the book. For example, Hitler argued, “only a sufficiently large space on this earth ensures the freedom of the existence to a nation.”<sup>107</sup> Likewise, Hitler also claimed, “Land and soil must be the aim of our foreign policy,” as the German borders following the Treaty of Versailles in 1914 were insufficient.<sup>108</sup> Hitler also advocated for the violent acquisition of territory in Europe for the *Lebensraum* when he said that “only the sword must provide the soil.”<sup>109</sup> Again, Hitler connected the question of the *Lebensraum* to a justified sense of morality:

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<sup>105</sup> Kershaw, *Nemesis*, 64.

<sup>106</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 19.

<sup>107</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 623.

<sup>108</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 630.

<sup>109</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 636.

“What we must fight for is to assure the existence and the increase of our race and our people, to feed its children and keep its blood pure; we must fight for the freedom and independence of the Fatherland, so that our people may ripen toward the fulfillment of the mission assigned it by the Creator of the Universe.”<sup>110</sup>

Through these passages, Hitler lays out the clear goals of the Third Reich in World War II. Although *Mein Kampf* was indeed a propagandistic work, Hitler was obviously sincere in the iteration of his worldviews. Hitler pursued these goals through geographic conquest in World War II. In his book *The War Aims and Strategies of Adolf Hitler*, historian Oskar Pinkus addresses the question of Hitler’s motives in initiating conflict with Europe. Pinkus ultimately concludes that Hitler’s primary goal was a crusade for the subjugation of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.<sup>111</sup> According to Pinkus, Hitler conducted the wars in east and the west very differently. For example, Hitler wavered when it came to invading Great Britain. However, Hitler prematurely and enthusiastically invaded the Soviet Union in the dysfunctional Operation Barbarossa.<sup>112</sup> Furthermore, Hitler treated French and British POWs differently than Russian and Slavic POWs. The French and the British were treated reasonably well, whereas Soviet POWs were slaughtered, tortured, and starved en masse, reflecting Hitler’s desire to “cleanse” the *Lebensraum* for the spread and promulgation of the German nation. Indeed, the perpetration of the Holocaust further substantiates this argument. Hitler merely engaged France and Great Britain because the west waged war on Germany.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 212.

<sup>111</sup> Oscar Pinkus, *The War Aims and Strategies of Adolf Hitler* (McFarland & Company: 2005), 1.

<sup>112</sup> Pinkus, *War Aims and Strategies*, 1.

<sup>113</sup> Pinkus, *War Aims and Strategies*, 1.

On the other hand, historian Gerhard Weinberg, in his book *Visions of Victory*, argues that Hitler not only had designs on Eastern Europe, but post-war designs on Western Europe, as well. Primarily, the German dictator sought the annexation of territory east until the Ural Mountains, including Poland, the Baltic States, and European Russia.<sup>114</sup> Hitler also sought the annexation of Denmark and Scandinavia.<sup>115</sup> In Western Europe, he intended to establish puppet governments in Great Britain, France, Spain, and Portugal.<sup>116</sup> Hitler also wanted to establish puppet governments in Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Hungary.<sup>117</sup> He also had designs on African colonial possessions in western, central, and southern Africa.<sup>118</sup> Furthermore, Hitler evidently intended to continue the Holocaust into the post-war period. As explored by historians Klaus-Michael Mallman and Martin Cüppers, the *Einsatzgruppen* (mobile killing squads) had a detachment stationed in Athens, Greece termed *Einsatzgruppe-Egypt* ready for deployment to North Africa and the Middle East as early as 1942. Whether under the direct supervision of the Nazi regime or under the supervision of the puppet governments, the policy of Jewish extermination was to continue.<sup>119</sup> Nevertheless, Hitler sought the geographical domination of Europe for the sake of the German nation and the “cleansing” of Europe of undesirables.

Hitler pursued cultural and artistic endeavors as a means of dominance over Nazi-occupied Europe. Cultural policies abroad advanced party ideology of cultural

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<sup>114</sup> Weinberg, *Visions of Victory*, 13.

<sup>115</sup> Weinberg, *Visions of Victory*, 11.

<sup>116</sup> Weinberg, *Visions of Victory*, 11.

<sup>117</sup> Weinberg, *Visions of Victory*, 12.

<sup>118</sup> Weinberg, *Visions of Victory*, 14.

<sup>119</sup> Weinberg, *Visions of Victory*, 19.

hegemony. Cultural hegemony did not only apply to the spread of “Aryan” culture, but also the theft of cultural objects from the areas Germany conquered. Beyond the racial and political purification of Europe, Hitler also aspired to build the Reich based on National Socialist cultural ideals, stripped of non-German principles.<sup>120</sup> Hitler believed that the master race was tasked with this form of cultural imperialism as a moral duty. Hitler envisioned the “Aryan” conqueror of the Third Reich spreading German culture and National Socialist ideals across Europe. For example, Hitler revered the dead in the Romantic ideal “where sacrifice validated the cause, rather than the cause itself.”<sup>121</sup> Hitler intended to spread and immortalize this German notion of self-sacrifice. Hitler planned for a network of citadels “to glorify war, honor its dead heroes, and symbolize the impregnable power of the German race” across his empire from Scandinavia to North Africa.<sup>122</sup> Furthermore, high culture would serve as the focal point of the Third Reich. For example, Hitler drew up ambitious plans to redesign major European cities across the Third Reich and construct museums devoted to “Aryan” art.<sup>123</sup> Hitler said that “Wars come and go; cultural achievements alone survive.” Essentially, World War II also served as the vehicle for this cultural imperialism.

German dominance of Europe also entailed the confiscation of foreign cultural objects. Nazi art looting policies allowed the Nazi conquerors to pursue these desires. The operations of the ERR (*Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg*) and the other competing cultural plundering agencies within France, Poland, the Baltic states, Ukraine, and the

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<sup>120</sup> Spotts, *Power of Aesthetics*, 119.

<sup>121</sup> Spotts, *Power of Aesthetics*, 116.

<sup>122</sup> Spotts, *Power of Aesthetics*, 117.

<sup>123</sup> Spotts, *Power of Aesthetics*, 32.



Soviet Union was thorough, ruthless, and efficient. For example, Hans Frank, governor of Nazi-occupied Poland, issued the Order of the Confiscation of the Property of the Former Polish State Inside the General Government, thereby authorizing the plundering activities of Kajetan Mühlmann.<sup>124</sup> Under the leadership of Mühlmann, the plundering squads appropriated valuable cultural objects. Mühlmann's squads targeted "state collections, universities, churches, and valuable private estates."<sup>125</sup> The staff scoured Poland thoroughly in major cities and rural village and left "scarcely a city, town, or significant collection [...] untouched."<sup>126</sup> The confiscation of cultural objects symbolically represented Nazi cultural hegemony of occupied Europe. Nazi Germany and the leadership of the NSDAP owned the right to possess or destroy the cultural heritage of conquered peoples. Nazi cultural imperialism and art plundering served Nazi ideologies of the "Aryan" as the master race and the bringer of culture to occupied Europe. Ultimately, Hitler's geographic, racial, and cultural goals of World War II represented his desire to advance the will of the people both domestically and throughout Europe.

### Conclusion

Ultimately, Hitler was an individual capable of committing terrible atrocities for the sake of the Germany and the German people. From his youth to his ascension to power, Hitler developed a radical set of political, social, and racial worldviews. Hitler

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<sup>124</sup> Jonathan Petropoulos, *Art as Politics in the Third Reich* (University of North Carolina Press: 1996), 105.

<sup>125</sup> Petropoulos, *Art as Politics*, 106.

<sup>126</sup> Petropoulos, *Art as Politics*, 106.

developed his anti-Marxist and anti-Semitic views during his years in Vienna. His experiences in World War I and the “stab in the back” myth exasperated and confirmed Hitler’s views against Jews, Social Democrats, capitalists, and Marxists. During the Weimar Republic, Hitler articulated these views through the NSDAP and *Mein Kampf*, and ultimately rose to power through the positive reception of his worldviews. Lastly, in Nazi Germany and through World War II, Hitler transformed his ideologies into reality through the gradual radicalization of “cleansing” policies. Hitler sought the geographic and cultural domination of Europe as the realization of the superiority of the “Aryan” race. Throughout the perpetrations of the Nazi regime, Hitler justified these actions through moral reasoning based on racial and pseudo-scientific foundations. Hitler did not seek power for the sake of power, but rather for the realization of his goals and worldview. Hitler fanatically believed in the ascension of the German people to world domination and sought power to steer Germany down this path. He identified himself as the messiah of the German people. Clearly, Hitler was capable of using chemical weapons, as he used gas in the chambers of the death camps. Therefore, the focus now turns to the pressing question about the absence of chemical warfare in World War II.

## CHAPTER TWO CHURCHILL'S THREATS

### Introduction

Hitler sanctioned terrible atrocities, but did not deploy chemical weapons militarily during World War II. The absence of chemical gas poses a riddle because the German dictator did not hesitate to utilize any means to achieve the ends and goals of his crusade in Eastern Europe. As discussed in the previous chapter, Hitler, for the sake of his people and his Fatherland, perpetrated the Holocaust and the slaughter of thousands of other civilians and soldiers, Germans included. Therefore, Chapter Two turns to the discussion of Hitler's decision to not employ chemical warfare on the Eastern Front during Operation Barbarossa from 1941 to 1943. Clearly, chemical weapons were not really necessary for the Blitzkrieg tactics during the first summer of 1941. However, if Hitler believed that at any point during the thrust into the Soviet Union that chemical weapons were essential to the success of the mission, then he would not have hesitated to unleash the German reserves of chemical gas on Russian and Slavic soldiers and civilians. Once the *Wehrmacht* advance stalled in December 1941, Hitler could have ordered chemical warfare during the siege of Leningrad or turned to it in Stalingrad to avoid the brutal door-to-door urban combat. Counterfactually, the use of chemical weapons could have resuscitated Operation Barbarossa to the advantage of the *Wehrmacht*. Therefore, external circumstances influenced Hitler's decision to abstain from deploying chemical weapons on the Eastern front. In May 1942, Prime Minister Winston Churchill of Great Britain announced publicly that the use of chemical weapons on the Soviet Union would result in massive retaliation against Germany, in the form of

aerial chemical weapon bombardments of German cities and towns.<sup>127</sup> Ultimately, this threat of massive retaliation played a significant role in Hitler's decision not to employ chemical warfare on the Eastern front. At this stage in the war, Hitler sought to avoid the "mutually assured destruction" of his Allied enemies and his own country. Thus, Chapter Two explores Churchill's threats, his acts of deterrence, and the other possible factors that influenced Hitler's decision-making process.

### Fritz Haber

The rapid advancement, sophistication, and killing power of European weaponry in the late nineteenth century led to the subjugation and expansion of European colonial holdings. Prior to World War I, European colonial soldiers unloaded these new killing machines on colonial natives.<sup>128</sup> However, the advent of the Great War forced the Entente and Central powers to turn these weapons on each other in the furious bloodbath of trench warfare. Indeed, World War I introduced the concept of industrialized warfare. Chemical weapons played a significant role in this war of attrition. At the forefront of science and technology, German scientists gave birth to weaponized chemical gas and chemical warfare. Born in 1868, Fritz Haber, a German-Jewish chemist, first achieved international acclaim fixing nitrogen from air.<sup>129</sup> Like many German Jews, Haber was extremely patriotic and believed that science would lead to Germany's international

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<sup>127</sup> Winston Churchill, *The Second World War: The Grand Alliance* (Houghton Mifflin: 1950), 330.

<sup>128</sup> Daniel Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford University Press: 1981).

<sup>129</sup> Fritz Stern, *Dreams and Delusions* (Alfred A. Knopf: 1987), 57.

ascendancy.<sup>130</sup> Following his rise to prominence pre-World War I, Haber established an institute that helped nurture the next generation of scientists. Haber also believed in the practical application of science and the connection of science and industry. When World War I broke out, Haber committed himself and his institute's work wholly to Germany's total victory.<sup>131</sup> As the head of the chemical division in the War Ministry, Haber developed the first weaponized chemical agents, and his colleagues developed the first deployment methods in 1914.<sup>132</sup> Haber hoped that this new form of warfare would end the stalemate on the Western front and turn the tide of the war in Germany's favor. Ironically, it was a Jewish scientist invented the gas that Hitler would use in the chambers of the death camps: Zyklon-B. Haber's patriotism and the utilization of his expertise for the war effort was not unique to Haber alone. For example, Walter Rathenau, the rationing minister, extended the war for another two years through his savvy administration of the war on the domestic front. Nevertheless, historian Fritz Stern, author of *Dreams and Delusions*, argued that Haber and his institute's scientific contribution made them the Manhattan project of World War I.<sup>133</sup> In addition to the other contributions of Haber's institute, chemical gas alone served as an efficient way to clear enemy trenches and undermine enemy morale.

Although the Germans invented chemical gas, the Entente powers quickly developed their own chemical agents to use in retaliation. Both the Entente and the Central powers developed more sophisticated respirators and gas masks to address the

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<sup>130</sup> Stern, *Dreams and Delusions*, 54.

<sup>131</sup> Stern, *Dreams and Delusions*, 53.

<sup>132</sup> Stern, *Dreams and Delusions*, 63.

<sup>133</sup> Stern, *Dreams and Delusions*, 65.

threat of chemical warfare. Likewise, delivery methods continued to be refined, an advance that challenged the sophistication of respirators. In many ways, chemical warfare represented an early form of escalation, as both opponents sought to achieve military dominance in this field. As Hitler discovered in 1918, Allied delivery methods of chemical gas still affected war in the trenches, despite the advancement of the gas masks. Although the invention of chemical gas did not determine the outcome of World War I, these chemical agents affected the conduct of trench warfare. Just as chemical weapons in World War I represented an early form of escalation, Churchill likewise introduced the concept of deterrence through the threat of chemical warfare.

### Winston Churchill

Soldier, politician, and historian, Sir Winston Churchill, in many ways, was the British counterpart to Hitler. A remarkable prime minister at a desperate time, Churchill represented Hitler's ultimate nemesis. Just like Hitler, Churchill did not subscribe to any "half-measures," but rather conducted World War II with ruthlessness and conviction. Arguably, without Churchill's leadership, Great Britain would have fallen to Germany's onslaught earlier in the war. Churchill met Hitler's ferocity with his own fortitude, and this served as a deterrent to Hitler's desired conduct of World War II. Churchill was born on November 30, 1874 into the aristocratic family of the Duke of Marlborough.<sup>134</sup> When Churchill turned twenty, he entered the military as a second lieutenant with the Hussars cavalry unit.<sup>135</sup> Churchill spent many of his early years in the military stationed with the

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<sup>134</sup> Martin Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life* (Henry Holt and Company: 1991), 1.

<sup>135</sup> Gilbert, *Churchill*, 51.

Hussars in India.<sup>136</sup> After his father passed away, his mother continued to spend extravagantly, driving the family into financial straits.<sup>137</sup> Therefore, Churchill worked as a war correspondent for a newspaper and requested a leave of absence to cover the conflict in Afghanistan. During his time on the Afghan campaign, Churchill and the unit came under hostile fire, forcing Churchill to engage the enemy himself. Likewise, Churchill joined the 21<sup>st</sup> Lancers cavalry unit in Omdurman during the British campaign in Sudan against the Dervish army as a news correspondent.<sup>138</sup> During the campaign, Churchill led his men in a cavalry charge into a unit of Dervish riflemen. Then, during his coverage of the Boer War in South Africa, Boer soldiers ambushed Churchill's rail car.<sup>139</sup> Churchill again engaged the enemy, staved off the ambush, and even moved twenty wounded men under fire. During his six years serving in the British military, Churchill witnessed war first hand and experienced active combat. Just as Hitler saw combat first hand, so did Churchill. The similarities between Churchill and Hitler continued into their political careers. In many ways, Churchill's time in the military imbued him with a boldness that Churchill carried into his political life.

After a first unsuccessful attempt, Churchill won a seat in Parliament at twenty-six years of age as a member of the Conservative Party, representing the district of Oldham.<sup>140</sup> In 1911, Churchill was appointed First Lord of the Admiralty, and he made his military experience felt immediately.<sup>141</sup> Churchill created a naval war staff and

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<sup>136</sup> Gilbert, *Churchill*, 64.

<sup>137</sup> Gilbert, *Churchill*, 77.

<sup>138</sup> Gilbert, *Churchill*, 96.

<sup>139</sup> Gilbert, *Churchill*, 111.

<sup>140</sup> Gilbert, *Churchill*, 135.

<sup>141</sup> Gilbert, *Churchill*, 239.

advocated a policy of vigilance. He advised that military preparation was “the only field wherein immediate and sustained action of a useful nature is possible.”<sup>142</sup> Primarily, Churchill was concerned by the rapid and unrestricted build-up of German naval strength.<sup>143</sup> His most notable achievement during his tenure as the First Lord of the Admiralty was his convincing of Parliament to purchase the majority stake in the Anglo-Persian oil company as a substantial and permanent source of fuel for the military.<sup>144</sup> When World War I broke out, Churchill served on the Western Front with the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion of Royal Scots Fusiliers and led thirty-six incursions into “no man’s land.”<sup>145</sup> Then, the wartime government called upon Churchill to return to London and serve as the Minister of Munitions in 1917. Following the war in 1922, the Conservative government fell from power, and Churchill lost his seat in Parliament. He returned to Parliament in 1924, along with a Conservative majority, and served as the Chancellor of the Exchequer.<sup>146</sup> In his role, Churchill attempted to return to the gold standard, which failed miserably. The Conservatives again fell from power in 1929. Churchill retained his seat in Parliament, but would not hold an office within the government for ten years. Churchill’s isolation from the seats of power resulted from his adamant opposition to the prospect of Indian independence.<sup>147</sup>

Following the Nazi ascension to power in 1933 and Hitler’s initiation of rearmament policies, Churchill proved extremely vocal in his warnings about Germany’s

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<sup>142</sup> Gilbert, *Churchill*, 239.

<sup>143</sup> Gilbert, *Churchill*, 254.

<sup>144</sup> Gilbert, *Churchill*, 261.

<sup>145</sup> Gilbert, *Churchill*, 375.

<sup>146</sup> Gilbert, *Churchill*, 468.

<sup>147</sup> Gilbert, *Churchill*, 497.



resurgence.<sup>148</sup> Likewise, Churchill made caustic attacks on the Chamberlain government for the appeasement policies that culminated at the Munich conference. As Churchill witnessed Germany preparing for war, he was no longer in a position to influence the policies of the British military. Churchill saw Great Britain as the deterrent to German ambitions on the European continent, but isolated from the government, Churchill could only watch events unfold. In October 1941, Churchill claimed that Hitler was the only enemy that mattered, seemingly implying that while Churchill despised Hitler, he also respected the German dictator.<sup>149</sup>

In 1939, after ten years isolated from the government, the outbreak of World War II resulted in Churchill's return to government as the First Lord of the Admiralty and as a member of the War cabinet.<sup>150</sup> After the German attack in France and the Benelux countries on March 10, 1940, the king appointed Churchill as the next prime minister.<sup>151</sup> However, upon assuming office, Churchill faced disaster with the fall of France.<sup>152</sup> Churchill's goal for the resolution of World War II was simple: Great Britain would continue the war against the Axis Powers, alone if necessary, until the British achieved total victory, even if this entailed the engagement of the United States. Churchill even prepared Great Britain for the possibility of a successful German invasion.<sup>153</sup> Churchill transferred gold and foreign exchange and securities reserves to Canada and prepared Britain for guerilla warfare. In the words of historian Gerhard Weinberg, Churchill was

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<sup>148</sup> Gilbert, *Churchill*, 603.

<sup>149</sup> Martin Gilbert, *The Churchill War Papers: Volume III* (W.W. Norton & Company: 2000), 1391.

<sup>150</sup> Gilbert, *Churchill*, 623.

<sup>151</sup> Gilbert, *Churchill*, 643.

<sup>152</sup> Gerhard Weinberg, *Visions of Victory* (Cambridge University Press: 2005), 138.

<sup>153</sup> Weinberg, *Visions of Victory*, 139.

“convinced that Germany must be utterly crushed this time and that there could be no reliance on internal opponents of the Hitler regime.”<sup>154</sup> Furthermore, he believed that “only a complete defeat of Germany would preclude a third German attempt at world domination and secure Britain from a German threat.”<sup>155</sup> Ultimately, Churchill sought the “unconditional surrender” of Hitler and Nazi Germany.<sup>156</sup> At Yalta, Churchill argued against war trials and instead argued for the immediate execution of the leaders of the Third Reich like “outlaws.”<sup>157</sup> Both Churchill and Hitler were soldiers turned politicians – bold, military-minded men at the helms of their nations during World War II. Both sought the total obliteration of their enemies – Hitler and his genocidal war in Eastern Europe and Churchill and his crusade against Nazi Germany. Both utilized radically violent methods to achieve their respective goals for World War II. Hitler perpetrated the horrors of the Holocaust, while Churchill ordered the utter desolation of German cities. Clearly, Churchill played a decisive role as the deterrent to Hitler’s use of chemical weapons on the Eastern front. Later, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and American airpower further contributed to Hitler’s deterrence.

### The Eastern Front

Hitler was capable of committing terrible atrocities as the means to his ultimate goals of World War II. As discussed in the previous chapter, Hitler engaged Great Britain and France because of the threat they posed. However, the subjugation of Eastern

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<sup>154</sup> Weinberg, *Visions of Victory*, 139.

<sup>155</sup> Weinberg, *Visions of Victory*, 140.

<sup>156</sup> Weinberg, *Visions of Victory*, 150.

<sup>157</sup> Annie Jacobsen, *Operation Paperclip: The Secret Intelligence that Brought Nazi Scientists to America* (Little, Brown and Company: 2014), 29.

Europe served as Hitler's primary objective during World War II. The invasion of the Soviet Union represented a major stepping-stone to the realization of his messianic mission:

Our gains in the West [...] constitute a contribution to our general security, but our Eastern conquests are infinitely more precious, for they are the foundations of our very existence.<sup>158</sup>

Russia had never been conquered by a foreign entity. The Soviet Union was an imposing entity, covering 8.5 million square miles with a 750-mile front.<sup>159</sup> The country had a population of 195 million. Furthermore, in 1941, only three percent of the roads in the Soviet Union were paved, a challenging situation exacerbated by the fact that the Soviets used a wide-gauge railroad line, unusable by any other than Russian trains. Lastly, the harsh winters had a devastating effect on invading armies. However, when Hitler launched Operation Barbarossa, both British and American military minds expected the collapse of the Soviet Union under the blitzkrieg of the *Wehrmacht*.<sup>160</sup> Churchill hoped that Stalin would at least “attempt a vain resistance.”<sup>161</sup> In the words of one British general, the Germans “would go through [the Russians] like a hot knife through butter.”<sup>162</sup> During the first summer in 1941, Hitler had every reason to feel confident in the success of his invasion of the Soviet Union, as the *Wehrmacht* marched decisively through Ukraine.<sup>163</sup> Clearly, chemical warfare did not fit into the strategies of Hitler's

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<sup>158</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Hitler's Table Talk* (Weidenfeld and Nicholson: 1953), 697.

<sup>159</sup> Oscar Pinkus, *The War Aims and Strategies of Adolf Hitler* (MacFarland & Co, Inc.: 2005), 169.

<sup>160</sup> Ronald Lewin, *Hitler's Mistakes* (William Morrow and Company: 1984), 117.

<sup>161</sup> Gilbert, *War Papers*, 817.

<sup>162</sup> Lewin, *Hitler's Mistakes*, 117.

<sup>163</sup> Hitler, *Table Talk*, 17.

blitzkrieg into the Soviet Union. However, the invasion of the Soviet Union soon stalled, and the winter of 1941 severely hampered the *Wehrmacht* advance. The original plan of his general staff was a straight march to Moscow, the political and economic center of the Soviet Union, thus ending the conflict before winter.<sup>164</sup> However, Hitler, possibly overconfident in the strength of his invading force and underestimating the challenges of invading the Soviet Union, developed a strategy of his own, antithetical to that of his general staff. Hitler proposed a pincer strike into the Soviet Union from launching points in the Ukraine.<sup>165</sup> One pincer would march through Leningrad, the other through Stalingrad. The armies marching through Stalingrad would break off an auxiliary force to capture the Soviet oil fields in the Caucasus Mountains. The pincer would then close on Moscow. Oddly, Hitler was not interested in the capture of Moscow, and his “directive contained a large number of disconnected objectives with priority given to none.”<sup>166</sup> Thus, Hitler spread his forces too thinly and created a logistical nightmare where none need have existed. The result was that the *Wehrmacht* became bogged down in a war of attrition against the superior manpower and resources of the Soviet Union.

The transformation of Operation Barbarossa from a war of mobility into a war of attrition presented the opportunity for the deployment of chemical warfare. In December 1941 alone, the *Wehrmacht* lost one thousand tanks and two thousand locomotives specifically designed for the wide-gauge Soviet rail lines.<sup>167</sup> Two key battles in Operation Barbarossa, the Siege of Leningrad and the Battle of Stalingrad, chemical

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<sup>164</sup> Lewin, *Hitler's Mistakes*, 118.

<sup>165</sup> Lewin, *Hitler's Mistakes*, 119.

<sup>166</sup> Lewin, *Hitler's Mistakes*, 119.

<sup>167</sup> Hitler, *Table Talk*, 339.

weapons could have easily cleared the respective cities of soldiers and civilians. The Siege of Leningrad lasted over two years, while the Battle of Stalingrad lasted over five months in the bloodiest fighting of the war. In December 1941, Hitler's general staff examined the possibility of destroying Leningrad with chemical weapons.<sup>168</sup> The findings revealed that preparations for such a strike required thirty days. However, the *Luftwaffe* could have doused the city with chemical agents in a matter of days. Hitler could have achieved two significant German victories in these battles with chemical warfare. However, he still refrained from using chemical weapons on the Eastern front. Clearly, the question was not moral in nature. Hitler used chemical agents in the gas chambers of the death camps on the Jews. Hitler thought of Russians and Slavs as animals and treated them as such in the POW camps.<sup>169</sup> Hitler tested Zyklon-B on Russian POWs before widespread implementation in the death camps.<sup>170</sup> At war's end, in July 1945, the majority of POWs in the Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, Lublin, and other concentration camps were gassed to prevent their release to the Soviet army. The *Wehrmacht* killed 3.5 million out of the 5.7 million captured Russian and Slavic soldiers through starvation, exposure, exhaustion, or execution. Hitler did not have any qualms about using chemical agents on either citizens or soldiers.

Furthermore, the use of chemical weapons in World War I clearly set a precedent for chemical warfare in spite of the Hague Convention of 1925 banning the use of asphyxiating gases on the battlefield. Indeed, beginning in 1932 and continuing through

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<sup>168</sup> Rolf-Dieter Müller, *Germany and the Second World War* (Oxford University Press: 2003), 763.

<sup>169</sup> Pinkus, *War Aims*, 274.

<sup>170</sup> Pinkus, *War Aims*, 274.

World War II, the Japanese set the precedent for chemical warfare with their use of chemical agents militarily against the Chinese.<sup>171</sup> The Japanese began developing stockpiles of chemical weapons in 1918 at the end of World War I. During World War II, Unit 731, a covert biological and chemical weapon research division of the Japanese Imperial Army, experimented on thousands of Chinese human guinea pigs. Likewise, Hitler did not hesitate to violate treaties or international agreements. Hitler thought that the League of Nations was a “den of intrigue woven against Germany, binding Germany to obligations none of the others intended to keep.”<sup>172</sup> Back in 1933, Hitler removed Germany from the League of Nations and in complete violation of the Treaty of Versailles began rearming the Third Reich.<sup>173</sup> The German dictator occupied the Rhineland and annexed Austria despite international pressure. Hitler did not compromise in foreign affairs and instead pursued the course of action he felt best served the advancement of the German people.

The absence of chemical warfare on the Eastern front was not a matter of insufficient caches or supplies. Under the direction of Otto Ambros, head of the IG Farben chemical development program, “major breakthrough[s] led to the development of nerve gases” in 1936.<sup>174</sup> Previously, chemical gases were not definitively fatal, but rather served to clear trenches in World War I, create chaos, and cause massive numbers of injuries. However, tabun was the first nerve gas that caused fatalities in mere

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<sup>171</sup> Gerhard Weinberg, *World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge University Press: 1994), 559.

<sup>172</sup> Hitler, *Table Talk*, 501.

<sup>173</sup> Hitler, *Table Talk*, 632.

<sup>174</sup> Weinberg, *World at Arms*, 558.

minutes.<sup>175</sup> In 1941, the *Wehrmacht* possessed 40,000 tons of tabun. IG Farben also fabricated the nerve agents, sarin and somar.<sup>176</sup> Developed in December 1941, sarin was six times more potent than tabun, and by 1942, the general staff deemed the supply of nerve agents sufficient for employment on the Eastern Front.<sup>177</sup> In 1941, the army ordnance office lobbied the Führer to employ chemical warfare, arguing that the military needed to conserve munitions in order to sustain the invasion of the Soviet Union, and chemical warfare could serve that purpose well.<sup>178</sup> Furthermore, the Soviets were not well equipped defensively against chemical warfare. Clearly, Hitler possessed weapons of mass destruction, capable of dealing horrific and painful losses to the soldiers and citizens obstructing his conquest of the Soviet Union. With his low estimation of human life, Hitler's decision was surprising. Ultimately, outside forces stayed Hitler's hand for the employment of chemical warfare. Winston Churchill served as this force of deterrence.

#### “Mutually Assured Destruction”

Faced with the subjugation of Europe under the thumb of Hitler and Nazi Germany, Churchill resolved to fight until the Third Reich fell. The exercise of chemical warfare was simply a means to this end. Churchill had no qualms about employing chemical weapons against Germany and the German people. In fact, as early as 1920, Churchill sanctioned the use of chemical gas against the Kurds during a British campaign

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<sup>175</sup> Müller, *Second World War*, 761.

<sup>176</sup> Weinberg, *World at Arms*, 558.

<sup>177</sup> Müller, *Second World War*, 761.

<sup>178</sup> Müller, *Second World War*, 762.

in Iraq. Prior to Stalin's request for British retaliation, Churchill and his military advisors were prepared to use chemical weapons against Germany.<sup>179</sup> Specifically, Churchill prepared chemical warfare as a defensive strategy against a German invasion of Great Britain.<sup>180</sup> Then, in March 1942, Stalin, concerned about the possibility of Germany using chemical weapons in their spring offensive, requested assurances from Churchill for retaliation against Germany.<sup>181</sup> In response, Churchill promised Stalin that the British military would treat any chemical attack against the Soviet Union as if it were a chemical attack against Great Britain and would retaliate with massive force. Churchill publicly announced these assurances over several radio addresses, seemingly to inform Hitler and Nazi Germany of his threats.<sup>182</sup> Prior to the invasion of the Soviet Union, Great Britain stood alone against the Third Reich. Following the survival of the initial onslaught of the *Wehrmacht*, the Stalin and the Soviet Union presented an important ally to the British by opening a second front and shifting the burden away from Great Britain.<sup>183</sup> Therefore, preserving the Eastern Front was an important priority for Churchill, a consideration that helps explain this promise to Stalin.

Indeed, Churchill and the Royal Air Force (RAF) possessed the resources to retaliate against German chemical warfare on the Eastern front. During the Battle of Britain in the summer of 1940, the issue arose amongst the Nazi leadership whether or not to launch a full-scale invasion of Great Britain. Hitler ultimately decided that he

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<sup>179</sup> Churchill, *Grand Alliance*, 425.

<sup>180</sup> Weinberg, *World at Arms*, 558.

<sup>181</sup> Winston Churchill, *The Second World War: The Hinge of Fate* (Houghton Mifflin: 1950), 203.

<sup>182</sup> Churchill, *Hinge of Fate*, 330.

<sup>183</sup> Gilbert, *War Papers*, 1419.



wanted to achieve air supremacy before committing to an invasion.<sup>184</sup> The *Luftwaffe* attacked London and other urban areas with a larger fighting force than that of the RAF. However, the superior pilots of the RAF, in the words of Churchill, turned the tide of battle in favor of the RAF throughout the summer. For example, during the week of August 24, the RAF lost fifty-nine aircraft, while the *Luftwaffe* lost 145 aircraft.<sup>185</sup> Ultimately, the unsustainability of losses by the *Luftwaffe* forced Hitler to abandon “Operation Sea lion.”<sup>186</sup> The Battle of Britain was a crippling blow to the strength of the *Luftwaffe*. According to Winston Churchill, by May 1941, the RAF possessed more firepower than the *Luftwaffe*.<sup>187</sup> Furthermore, Hitler diverted *Luftwaffe* aircraft in support of Operation Barbarossa and to aid the *Afrika-korps* in North Africa. Therefore, in terms of air superiority, Churchill could deliver on his promise to Stalin. In a telegram message to Stalin on March 20, 1942, Churchill claimed that he possessed enough chemical weapons to douse German cities in chemical agents:

I have been building up an immense store of gas bombs for discharge from aircraft, and we shall not hesitate to use these over all suitable objectives in Western Germany from the moment that your armies and people are assaulted in this way.<sup>188</sup>

Although not of the same lethality of the tabun and sarin that the Germans possessed, the British military produced caches of phosgene and mustard gas, capable of spreading

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<sup>184</sup> Winston Churchill, *The Second World War: Their Finest Hour* (Houghton Mifflin: 1950), 322.

<sup>185</sup> Churchill, *Their Finest Hour*, 339.

<sup>186</sup> Churchill, *Their Finest Hour*, 337.

<sup>187</sup> Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*, 425.

<sup>188</sup> Churchill, *Hinge of Fate*, 330.

suffering and death among the civilians of these targeted German cities.<sup>189</sup> In fact, the only casualties of chemical warfare in World War II were the result of Allied chemical agents. An American shipment of one hundred tons chemical weapons en route to the Eastern front was bombed by a German air raid at Bari, Italy on December 2, 1943.<sup>190</sup> The shipment was meant for retaliatory measures against the Germans. Over a thousand Allied soldiers and Italian citizens died as a result of the accidental release of the chemical agents. The Allied High Command covered up the incident hoping that Germany would not learn of the presence of their chemical weapons. General Dwight D. Eisenhower was concerned that German knowledge of Allied gas in Europe would provoke a preemptive German strike. Even without nerve agents, the Allied forces clearly possessed the means to perpetrate brutal acts of chemical warfare against German civilians. Furthermore, the British designed biological warfare against the Third Reich.<sup>191</sup> By the winter of 1943, the British military designed bombs, constructed by American factories, capable of spreading anthrax spores throughout an urban area. The bombs would kill anyone within a square mile and then create an uninhabitable area. In 1944, Churchill purchased half a million of these anthrax bombs from America merely as a “first installment.”<sup>192</sup> However, the successful invasion of Normandy induced Churchill to refrain from employing these weapons of mass destruction. In the summer of 1944, Germany initiated V-1 rocket attacks against London, prompting the Prime

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<sup>189</sup> Weinberg, *World at Arms*, 558.

<sup>190</sup> Weinberg, *World at Arms*, 559.

<sup>191</sup> Jörg Friedrich, *The Fire* (Columbia University Press: 2002), 87.

<sup>192</sup> Friedrich, *The Fire*, 87.

Minister to advocate chemical retaliation.<sup>193</sup> Thus, Churchill's threats presented an important decision that Hitler needed to make: the devastation of the Soviet Union at the cost of the German people. In essence, Churchill, in his role as Hitler's deterrent, introduced an early form of "mutually assured destruction."

### Hitler's Decision

As seen in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler obviously was traumatized by his own experience with chemical weapons in World War I. Thus, the apparent explanation for bowing to Churchill's threats was that he did not want the German people, whom he claimed to love and whose interests he purported to advance, to suffer the same fate as he. However, chemical weapons had advanced to a level of sophistication that his people would not only suffer as he did, but also perish in the process. However, monocausal explanations such as this rarely serve to uncover the depth of Hitler's decision-making process. Hitler claimed that "although Germany had developed chemical weapons, [he] was not interested in their employment so long as [Germany was not] in an extreme emergency."<sup>194</sup> In the summer of 1941, Hitler did not see the need for chemical warfare, as his strategy for Operation Barbarossa successfully carried the *Wehrmacht* through the western Soviet Union. Hitler received Churchill's threat in May 1942. Even though the advance of the *Wehrmacht* had stalled, perhaps Hitler did not yet see the situation as an emergency worthy of needlessly sacrificing the lives of civilians home in Germany. He launched a spring and summer offensive in 1942. However, with the defeat of the

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<sup>193</sup> Roy Jenkins, *Churchill: A Biography* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux: 2001), 747.

<sup>194</sup> Müller, *Second World War*, 759

German Sixth Army at Stalingrad in 1943, the tide of the war turned against the Third Reich and the situation grew more desperate. Furthermore, as the Allies worked their way through North Africa and Italy, the swift end of the war against the Soviet Union would free German resources to combat Allies in the Mediterranean, as well as restart an offensive against Great Britain. However, the threat of chemical weapons directed at Germany would force Hitler to wage chemical warfare on both Great Britain and the Soviet Union. Faced with this logistical issue, Speer estimated that the current caches of chemical weapons were insufficient for two fronts.<sup>195</sup> The 40,000 tons of chemical agents amassed by 1942 were more than sufficient for the use of chemical warfare for the subjugation of the Soviet Union, but not enough for two separate theaters in Europe. Many of Hitler's general staff saw chemical gas as an offensive weapon, as opposed to a defensive weapon. Thus, the *Wehrmacht's* retreat out of the Soviet Union was not the opportune time to utilize chemical weapons, but rather during the offensive push into the Soviet Union.<sup>196</sup> Therefore, faced with a worsening situation on the Eastern front and the threat of retaliation on the Western front, Hitler could not logistically wage chemical warfare against both of his enemies.

However, Germany's civilian air defense remained suspect. First, there was a severe deficiency in the number of requisite gas masks available to protect the civilian population from chemical warfare.<sup>197</sup> Second, the *Luftwaffe* was already crippled by the Battle of Britain and then spread thin across North Africa and the Soviet Union. The

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<sup>195</sup> Müller, *Second World War*, 761.

<sup>196</sup> Gilbert, *War Papers*, 1203.

<sup>197</sup> Weinberg, *World at Arms*, 558.

*Luftwaffe* did not possess any reserve forces in case of emergency.<sup>198</sup> Building German aircraft required six times the amount of time required for a British or American factory to produce a comparable aircraft.<sup>199</sup> Therefore, not only did the RAF outnumber the *Luftwaffe*, but also the disparity of air supremacy between the Allies and Nazi Germany would continue to widen. Hitler also wanted to concentrate German production on bombers and not fighters.<sup>200</sup> Without sufficient fighters, the *Luftwaffe* pilots essentially did not challenge any RAF bombers and the latter could be loaded with bombs containing chemical weapons not to mention incendiaries that would torch German cities. Lastly, cities were not well defended with anti-aircraft artillery. In 1940, Hitler ordered the construction of shelters and air raid sirens built into urban areas.<sup>201</sup> Hitler envisioned transforming Germany into “one, single integrated defense unit.”<sup>202</sup> He determined that German towns and cities required air defense with floodlights and mirrors to blind pilots. Furthermore, Hitler predicted that with an estimated annual production of six thousand anti-aircraft guns, every civilian man and woman could provide the manpower for air defense crews. However, with the allocation of priorities and resources, the only real protection for German civilians were the air raid bunkers, which were insufficient to meet the needs of large cities like Hamburg or Dresden. The British began their bombing campaign as early as 1940. From 1942 until the end of the war, the British, and then the American, bombing of German cities grew increasingly unrestricted and targeted urban and civilian zones. In 1940, the *Luftwaffe* managed relatively successful defensive

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<sup>198</sup> Hitler, *Table Talk*, 107.

<sup>199</sup> Hitler, *Table Talk*, 221.

<sup>200</sup> Hitler, *Table Talk*, 307.

<sup>201</sup> Friedrich, *The Fire*, 326.

<sup>202</sup> Hitler, *Table Talk*, 669.

measures that forced the cease of British bombing until the summer of 1941. However, by 1941, the strength of the RAF thoroughly dominated that of the *Luftwaffe*.<sup>203</sup> Churchill considered Nazi Germany's air strength Hitler's most significant vulnerability.<sup>204</sup> Furthermore, new bombing strategies under Air Marshal Harris transformed the sphere of RAF strategic bombing.<sup>205</sup> Despite the continuous bombardment of German cities, Hitler did not order the *Luftwaffe* to retaliate against the British in any form, following the end of Operation Sea Lion. The *Luftwaffe* was merely capable of providing a paltry defense, already spread thin across the other fronts of the European theater. Therefore, in terms of defending his people from the British, Hitler was at the mercy of the RAF, while his attentions were turned eastward to the Soviet Union.

Hitler issued an order to Speer to prepare militarily and industrially for chemical warfare in April 1943.<sup>206</sup> However, Hitler ultimately backed down. Hitler even blamed Churchill for the outbreak of World War II: "It is a pity that I have to wage war on account of that drunk [Churchill] instead of serving the works of peace."<sup>207</sup> However, Hitler, at the same time, also respected Churchill as a soldier and as an artist.<sup>208</sup> In fact, Hitler did not intend to incarcerate Churchill at war's end, as he intended for other wartime leaders of the Allies. Clearly, Hitler expressed a variety of views concerning Winston Churchill, but nevertheless took Churchill's threats seriously. Hitler was a risk

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<sup>203</sup> Gilbert, *War Papers*, 1370.

<sup>204</sup> Gilbert, *War Papers*, 1370.

<sup>205</sup> Winston Churchill, *The Second World War: Closing the Ring* (Houghton Mifflin: 1951), 518.

<sup>206</sup> Müller, *Second World War*, 763.

<sup>207</sup> Frederic Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (Overlook Press: 2009), 29.

<sup>208</sup> Spotts, *Power of Aesthetics*, 85.

taker. However, Hitler did not test the validity of Churchill's threats, despite the pressing need for a "game changer" on the Eastern Front. Hitler was not willing to consider whether the threats of retaliation were a bluff. Furthermore, Hitler's crusade against the Soviet Union was a form of Holy War. As stated earlier, Hitler's struggle against the Jews and Bolsheviks was a morally and religiously justified act of God. Hitler was the messiah of the "Aryan" race, guiding the ascendance of the German people and protecting them from the Jewish mission ushering the collapse of civilization. Clearly, Operation Barbarossa was a significant piece of Hitler's mission in his life on Earth. As the campaign stalled and then failed, Hitler continued to abstain from chemical warfare in Russia. Therefore, Hitler's actions perhaps betrayed his true feelings toward Churchill, aside from his comments to his Nazi associates. Hitler was wary of Churchill and conscious of the destruction he was capable of causing to Germany and the German people. To Hitler, the danger Churchill posed was very real. Real enough that Hitler allowed the failure of Operation Barbarossa without taking more extreme measures. Faced with a plethora of wartime and logistical challenges, Hitler was not willing to test Churchill's ruthless devotion to the collapse of Nazi Germany at the cost of the lives of the German people at this point in World War II. Churchill effectively served as Hitler's ultimate deterrent.

### Conclusion

Operation Barbarossa (1941-1943) was the lynchpin of Hitler's crusade in Eastern Europe for the establishment of the *Lebensraum*. The absence of German chemical warfare in, what Hitler considered primary targets, Leningrad and Stalingrad once the

initial push into Soviet territory stalled was puzzling. Furthermore, once the tide turned in favor of the Red Army, Hitler continued to abstain from chemical warfare. Hitler was capable of terrible atrocities for the sake of his commitment to welfare of the German people. Hitler employed chemical agents extensively for the Holocaust and even gassed large numbers of Russian POWs. Hitler's hatred for Jews and Bolsheviks did not extend to the military battlefield. Clearly, based on the psychoanalysis of Hitler, outside forces influenced this crucial chain of events. Sir Winston Churchill, the prime minister of Great Britain, served as this deterrent to Hitler's ambitions. Ruthlessly dedicated to Hitler's defeat and the collapse of the Third Reich, Churchill and, more importantly, the RAF possessed the means and resources to cause untold destruction to German cities and German civilians. Utterly defenseless to the movements and attacks of the RAF, Hitler was at the mercy of Churchill. Although Hitler's own experience with chemical gas in World War I most likely affected his attitude towards chemical warfare against German civilians, the addition of other factors weighed against the *Wehrmacht* also affected his decision to back down to Churchill's threats of retaliation. Faced with significant logistical challenges, Hitler could not risk the safety of tens of thousands of German civilians even for his holy mission in the Soviet Union. Clearly, Hitler still held hope for the success of the Third Reich in World War II. However, by 1944 and into 1945, Hitler's mental and physical state began to unravel and thus changed his attitude towards chemical warfare.



## CHAPTER THREE SPEER'S DEFIANCE

### Introduction

Faced with the destruction of the German people at Churchill's hands, Hitler ultimately backed down in the face of the British prime minister's resolve. Nevertheless, Hitler banked on his "miracle weapons" to turn the tide of World War II. Hitler himself said that the deployment of chemical weapons would wait until the Third Reich faced an emergency. However, following the defeat at Stalingrad in February 1943, the war took a decisive turn against Nazi Germany. As the British, American, and Soviet militaries closed in around Berlin, Hitler's diminishing composure and irrational decisions began to reflect the collapse of the governmental structure of the Third Reich. As his mental and physical status deteriorated, Hitler's thoughts turned to his own suicide, the destruction of Germany, and the decimation of the German people. Previously concerned with the preservation of the "Aryan" race to the point of pursuing Operation Barbarossa's success without chemical warfare, this gradual acceptance of extinction illustrated the breakdown of Hitler's confidence in "total victory." In his bunker under the Reich Chancellery, Hitler faced the impending doom of the Allied assault. Indeed, many, including Albert Speer, questioned Hitler's sanity. Thus, faced with the limited options of the defeated, Hitler issued the Führer order for the complete destruction of all German infrastructures on March 19, 1945. Famously referred to as the "Nero Decree," Hitler's scorched-earth policy hastened Nazi Germany's path to catastrophe. However, despite Hitler's and Himmler's last ditch efforts to crush the Allies, the SS was the only institution committed to fighting by spring 1945, and chemical weapons were never deployed on the battlefield,

despite Hitler's pathetic dependence on his crutch of "miracle weapons." The V-1 and V-2 rocket programs presented the most liable option for dispersing chemical agents in London and Paris. In particular, the V-2 rockets had a devastating impact on Great Britain, so much so that Winston Churchill again raised the prospect of mass chemical retaliation. However, the insufficient supply of these weapons explained their ineffectiveness in the final stages of the war. Ultimately, the invasion of the Allies and the collapse of military command and governance of Nazi Germany in 1945 prevented Hitler and the few remaining fanatics dedicated to "total victory" from utilizing the chemical weapon stockpiles built up during the course of the war.

### Albert Speer

Ambitious, talented, and ruthlessly efficient, Albert Speer, perhaps Hitler's closest associate, played a remarkable role during the final months of the Third Reich's existence. The "apologetic Nazi," as he was later known, defied Hitler's direct orders by circumventing and obstructing the execution of the Nero Decree. More importantly, Speer, the logistical mastermind behind Hitler's chemical weapons program, exercised a decisive part in the absence of chemical warfare during the final months of World War II. Although personally loyal to Hitler, Speer was not as invested in the ideologies of the Nazi state. Born after the turn of the twentieth century on March 19, 1905 into a comfortable upper-middle class family, Speer was a member of the generation too young to participate directly in World War I.<sup>209</sup> He originally wanted to pursue a degree in mathematics, but ultimately decided to follow his grandfather and father into architecture,

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<sup>209</sup> Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich* (The MacMillan Company: 1970), 4.

mostly due to his father's urging.<sup>210</sup> After completing his studies at university, Speer secured a position as Heinrich Tessenow's assistant.<sup>211</sup> Tessenow was a very prominent architect in the 1920s. During his time at Tessenow's institute, Speer's students encouraged him to attend a meeting of the NSDAP, one where Hitler himself spoke. Speer claimed that during the meeting, he was mesmerized by Hitler's rhetoric, and thus, in 1931, he joined the Nazi party.<sup>212</sup> However, this episode clearly portrayed his devotion to his own personal advancement. Despite his birth into a politically energized generation, Speer neither discussed nor subscribed to political ideologies. For the entirety of his young life, he did not profess any strong political views.<sup>213</sup> Following the Wall Street crash in 1929, the NSDAP gained a substantial number of seats in the Reichstag and earned a plurality in 1932. Furthermore, the economic shockwave felt in Germany saw a significant dip in Speer's salary with Tessenow's institute since academics were civil servants.<sup>214</sup> Therefore, Speer, faced with a metaphorical fork in the road, tossed in his lot with the rise of the NSDAP. In fact, when President von Hindenburg appointed Hitler chancellor in 1933, Speer did not recognize the enormity of the party's success, but rather cared more about his personal inactivity as an architect.<sup>215</sup> As the only district member with a car, Speer started as a driver for party members, but this position clearly served as a way to meet more senior members. Thus, he met Karl Hanke and secured his first commission redecorating the West End Berlin district

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<sup>210</sup> Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, 6.

<sup>211</sup> Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, 11.

<sup>212</sup> Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, 17.

<sup>213</sup> Joachim Fest, *Speer: The Final Verdict* (Harcourt: 1999), 27.

<sup>214</sup> Fest, *The Final Verdict*, 29.

<sup>215</sup> Fest, *The Final Verdict*, 31.

headquarters.<sup>216</sup> Hanke would help Speer acquire more commissions in the future. In 1933, Hitler personally approved Speer's designs for the Nuremberg rally.<sup>217</sup> Through this one project, Hitler assigned Speer to work under Paul Troost, Hitler's personal architect, for the renovation of the Reich's chancellery.<sup>218</sup> During his work on the Reich's chancellery, Speer grew increasingly close to Hitler personally. This included being invited to dine with the Nazi elite and receiving late night calls from Hitler to discuss the project.<sup>219</sup> When Troost passed away in 1934, Speer ostensibly ascended to the Führer's favorite. By this point, Speer claimed that he was completely under Hitler's sway.<sup>220</sup> By the age of twenty-eight, Speer had sold his soul, and through his association with Hitler, everything he ever dreamt of was within his grasp.<sup>221</sup>

Speer successfully completed a variety of projects as Hitler's favorite architect. For example, his entry in the 1937 Paris World's Exposition won a gold medal.<sup>222</sup> However, Hitler was more concerned with leaving his mark on history. As Benito Mussolini could point to Roman monuments as symbols of empire so too did Hitler want German monuments that people could extol centuries later.<sup>223</sup> Hitler was excited when his building designs surpassed other monumental structures in terms of size. Hitler also entrusted Speer with the remodeling of Berlin into the capital of the Third Reich. The German dictator designed a domed great hall with a 250-meter diameter and a triumphal

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<sup>216</sup> Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, 21.

<sup>217</sup> Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, 28.

<sup>218</sup> Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, 31.

<sup>219</sup> Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, 44.

<sup>220</sup> Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, 49.

<sup>221</sup> Fest, *The Final Verdict*, 36.

<sup>222</sup> Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, 67.

<sup>223</sup> Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, 56.

arch 120-meters tall.<sup>224</sup> According to historian Dan van der Vat, under his new title of Inspector-General for Construction of the Reich's Capital, Hitler's favorite architect developed plans to reorganize the entire city and even "expanded" on the Führer's Megalomaniacal designs.<sup>225</sup> As the architect of the capital, Speer was introduced to the darker side of the regime and oversaw the deportation of Jews residing in the capital. From August 1941 to November 1941, he ordered the removal of over seven thousand Jewish residents from their homes.<sup>226</sup> Speer displayed a keen organizational sense to "arrange [the] speedy fulfillment of contracts awarded on the whim of a dictator who demanded instant gratification."<sup>227</sup> He would later utilize this skill set to manage the economy as the Armaments Minister. Speer had already tied his fate to that of Hitler's, but now Speer could safely assume his position within Hitler's inner circle. Speer's ascension continued into the invasion of Poland and the outbreak of World War II. Indeed, he fully supported the invasion of Poland. In Gitta Sereny's biography of Speer, the architect said that "he was perfectly aware that [Hitler] sought world domination" and at the time, Speer "wanted this great man to dominate the globe."<sup>228</sup> Speer claimed that the purpose of his buildings was to celebrate Germany's ascendance and supremacy. During the early years of the war, Speer even postponed his work on the capital and offered the services of his department to the wartime effort.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Dan van der Vat, *The Good Nazi: The Life and Lies of Albert Speer* (Houghton Mifflin: 1997), 69.

<sup>225</sup> van der Vat, *The Good Nazi*, 70.

<sup>226</sup> van der Vat, *The Good Nazi*, 98.

<sup>227</sup> van der Vat, *The Good Nazi*, 71.

<sup>228</sup> Gitta Sereny, *Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth* (Alfred A. Knopf: 1995), 186.

<sup>229</sup> van der Vat, *The Good Nazi*, 99.

In February 1942, at thirty-eight years of age, Hitler appointed Speer as the Reich Armaments Minister.<sup>230</sup> Hitler entrusted Speer with both his architectural legacy and with the administration of the logistics of the war effort. Speer was Hitler's friend, Hitler's favorite minister, and shared a kindred spirit with Hitler.<sup>231</sup> The architect turned Armaments Minister hid a huge ambition and sizable ego, which Hitler stroked. Clearly, both Hitler and Speer had much to gain through their friendship. Speer was not naïve and understood the darker side of the regime, though he failed to acknowledge much of his own involvement in his memoirs. In fact, Speer utilized slave labor to support his armaments production.<sup>232</sup> However, as he grew closer to Hitler and as he ascended through the ranks of the Nazi state, Speer likewise overlooked the regime's darker aspects.<sup>233</sup> Through his interactions with Himmler, the deportation of Berlin Jews, and the state construction projects at Auschwitz, Speer obviously knew about the Holocaust.<sup>234</sup> According to historian Dan van der Vat, the Armaments Minister's "ability to compartmentalize enabled him to separate the nature of the regime from the work he was doing and the character of the man who led it."<sup>235</sup> Furthermore, van der Vat considered Speer's defense of his ignorance "legalistic exculpation," and that he "sidestepped the implication" of his actions. Biographer Gitta Sereny had a much different perspective. Sereny accepted Speer's admission of moral responsibility and

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<sup>230</sup> Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, 195.

<sup>231</sup> Fest, *The Final Verdict*, 42.

<sup>232</sup> Sereny, *Battle with Truth*, 332.

<sup>233</sup> Fest, *The Final Verdict*, 43.

<sup>234</sup> Rolf-Dieter Müller, *Germany and the Second World War* (Oxford University Press: 2003), 367.

<sup>235</sup> van der Vat, *The Good Nazi*, 88.

believed that Speer did not possess explicit knowledge of the Holocaust.<sup>236</sup> Moral implications aside, by 1943, as he assumed greater prominence within the administrative structure, Speer “harbored more than a little ambition to move into the limelight as ‘crown prince.’”<sup>237</sup>

Within his new office, Speer created Central Planning in 1942, essentially centralizing the allocation of industrial raw materials and for the various needs of the *Wehrmacht*.<sup>238</sup> Speer also determined the allocation of labor and the workforce.<sup>239</sup> Essentially, “the essence of the system (which was never laid down in detail) was not hierarchy or a dubious ‘leadership principle,’ but organized collaboration and a balancing of interests that took the output of armaments as its yardstick of success.”<sup>240</sup> Speer removed bureaucrats from the administration of armament production in lieu of industrialists and experts.<sup>241</sup> Speer also maximized wartime production by issuing ordinances dealing with international cartel agreements, quotas, “profit-oriented considerations,” and conflicts of interest in varying sectors that led to bottlenecks. With Hitler’s trust, Speer protected his “rationalization” process of the Armaments Ministry from interference by the Party, the *Wehrmacht*, and the SS.<sup>242</sup> By autumn 1943, Speer also gained control over naval armaments.<sup>243</sup> Then, at the zenith of his power in the

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<sup>236</sup> Sereny, *Battle with Truth*, 463.

<sup>237</sup> Müller, *The Second World War*, 353.

<sup>238</sup> Müller, *The Second World War*, 328.

<sup>239</sup> Müller, *The Second World War*, 329.

<sup>240</sup> Müller, *The Second World War*, 339.

<sup>241</sup> Müller, *The Second World War*, 340.

<sup>242</sup> Müller, *The Second World War*, 342.

<sup>243</sup> Müller, *The Second World War*, 351.

summer of 1944, Speer gained control of *Luftwaffe* armaments and air defense.<sup>244</sup>

Throughout this tenure, Speer was pegged as the possible Hitler successor. According to Sereny, Speer constantly clashed with Hitler's other subordinates like Hermann Göring and Heinrich Himmler, for example.<sup>245</sup> In his system of leadership, the German dictator played his subleaders against each other. Ultimately, Hitler remained the final arbiter and voice of authority as the Nazi elite competed for the Führer's favor. From 1942-1944, Speer's favored position led to the accrual of his burgeoning responsibilities. The V-1 and V-2 rocket program, which began in was one of the few projects that he shared with Himmler. Indeed, he and Himmler did not see eye-to-eye on how best to manage the underground rocket facilities and battled over both resource and labor allocation.<sup>246</sup> Speer preferred the diversion of resources to traditional military weaponry.

Through Speer's influence, the growing success of Bomber Command in 1942 did not hurt German war production. The wartime economy was not affected, and "resources, productive capacity, and labor drawn from occupied territories, armament production actually increased."<sup>247</sup> Through his ambition, talent, intellect, and closeness to Hitler, Speer arguably ascended through the ranks of the party to the tier of power on par with Goebbels and Himmler. Although a careerist, Speer was still devoted to Hitler and their friendship and worked tirelessly to shore up the inefficiencies of armaments production to fight towards "total victory." However, despite his significant effect on the war effort, the Allies continued their relentless push towards Berlin.

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<sup>244</sup> Müller, *The Second World War*, 633.

<sup>245</sup> Sereny, *Battle with Truth*, 403.

<sup>246</sup> van der Vat, *The Good Nazi*, 174.

<sup>247</sup> Winston Churchill, *The Second World War: Closing the Ring* (Houghton Mifflin: 1951), 519.



## Miracle Weapons

From V-1 rockets to chemical weapons, Hitler wished to unleash his miracle weapons during the final stages of the war and placed the last of his hopes for victory in these secrets of which the Allies were unaware. According to Sereny, by 1943, Speer claimed that Hitler “was [...] convinced that [...] the miracle weapons [...] would win the war.”<sup>248</sup> Churchill possessed no knowledge of the existence of German nerve agents.<sup>249</sup> The British Prime Minister assumed that the Germans only had stockpiles of mustard gas from World War I, illustrating the secrecy with which Hitler protected his miracle weapons. However, much to Speer’s dismay, Hitler diverted resources critical to the conventional defense of the Third Reich, such that the *Wehrmacht* could not halt the advances of the Allied forces. Likewise, the late and untimely allocation of resources to these miracle weapons, especially the V-1 and V-2 rockets, neither allowed time for the proper development nor a sufficient production to cause any significant damage to the Allied forces. The development of the V-1 and V-2 rockets mostly fell under the jurisdiction of Himmler and the SS. Both the V-1 and V-2 rockets, however, were not built for accurate strikes, but developed to hit large targets like London. The V-1 was a small pilotless plane that hit its target with its payload after running out of fuel.<sup>250</sup> The SS fired 22,400 V-1 rockets at London. The V-2 was a liquid-fuel rocket that traveled at

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<sup>248</sup> Sereny, *Battle with Truth*, 404.

<sup>249</sup> Winston Churchill, *The Second World War: Hinge of Fate* (Houghton Mifflin: 1950) 329.

<sup>250</sup> Gerhard Weinberg, *World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge University Press: 1994), 562.

a much faster speed of two thousand miles per hour, as opposed to the 375 miles per hour speed of the V-1 rocket. Therefore, the V-2 rocket was much more difficult to shoot down on its approach. The SS fired 3,200 V-2 rockets, resulting in the deaths of fifteen thousand Britons. London presented an immense target, but technical difficulties in the production and allocation of scarce resources fell outside of Speer's central command economy; then were not utilized with the efficiency for which Speer was known. The rockets were only useful if fired in massive volley strikes, but this requirement was beyond German capabilities. Thus, the SS efforts with rocket production fell flat and did not affect the war in any significant way. The "employment [of V-1 and V-2 rockets] came too soon rather than too late," as Nazi Germany's resources were inefficiently wasted.<sup>251</sup> The efficient development of rockets possibly could have served as a possible form of deterrence against the Allied bombing campaign. Despite the futility of the SS's rocket operations, Speer continued to feed Hitler information on the armaments miracle (Speer tripled aircraft production in 1944) and the prospect of super weapons.<sup>252</sup> In the words of historian Rolf-Dieter Müller, Speer "acted on Hitler like a sedative" in the winter of 1944. The young Armaments Minister "inspired Hitler to hold on, and not commit an act of desperation." Therefore, "while Speer prolonged the war, he also prevented its escalation into a chemical, biological, and nuclear inferno in the middle of Europe."

With the failure of the nuclear weapons program under Werner Heisenberg, Nazi super weapons, or weapons of mass-destruction, lay with the development of new

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<sup>251</sup> Weinberg, *World at Arms*, 563.

<sup>252</sup> Müller, *Second World War*, 760.

chemical weapons. The “Third Reich’s biggest and most secret armaments projects” was the tabun and sarin production plant in Dyhernfurth an der Oder. This underground facility produced one hundred tons per month, which was sufficiently capable of filling 120,000 howitzer shells.<sup>253</sup> In 1942, Speer increased chemical agent production for the upcoming summer offensive on the Eastern Front. Hitler wanted to hold the upper hand in terms of chemical capabilities with entry of the United States into the European theater. Hitler envisioned a “chemical wall” along the lines of the Eastern Front to hold the Red Army at bay.<sup>254</sup> In addition to specific chemical warfare, Hitler ordered the development of chemicals in conventional warfare, much as the British and Americans did with the creation of firestorms. For example, taifun was a chemical mixture of carbon monoxide and ethylene designed for dispersion into underground passages. Soldiers could then ignite the entire passage as an attempt to destroy partisan tunnels on the Eastern Front. These unique units were called “sapper” units. Five hundred bottles of taifun were available to the first sapper unit, but the first operations in 1943 of this pseudo-chemical warfare failed because the “sappers” could not achieve the critical level of concentration necessary for the ignition of the underground passages.<sup>255</sup> Another example was the development of N-Stoff, a corrosive chemical that disintegrated anything including water. In another underground secret facility at Falkenhagen near Berlin, a few hundred tons were produced. Hitler envisioned eliminating the water around the British Isles and creating a path for a *Wehrmacht* invasion, but obviously not enough of the substance was

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<sup>253</sup> Müller, *Second World War*, 761.

<sup>254</sup> Müller, *Second World War*, 762.

<sup>255</sup> Müller, *Second World War*, 764.

produced.<sup>256</sup> In fact, Hitler ordered Goebbels to develop a propaganda campaign based on the deployment of N-Stoff. However, the *Wehrmacht* found no use for N-Stoff, and it never appeared on the battlefield.

Clearly, with the exception of tabun and sarin, none of the other “secret weapons” Hitler ordered developed possessed the possibility of turning the tide of the war in favor of Nazi Germany. In fact, the allocation of resources for Hitler’s various pet projects disrupted Speer’s rational armaments production for the conventional defense of Germany against the Allied invasion. Nevertheless, faced with the prospect of defeat and the collapse of the Third Reich, Hitler sought any avenue that might in turn preserve the “Thousand Year Reich” he hoped to create. However, in the bunker under the Reich Chancellery, Hitler’s thoughts phased from preservation of the “Aryan” race into suicide and rampant destruction.

### The Tipping Point

With the American and British forces pushing west from Normandy and north from the Italian peninsula and the Red Army advancing west, Hitler felt the combined pressure of his enemies closing in on the throat of the Third Reich. Furthermore, the bombing campaigns continued to bombard German cities, resources, military factories, and industries. While Hitler and Nazi Germany perpetrated crimes against humanity on the Eastern Front, Churchill and the Americans committed terrible atrocities through the bombardment campaign against the Third Reich. Ultimately, during the war, both sides of the conflict were guilty of horrible acts of violence. However, only the victorious

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<sup>256</sup> Müller, *Second World War*, 764.

dispensed justice, but the question of war crimes and civilian casualties in total war must remain in perspective. The Allied bombing campaigns remain controversial: whether the use of force was justified or whether it was excessive “calculated terror.”<sup>257</sup> According to historian Roy Jenkins, Churchill thought that these attacks against Germany were justified and was the path to victory.<sup>258</sup> The Allied bombing campaign resulted in the death of approximately 420,000 and 570,000 German civilians.<sup>259</sup> World War I tactics of lowering civilian morale, such as German artillery shelling of Paris, set the precedent for purposely targeting civilians. In fact, engaging civilians generally was accepted by the high commands of both the Allies and the Axis. Churchill pioneered the concept of strategic bombing in 1919 in his role as the minister of munitions in World War I and planned a “thousand-bomber” attack on Berlin if the Germans held the Western Front in 1918.<sup>260</sup> For World War II, Churchill felt that the operations of Bomber Command were essential to his goal of “total victory.”<sup>261</sup> Although production of bombers “lagged,” according to Churchill’s timetable, numbers soon reached a point that campaigns against U-boats and German cities in 1940 began to have tangible effects.<sup>262</sup> Churchill believed that strategic bombing was “a foretaste of what Hitler would inflict upon the British and American peoples if only he could get the power [;] retribution for these crimes must

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<sup>257</sup> Richard Evans, *Lying About Hitler: History, Holocaust, and the David Irving Trial* (Basic Books: 2001), 150.

<sup>258</sup> Roy Jenkins, *Churchill: A Biography* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux: 2001), 641.

<sup>259</sup> Jörg Friedrich, *The Fire* (Columbia University Press: 2002), 50.

<sup>260</sup> Friedrich, *The Fire*, 51.

<sup>261</sup> Churchill, *Closing the Ring*, 517.

<sup>262</sup> Churchill, *Closing the Ring*, 518.

henceforward take its place among the major purposes of this war.”<sup>263</sup> By March 1942, Churchill informed Stalin that American bombers engaged in daytime bombing of German cities while the RAF engaged in nighttime bombing.<sup>264</sup> The RAF and the American bombers created a swath of destruction that Churchill described as “blasting Hitler from behind while [...] grappling with the Bear.”<sup>265</sup> On a given day, bombers made four hundred “daytime sorties,” and on a given night, two hundred bombers carried three tons of explosives each.<sup>266</sup> Rapid advancement in engine technology allowed for heavier tonnage capacity for each bomber. Starting at 2800 pounds of explosives in 1940, by 1943, four engine bombers carried 7500 pounds on average.<sup>267</sup> The invention of radar further contributed to the effectiveness of Allied bombing raids. American attacks on German airfields and aircraft production facilities greatly diminished fighter defense by the *Luftwaffe*.<sup>268</sup>

The discovery of the way to ignite a firestorm in 1943 introduced a new tactic to the Allied bombing of Germany. The first firestorm developed as a natural phenomenon. Firestorms caused death in three different ways: the heat climbed up to fifteen hundred degrees Fahrenheit; winds blew at a velocity fifty feet per second within a 2.5 mile radius of the center sucking in people caught within the vortex; and the fire removed all of the oxygen in the area.<sup>269</sup> Because the destruction of German cities required more munitions

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<sup>263</sup> Martin Gilbert, *The Churchill War Papers: Volume III* (W.W. Norton & Company: 2000), 1370.

<sup>264</sup> Churchill, *Hinge of Fate*, 329.

<sup>265</sup> Churchill, *Hinge of Fate*, 203.

<sup>266</sup> Gilbert, *War Papers*, 903.

<sup>267</sup> Churchill, *Closing the Ring*, 518.

<sup>268</sup> Churchill, *Closing the Ring*, 523.

<sup>269</sup> Friedrich, *The Fire*, 94.

and explosives with conventional bombing, Churchill thought of firestorms as a more economical approach to the bombing campaign.<sup>270</sup> During the bombing of Hamburg in 1943, Bomber Command tested a scientific approach to creating firestorms.<sup>271</sup> Tagged Operation Gomorrah, bombers dropped incendiary sticks and liquid incendiaries. Then, the bombers dropped firebombs, igniting a firestorm in less than forty-three minutes. The firestorm created wind speeds equal to that of a Pacific hurricane and burned for three hours until there was nothing left to burn, taking the lives of forty to fifty thousand civilians – the highest body count of the bombing campaign. Then in Dresden in February 1945, two attacks by British bombers and two attacks by American bombers desolated the third largest city in Germany.<sup>272</sup> Dresden was an important center of communications and transport, with garrisoned troops, and industries all outfitted for armaments manufacture. Like most other German cities, Dresden was ill prepared defensively for the bombings. The Allies used these factors as the justification for their attack. However, the production centers and rail lines were damaged, but not crippled because the British focused their fire bombing on the wooden historical center of Dresden, as it was easy to ignite.<sup>273</sup> The city was further clogged with civilians fleeing the advance of the Red Army. The Dresden campaign resulted in twenty thousand casualties, second to Hamburg. However, the Anglo-American bombing campaign was a mild alternative to Churchill's initial desire for chemical and biological warfare against sixty German cities. Essentially, the use of phosphorous and other chemicals in the

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<sup>270</sup> Friedrich, *The Fire*, 95.

<sup>271</sup> Friedrich, *The Fire*, 96.

<sup>272</sup> Evans, *Lying About Hitler*, 149.

<sup>273</sup> Evans, *Lying About Hitler*, 150.

creation of firestorms was a deadly form of chemical warfare, resulting in the swift deaths of tens of thousands of people. Churchill, like Stalin and the Red Army, sought retribution for the terror of the Nazi regime and perpetrated terrible acts of violence in kind. As the vice closed around Berlin from all sides in 1945, Hitler suffered from severe physical and mental strain, but continued to bank many of his hopes on his “miracle weapons.”

### The Nero Decree

Hitler threw every last option Germany had left at the Allies. However, none of these last ditch efforts had any effect on the steady advancement of the Allies into Berlin. By the end of 1944, Hitler had retreated into the bunker under the Reich Chancellery and conducted the war command from there. However, his thoughts quickly turned to thoughts of suicide and Germany’s destruction. Hitler himself said: “May God forgive me the final days of this war!”<sup>274</sup> According to Speer, Hitler also said, “If the war is lost, the nation will also perish [;] this fate is inevitable.”<sup>275</sup> Furthermore, if the war was lost, the German people deserved extinction for their weakness and were “destined for destruction.” Hitler ordered Speer not to provide civilians with necessities like food or shelter.<sup>276</sup> However, Speer disobeyed this order.<sup>277</sup> Perhaps the Armaments Minister first break with his beneficiary, this defiance revealed the growing divergence between the two “friends.” In December 1944, Hitler organized the last German offensive of the

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<sup>274</sup> Müller, *Second World War*, 761.

<sup>275</sup> Fest, *The Final Verdict*, 234.

<sup>276</sup> Jacobsen, *Operation Paperclip*, 30.

<sup>277</sup> Sereny, *Battle with Truth*, 471.



war. However, the Ardennes offensive on the Western Front, which essentially drew upon the final resources of the *Wehrmacht*, was squashed by January and ended the last major military action by Nazi Germany. The Ardennes offensive was one of many last ditch efforts Hitler ordered. For example, Himmler organized “suicide squads” designed to sacrifice themselves to target and destroy Allied armored units with explosives.<sup>278</sup> Himmler also organized the deployment of V-1 and V-2 rockets. Speer believed that if Hitler possessed an atomic bomb, he would not have hesitated to launch one at London.<sup>279</sup> Hitler also armed units of women and Hitler Youth for the final defense of Berlin against the onslaught of the Red Army.<sup>280</sup> By the winter of 1944 as Speer fell out of favor with Hitler, other ministers vultured his control of armaments production, but that led to the disintegration of the central planning that kept Germany surviving World War II.<sup>281</sup> In January 1945, Hitler ordered Speer to organize the “complete destruction of all German infrastructure.”<sup>282</sup> In the words of Speer, Hitler intended to “drag half the world with us into the abyss.”<sup>283</sup> Then, on March 19, 1945, Hitler officially issued the Nero Decree ordering all local party officials, under the supervision of Speer, to destroy all German infrastructures.

More importantly, the question remains about the absence of chemical weapons during this final phase of the war. Hitler deployed his other secret weapons, but chemical weapons, his real weapons of mass destruction, were conspicuously missing. Hitler

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<sup>278</sup> Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, 412.

<sup>279</sup> Ian Kershaw, *The End* (The Penguin Press: 2011), 312.

<sup>280</sup> Joachim Fest, *Inside Hitler's Bunker: The Last Days of the Third Reich* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux: 2002), 40.

<sup>281</sup> Fest, *The Final Verdict*, 232.

<sup>282</sup> Jacobsen, *Operation Paperclip*, 30.

<sup>283</sup> Fest, *The Final Verdict*, 235.

undoubtedly intended to use chemical weapons in this suicidal state. Following the surrender of the *Wehrmacht* at Stalingrad in 1943, Hitler commanded all units of the *Wehrmacht* to prepare for the deployment of chemical weapons.<sup>284</sup> Clearly, once the war turned against the Third Reich, Hitler was more prepared to accept the consequences of chemical warfare to check the advance of the Red Army. Indeed, in February 1944, Hitler's general staff circulated the code word "Crystal Vase." The activation of the code would signify the armed forces to initiate chemical warfare.<sup>285</sup> However, Germany was not prepared to wage a chemical war on both fronts. Otto Ambros, the head of chemical weapons production, estimated that the production facilities could yield a sufficient supply of tabun by May 1944 and a sufficient supply of sarin the following year. Somar was still experimental and not ready for mass production. Hitler saw his chemical super weapons as the "means of the very last and final decision" of World War II.

Consequently, tabun production doubled, and sarin production sextupled. Hitler believed that the most prudent strategy was to postpone chemical warfare as late as possible to deny Allied scientists the opportunity to develop their own nerve agents once the secret weapons were unleashed. Despite the disappointing failure of the Ardennes offensive, Hitler still desired for a swift end to the war. He hoped the sudden momentum provided by the nerve agents could accomplish this goal.<sup>286</sup> Furthermore, German scientists developed new delivery methods for these chemical weapons.<sup>287</sup> According to historian Annie Jacobsen, enough gas was available at the Dyhenfurth secret facility to lay waste

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<sup>284</sup> Müller, *Second World War*, 765.

<sup>285</sup> Müller, *Second World War*, 769.

<sup>286</sup> Müller, *Second World War*, 767.

<sup>287</sup> Jacobsen, *Operation Paperclip*, 25.

to the civilian populations of London or Paris.<sup>288</sup> Hypothetically, the *Wehrmacht* could load nerve agents into V-2 rockets and target London. In October 1944, Hitler sent Churchill a proposal to allow Germany to lay down a poison wall along the Eastern Front without British retaliation.<sup>289</sup> Hitler perhaps made this request because Churchill and Roosevelt did not want the Soviets to extend beyond their original borders.<sup>290</sup> However, Churchill still disagreed. Hitler even ordered an increase in civilian chemical defense precautions. Gas mask production, for example, rose dramatically.<sup>291</sup> Many of these examples point to Hitler's willingness to engage in chemical warfare against the Allies. However, Hitler's most secret and potent miracle weapon remained shelved through the final months of World War II.

### Collapse

Despite the readiness of the military to engage in chemical warfare, Hitler did not issue the order. Essentially, a combination of Speer's interference and the overall collapse of governance in the Third Reich prevented the deployment of chemical weapons. In the bunker, Hitler's mental and physical wellness continued to deteriorate. Hitler's mindset quickly evolved once again from catastrophe to apathy. Hitler lost his motivation to lead. Historian Ian Kershaw argued that Hitler had given up on the continuation of the war following the failure of the Ardennes Offensive in January 1945,

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<sup>288</sup> Jacobsen, *Operation Paperclip*, 25.

<sup>289</sup> Müller, *Second World War*, 771.

<sup>290</sup> Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, 414.

<sup>291</sup> Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, 413.

but could not openly admit it.<sup>292</sup> Hitler struggled with the reality of the situation. He simply continued his act of the “indomitable Führer” for the sake of his entourage. Nevertheless, by March of 1945, his authority waned, and his orders were disobeyed. For example, Hitler ordered the rapid evacuation of German cities on both the Western and Eastern Fronts.<sup>293</sup> However, the *Wehrmacht* did not conduct the evacuation. In January 1945, Speer began to question Hitler’s sanity. Hitler ranted about his suicide, the failure of the German people, and the shortcomings of his subleaders. Physically, the German dictator was deteriorating. His personal physician Dr. Theodor Morrell heavily medicated Hitler in the final months of his life. Hitler consumed twenty-eight pills per day and received numerous injections, many of which were simply glucose.<sup>294</sup> When Hitler dismissed Morrell on April 21, Captain Heinz Assmann described Hitler as a “physical wreck who could barely walk, doing so with a stooped back and shuffling gait, his right leg dragging, his head shaking and his left hand trembling on the limply dangling arm.”<sup>295</sup>

Many of his subordinates had abandoned Hitler after his birthday on April 10, 1945. Party ideology did not sustain loyalty to Hitler. Many simply wanted to save themselves and made individual plans for surrender or escape.<sup>296</sup> Hermann Göring, for example, fled Berlin for one of his estates at Obersalzberg. The only Nazi leaders who remained with Hitler until his suicide were Joseph Goebbels and Martin Bormann.

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<sup>292</sup> Kershaw, *The End*, 294.

<sup>293</sup> Kershaw, *The End*, 291.

<sup>294</sup> David Irving, *The Secret Diaries of Hitler’s Doctors* (MacMillan Publishing Company: 1983), 272.

<sup>295</sup> Irving, *The Secret Diaries*, 273.

<sup>296</sup> Kershaw, *The End*, 336.

Clearly, Hitler's authority waned in the closing months of the war, and order within the military and the Nazi state began to breakdown. For example, Hitler organized Berlin's defense, but the *Wehrmacht* did not carry out Hitler's orders.<sup>297</sup> When Hitler discovered this betrayal, he suffered a hysterical breakdown. He refused to leave the bunker for safety. However, once the defense of Berlin failed, Hitler admitted to the few people remaining in the bunker that the war was lost. With Hitler's growing apathy, the other members of the Nazi elite could not collaborate to generate any leadership at war's end.<sup>298</sup> Historian Ian Kershaw described this crisis of leadership in Nazi Germany as "fragmentation."<sup>299</sup> Because Hitler spent the entirety of the Nazi regime playing his subordinates off one another to create competition, the leaders could only continue to bicker amongst themselves.<sup>300</sup> On April 22, Hitler essentially resigned his post. At this point, Walther Wenck, general of the 12<sup>th</sup> army, stated "the fate of a single individual is no longer of any significance."<sup>301</sup> Indeed, the battle over succession between Göring, Himmler, and Goebbels began in earnest, clearly reflecting a lack of concern for Hitler, the Party, or the State.<sup>302</sup> In the final days of the war, there was no semblance of a central government as the other Nazi leaders sought their brief moment of power.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> Fest, *Inside Hitler's Bunker*, 63.

<sup>298</sup> Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, 482.

<sup>299</sup> Kershaw, *The End*, 13.

<sup>300</sup> H.R. Trevor-Roper, *The Last Days of Adolf Hitler* (The MacMillan Company: 1947), 42.

<sup>301</sup> Fest, *Inside Hitler's Bunker*, 68.

<sup>302</sup> Fest, *Inside Hitler's Bunker*, 84.

<sup>303</sup> Kershaw, *The End*, 342.

By March 1945, Speer began to fall out of favor with Hitler.<sup>304</sup> Speer sent Hitler a memorandum stating that the war was unwinnable. Hitler threatened Speer with charges of treason, punishable by execution.<sup>305</sup> As Speer's influence declined, the economy fell into anarchy as Himmler and other Nazi leaders sought to dismantle Speer's empire.<sup>306</sup> Despite the political chaos in Berlin, Speer continued to obstruct the Nero Decree. From January to April of 1945, he made seventy trips and held over one hundred conferences with local *Gauleiters* attempting to convince them to also defy the Nero Decree.<sup>307</sup> Speer also forged orders from the *Wehrmacht* to protect infrastructure and halted the delivery of explosives. Hitler previously suspended sending food rations to German civilians, but the "apologetic Nazi" restarted distributing supplies to the people.<sup>308</sup>

Speer also played a key role in preventing chemical warfare. He was a careerist, not an ideologue, and was worried about his lot following the end of the war.<sup>309</sup> The Armaments Minister perhaps sought a compelling case that might save his life following Germany's surrender. In January of 1945, Speer and Ambros were both involved in the elimination of files and evidence at the various secret production facilities.<sup>310</sup> In fact, at Speer's sentencing at the military tribunals, the judges stated in 1946 that Speer was one of the few people attempting to prevent senseless destruction as per Hitler's orders, even risking "personal endangerment."<sup>311</sup> In November 1944, Hitler ordered that chemical

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<sup>304</sup> Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, 415.

<sup>305</sup> Jacobsen, *Operation Paperclip*, 30.

<sup>306</sup> Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, 414.

<sup>307</sup> Fest, *The Final Verdict*, 237.

<sup>308</sup> Fest, *The Final Verdict*, 238.

<sup>309</sup> Jacobsen, *Operation Paperclip*, 20.

<sup>310</sup> Jacobsen, *Operation Paperclip*, 24.

<sup>311</sup> Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, 401.

production continue in order to meet the promised May 1945 deadline, but Speer instead chose to allocate those resources elsewhere, regardless of the dictator's orders. The Armaments Minister discontinued chemical production in November 1944.<sup>312</sup> When Hitler asked Speer when the military could deploy the miracle weapons, Speer simply replied, "They're not coming."<sup>313</sup> According to Sereny, Speer claimed that "he was outraged by the Hitler orders to destroy everything."<sup>314</sup> Aware of the war's foregone conclusion, Speer sought to prevent destruction and tragedy befalling the German people because of Hitler's hate. His obstruction of the Nero Decree and of the chemical weapon program was emblematic of Speer's attitude toward Hitler at war's end. Whether concerned for his survival after the war or for the good of the German people, his interference prevented the deployment of chemical weapons. Furthermore, the launching points for the V-2 rockets were in the southwest region of the Netherlands. By spring 1945, the Allies had already captured the launching points for the rockets. The Germans first retreated north to The Hague with their rockets to prevent the Allies from possessing this new technology. However, from this new launching site, London was out of range for the V-2 rockets. As the Germans continued to retreat east, the main targets shifted from Great Britain to cities in Belgium. Furthermore, the *Luftwaffe* was decimated and incapable of launching aerial strikes on London. Speer made these weapons unavailable to Hitler, and the Allied forces essentially eliminated the delivery methods. Ultimately, when Speer confessed to his defiance, Hitler was barely fazed by this admittance of

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<sup>312</sup> Sereny, *Battle with Truth*, 472.

<sup>313</sup> Kershaw, *The End*, 291.

<sup>314</sup> Sereny, *Battle with Truth*, 472.

guilt.<sup>315</sup> Clearly, with all hope lost, Hitler did not care about Speer's betrayal or even Germany's defeat. However, Speer was not the only Nazi official in defiance of Hitler's orders. Himmler, for example, tried to negotiate his own surrender and offered the SS to the Americans and the British to fight the incursion of the Red Army.<sup>316</sup> Hitler committed suicide on April 30, 1945, and the war in Europe ended on May 8. Without a leadership structure in place, and within the chaos of Hitler's apathy, the miracle weapons were not deployed during the final months of World War II.

### Conclusion

As the tide of World War II turned against Nazi Germany, Hitler's mental and physical states began to severely deteriorate. Faced with the prospect of defeat and the failure of his messianic mission, Hitler's thoughts turned to suicide and destruction. Thus, Hitler pursued a series of last-ditch efforts in the hope of halting the advances of the Allied forces. However, following the failure of the Ardennes offensive, Hitler assigned Speer to conduct his scorched-earth policy, later referred to as the Nero Decree. Indeed, the stage was set for the deployment of Hitler's secret chemical weapons. However, Hitler began to behave apathetically towards governing the Nazi regime and commanding the remnants of the German military. During this crisis, Hitler's subordinates could not come together to form any sort of coalition, but rather continued to squabble and clash as they previously had done. In the midst of this chaos, Speer, a careerist very concerned with his survival following Germany's eventual surrender,

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<sup>315</sup> Fest, *Inside Hitler's Bunker*, 74.

<sup>316</sup> Fest, *Inside Hitler's Bunker*, 68.



sought a way to secure a positive image with the Allies. Speer circumvented Hitler's Nero Decree and prevented the senseless destruction of Germany's infrastructure. Speer also contributed to the avoidance of chemical Armageddon in Nazi Germany. The Armaments Minister prevented chemical weapons from falling into Hitler's control, while the military onslaught of the Allies eliminated any method of delivery for these weapons. Although for the sake of his own preservation, Speer's actions saved the lives of tens of thousands of German and Allied soldiers and civilians.

## CONCLUSION

The industrialized warfare of World War I set the precedent for the perpetration of “total war” – deliberate attacks on civilian populations, the commitment of a nation’s entire economy to the war effort, and the advent of “modern” warfare. New technology both desensitized people to mass killing and made it more efficient. Machine guns and long-range artillery, for example, transformed the limited wars of the nineteenth century into a war of attrition at the turn of the twentieth century with millions of soldiers fighting for both the Entente and Central Powers. As industrial and economic capacity began to play a more vital role in “modern” warfare, so too did science. Fritz Haber developed chemical weapons for Germany in 1914. Escalation on both sides led to the increased killing potential of these chemical agents. The intersection of science, industry, and war continued into World War II. The Axis and the Allies terrorized civilian and soldier alike with new tools of violence like bombers, tanks, and rockets. However, scientists brought weapons of mass-destruction (WMDs) – chemical, biological, and nuclear – into existence for the sake of victory. The Japanese were the first to utilize WMDs during their invasion of China. U.S. president Harry Truman unleashed the force of nuclear weapons against the Japanese at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, decimating the cities and their populations. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill possessed both biological and chemical weapons and intended to use them against Nazi Germany on several different occasions. Had the invasion at Normandy been unsuccessful, the Prime Minister would have doused Nazi-occupied territory in anthrax. Likewise, Churchill wanted to retaliate against German V-1 and V-2 rocket attacks with chemical warfare. Most notably, Adolf Hitler did not deploy Nazi Germany’s cache of chemical weapons.

German scientists developed nerve agents in 1936. Previously, chemical agents maimed many soldiers in World War I, but did not cause a significant number of deaths. Yet, nerve agents were extremely lethal and could kill victims within minutes. With Werner Heisenberg's failure to build a nuclear bomb, these nerve agents – tabun, sarin, and somar – were the only WMDs that Hitler possessed. Even when faced with the collapse of the Third Reich, the Nazi dictator did not initiate chemical warfare in World War II.

Hitler's decision not to deploy his arsenal of chemical weapons was puzzling. According to historian Annie Jacobsen, the 12,000-ton German supply of tabun was enough to annihilate the urban population of London. Despite the decline of the *Luftwaffe*, the Führer still potentially possessed the means to deliver his nerve agents with V-2 rockets. Hitler's worldview and his conduct of World War II would lead one to expect the dictator's inclination toward initiating chemical warfare. From his formative years in Vienna and through his adult life, he developed a worldview based on racial foundations that advocated violence and terror to achieve his goals. Hitler's anti-Semitism became especially radicalized with the "stab in the back" myth at the conclusion of World War I. He led the NSDAP to prominence in the Weimar Republic, and upon the Nazi Party's ascension to power, gradually transformed his ideals into reality. For the sake of the *Lebensraum*, Hitler invaded Poland, thus instigating World War II. The German dictator believed in his messianic mission and murdered millions of European Jews with the "cleansing" policies of the Holocaust.

During the first years of the war from 1939-1941, chemical weapons were not a realistic option for Hitler. Blitzkrieg tactics had led to the successful conquest of much of continental Europe. However, by December 1941 and into the spring offensive of 1942,

Operation Barbarossa stalled due to the logistical issues created by the vastness of the Soviet Union. Against the advice of his general staff, Hitler decided to split his invasion force to attack both Stalingrad and Leningrad before marching on Moscow. However, the *Wehrmacht* became bogged down in the siege of Leningrad and in the urban building-to-building warfare of the Battle of Stalingrad. Clearly, Hitler's worldview, his perpetration of the Holocaust, and the treatment of Soviet civilians and soldiers would lead one to believe that for the sake of his messianic mission, the German dictator would not hesitate to utilize chemical weapons to overcome these obstacles. Therefore, some external element factored into Hitler's decision to abstain from deploying his chemical weapons, even up until the ultimate failure of Operation Barbarossa in 1943.

Winston Churchill, the right Prime Minister in Great Britain's desperate hour of need, served as a deterrent to Hitler's designs in Eastern Europe. Churchill threatened German cities with massive retaliation of bombardment with chemical weapons if the Führer engaged in chemical warfare against the Soviet Union. Perhaps traumatized by his own experience with gas in World War I, Hitler did not want his people exposed to the same suffering. However, certain logistical issues also may have affected his decision. For example, by 1943, the *Luftwaffe* was crippled by the RAF in the Battle of Britain and spread thinly in support of the *Wehrmacht* in North Africa and the Soviet Union. Thus, the *Luftwaffe* was unable to defend against the British. In fact, from 1942 until the end of the war, unrestricted British and American bombing campaigns ravaged German cities with little to no resistance by the German military. Ultimately, Hitler did not believe that the Third Reich was in a situation desperate enough to risk the lives of his civilians and gamble with chemical warfare.

However, by the summer of 1944, when the Allies assaulted Nazi Germany on all sides from France, Italy, and Eastern Europe, Hitler attempted several last-ditch efforts to check the Allied advance. One was the Ardennes Offensive, which resulted in the *Wehrmacht's* "last stand." This gamble, of course, did not pay off. Second was Hitler's faith in his "secret weapons." The nerve agents fell under this category. However, none of these, especially the V-1 or V-2 rockets, had an effect significant enough to change the course of World War II. Interestingly, the German dictator threw whatever he had available in his arsenal at the Allies. However, in the final stages of the war, chemical weapons remained conspicuously absent. Previously, Hitler was concerned with the preservation of the "Aryan" race, but as the war decisively turned against Germany, his thoughts began to shift towards suicide and destruction. Hitler believed that the German people deserved extinction for their failure in World War II. Indeed, his Nero Decree of March 1945 was indicative of these suicidal tendencies. Engaging in chemical warfare and incurring Allied retaliation would have made sense. However, architect turned Armaments Minister Albert Speer obstructed the Nero Decree and played an important role in preventing Hitler from deploying his chemical weapons. Speer shut down the chemical weapons program and denied the Führer his WMDs. Another factor stemmed from the Allies capturing the V-2 rocket launching sites in the Netherlands. The Germans retreated east with their rockets so the technology did not fall into Allied hands. However, the V-2 rockets could no longer reach London. Inside his bunker, Hitler grew apathetic and essentially abandoned the Third Reich to its fate. His subordinates, unable to work together, instead sought absolute rule. The state, the economy, and the military

were in chaos. Hitler's chemical super weapons therefore did not appear on the battlefield in World War II.

Often overlooked is the destruction and death caused by the Allies during the closing years of the war. The main focus has been on Hitler's crimes against humanity with Nazi Germany's perpetration of the Holocaust. Both the Allies and the Axis carried out acts of extreme violence. The legacy of violence did not end with Hitler's suicide and the conclusion of World War II. Under "Operation Paperclip," the American government, covertly smuggled Nazi scientists into the United States to continue their research. With the looming Cold War, President Truman and the American government wanted to prevent German scientific expertise from falling into Soviet hands. War is a dangerous extension of escalation – one that results in the tragic deaths of thousands of non-combatants, especially in the era of modernity, industry, and science. Dictators, governments, and militaries use all forms of justification to pursue policies of death and destruction. Furthermore, WMDs continue to present issues of international contention. For example, Iran's nuclear program has been a recurring hot-button issue. Likewise, Bashar Assad's alleged use of chemical weapons against Syrian rebels took center stage on the international scene. The United Nations, international organizations, and international agreements perhaps do not hold the final solution to controlling WMDs and preventing violence. The question remains as how to end the cycle of violence and war and prevent the senseless death of innocent people caught in the crossfire.

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