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# We Will Never Speak of It: Evidence of Hitler's Direct Responsibility for the Premeditation and Implementation of the Nazi Final Solution

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The "Intentionalist vs. Functionalist" debate has raged amongst academic historians for decades, centered on the question of whether Adolf Hitler personally premeditated and instigated the Final Solution, or whether the idea and its implementation developed out of a collaborative effort within the ranks of the Nazi bureaucracy. This debate has largely been fueled by the fact that no written decree from Hitler directly ordering the Final Solution has ever been found. However, evidence in the form of personal statements made by Hitler as well as verbal recollections, diary entries, and wartime documents made by his Nazi colleagues, point to the idea that he did indeed personally order the Final Solution. Overall, through careful examination of Nazi primary source materials, Hitler's direct responsibility for the premeditation and implementation of the systematic annihilation of European Jewry can be firmly established.

Critics of the idea that Hitler personally developed and instigated the Final Solution generally point to the absence of a Führer-signed decree ordering this genocidal campaign as evidence for their position. However, there is good reason why, in spite of Hitler's being directly responsible for implementing the Final Solution, a written order has never been found: his desire to avoid public association with it for fear of outrage and reprisal, both domestic and international, over his brutal policies of mass murder. An example of the public outrage Hitler feared is seen in the negative reaction of the German populace to his official authorization of the T4 euthanasia program. In general Hitler had a fixed policy of not issuing written instructions for policies relating to what would later be classified as crimes against humanity. However, he made an exception in the case of the T4 euthanasia program, in order to overcome opposition to it within the German state bureaucracy.[1] In a 1939 written decree, Hitler charged program head Reichsleiter Philip Bouhler, and lead program physician Dr. Karl Brandt, with "the responsibility for expanding the authority of physicians...to the end that patients considered

[1]An example of opposition to the T4 program from within the German government is seen in Justice Minister Franz Gurtner, who refused to cooperate with the program until being shown Hitler's written authorization in August of 1940. Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1936-45: Nemesis* (New York, 2000), p. 254.

incurable...can be granted mercy death."[2] However, Hitler quickly came to regret authorizing the program in writing, as throughout 1940 the general population became increasingly aware that thousands of mentally and physically disabled Germans were being 'mercy-killed' by the Nazis in a Hitler-sanctioned state program. Between 1940 and 1941 the German people's negative reaction became increasingly vocal and vehement, culminating in Hitler being openly jeered by a crowd watching mentally challenged patients being loaded onto a train at a rail station in Hof, Bavaria in 1941.[3] Ultimately, this negative public reaction to the T4 program and Hitler's sanctioning of it, bolstered by denunciations from Catholic and Protestant church leaders, forced Hitler to publicly cancel the program in August of 1941, though it continued in secret until 1945.[4] Overall, no direct Hitler order for the Final Solution has ever been found due to the public relations debacle that erupted over his sanctioning of the T4 program, as well as its successful continuation in secret following its public 'cancellation'. These events reinforced for Hitler the value of carrying out his programs of systematic murder covertly without written orders, and subsequently informed his methodology for implementing the Final Solution.[5]

Even if we ignore the aforementioned evidence for why Hitler never issued a written Final Solution order and hypothetically suppose that one did at some point exist, its absence from the historical record can still be explained as being due to the large-scale destruction of documents and other physical evidence of the Holocaust by the Nazis in the waning days of the war. As their

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[2]Robert Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (London, 1986), p. 63.

[3]The encounter in Hof between Hitler and an angry crowd over the T4 program is referenced in Gitta Sereny*, Into That Darkness: an Examination of Conscience* (New York, 1983), p. 59. It is also referenced in Robert Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors*, p. 95. It is referred to in both works as being the only time Hitler was publicly challenged during his 12 years in power.

[4]Robert Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors,* p. 96.

[5]Evidence of the Nazi effort to keep the Final Solution secret as seen in Heydrich's written instructions to Einsatzgruppen leaders in a memo dated September 21, 1939. "I refer to the conference held in Berlin today and once more point out that **the planned overall measures (i.e. the final aim) are to be kept strictly secret...so as to facilitate subsequent measures**" Lucy Dawidowicz, *A Holocaust Reader (*New York, 1976), pp. 58-59.

Further evidence of the Nazi effort to hide the Final Solution as seen in a speech by Himmler to a meeting of SS Generals in Poznan, Poland on October 4, 1943: "**We will never speak of it publicly.** . . I mean the evacuation of the Jews, **the extermination of the Jewish race**...**The Jewish race is being exterminated**...that's quite clear, it's in our program. . ." Bradley Smith, *Heinrich Himmler: Geheim Reden 1933 Bis 1945 Und Andere Ansprachen* (Berlin, 1974), p. 267.

impending defeat became increasingly clear in 1944 and into 1945, the Nazi regime began a desperate undertaking to destroy all documentary evidence of their various crimes against humanity, including internal reports, personal correspondence, and various propaganda materials.[6] In addition, crematoria were knocked down, bodies were exhumed from mass graves and burned, and certain concentration camps were even partially or entirely razed.[7] Following the basic Nazi logic of hoping to evade Allied prosecution for their crimes by covering their tracks, if a piece of evidence as damning as a written decree from Hitler ordering the Final Solution ever did exist, it surely would have been one of the first documents destroyed in this effort. Overall, even if Hitler had issued a written order directly sanctioning the Final Solution, it surely would not have survived the Nazis' desperate late-war attempts to destroy the evidence of their crimes against humanity.

Since no definitive written order is known to exist, modern scholars must turn to alternative sources of primary evidence in determining Hitler's direct responsibility for developing and implementing the Final Solution. One of the most important of these sources is the abundance of transcripts of Hitler's public statements and speeches regarding the 'Jewish Question'. The earliest piece of verbal evidence from Hitler pointing to his personal premeditation of the Final Solution is a statement he made to journalist Josef Hell during an interview in 1922: "Once I really am in power, my first and foremost task will be the annihilation of the Jews. As soon as I have the power to do so, I will have gallows built in rows...Then the Jews will be hanged indiscriminately...until all of Germany has been completely cleansed of Jews."[8] This statement clearly shows that even long prior to taking power, Hitler had begun premeditating, at least in its most basic form, a campaign of genocide against

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[6]"Between 1933 and 1945 the public offices and corporate entities of Nazi Germany generated a large volume of correspondence. Some of these documents were destroyed in Allied bombings, and many more were systematically burned in the course of retreats or in anticipation of surrender." Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago, 1961), p. 1223.

[7]An example of a concentration camp that was destroyed by Nazis aware of the impending arrival of Soviet and U.S. troops is that of Majdanek near Lublin, Poland. Raul Hillberg, *The Destruction*, p. 1224.

[8]Josef Hell, *Aufzeichnung* (Institut für Zeitgeschichte, 1922), p. 5, as cited in Gerald Fleming, *Hitler and the Final Solution (*Berkley, 1984), p. 17.

Germany's Jews, and that he personally desired the systematic destruction of the Jewish race. Another statement by Hitler that points to his personal premeditation of the Final Solution is one he made to Czech foreign minister František Chvalkovský during a meeting on January 21, 1939: "We are going to destroy the Jews. They are not going to get away with what they did on 9 November 1918. The day of reckoning has come."[9] Hitler reiterated this genocidal sentiment nine days later in his "prophecy" speech before the Reichstag: "If International Jewry...should succeed once more in plunging nations into another world war, the consequence will be...the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe."[10] Hitler further emphasized his 'prophecy' regarding the fate of eradication for Europe's Jews during a speech in Munich to commemorate the 19th anniversary of his failed 'Beer Hall Putsch',[11] on November 8, 1942: "You will recall the Reichstag session during which I declared: 'if Jewry should bring about a world war, the result will be...the extermination of Jewry in Europe.' People laughed about me as a prophet. Of those who laughed then, countless numbers no longer laugh today, and those who still laugh now will no longer laugh a short time from now."[12] Overall, these recorded statements publicly made by Hitler prior to and during his twelve-year reign over Germany clearly show his personal calculation of and desire for the Final Solution.

In addition to the personal statements and speeches that convey Hitler's premeditation of the Final Solution, private records and wartime documents generated by high-ranking Nazi bureaucrats point to his personal ordering of it. An example of this can be seen in a diary entry by Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels dated to December 12, 1941: "With respect of the Jewish Question, the Führer has decided to make a clean sweep. He prophesied to the Jews that if they again brought about a world war, they would live to see their annihilation in it. That wasn't just a catch-word. The world war

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[9]Helmut Krausnick, *Anatomy of the SS State* (New York, 1968), p. 44.
[10]H. L., "Herr Hitler's Speech in the Reichstag", *Bulletin of International News*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Feb. 11, 1939), pp. 3-9.
[11]Beer Hall Putsch refers to the failed first attempt by Hitler and his National Socialist German Workers' Party to seize power from Germany's Weimar government. It took place on the evening of November 8, 1923 when Hitler, accompanied by 600 supporters, entered a Munich beer hall and announced the overthrow of the regional government in Munich as a prelude to a national takeover. Two days after the failed overthrow, Hitler was arrested and sentenced to five years in prison, during which time he wrote his infamous manifesto *Mein Kampf* ("My Struggle").
[12]Max Domarus, *Speeches and Proclamations 1932-1945: Chronicle of a Dictatorship* (Wauconda, 1990), p. 687.

is here and the annihilation of the Jews must be the necessary consequence."[13] A year later, on February 14, 1942, Goebbels again made reference in his diary to Hitler's ordering of the Final Solution: "The Führer once again expressed his determination to clean up the Jews in Europe pitilessly...Their destruction will go hand in hand with the destruction of our enemies...The Führer expressed this idea vigorously and repeated it afterward to a group of officers."[14] An additional reference to Hitler personally being the point of origin of the Final Solution is seen in a diary entry by Goebbels dated to March 2, 1943, in which he states: "As always in the circles of the party, it is the duty of the Führer's closest friends to gather around him in times of need...Above all with regard to the Jewish question...we are so fixed on it that there is no longer any escape."[15] Another private Nazi record that points to Hitler's having ordered the Final Solution is a handwritten note by Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler from a meeting with Hitler at the Wolfsschanze[16] on December 18, 1941, which simply read: "Jewish Question / to be exterminated like the partisans."[17] A final example of an internal Reich record that points to Hitler being directly responsible for the move to exterminate the Jewish race is the transcript of his meeting with Palestinian leader Mufti Haj Amin al-Husseini, on 28 November 1941, as recorded by Dr. Paul Otto Schmidt. From Schmidt's meeting minutes, we clearly see that Hitler directly promised al-Husseini that "He (the Führer) would carry on the fight until the last traces of the Jewish-Communist European hegemony had been obliterated". The meeting notes also show that Hitler subsequently promised Husseini that once the Nazis gained control of the Southern Caucasus, "Germany's only remaining objective in the region would be limited to the annihilation of the Jews

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[13]Christian Gerlach, *Krieg, Ernährung, Völkermord: Forschungen Zur Deutschen Vernichtungspolitik Im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Hamburg, 1998), p. 213.

[14]Louis P. Lochner, *The Goebbels Diaries* (New York, 1971), pp. 85-86.

[15]Ibid., pp. 195-196.

[16]German for "Wolf's Lair," the Wolfsschanze was the Nazi military headquarters on the Eastern Front. The complex was built for Operation Barbarossa, the 1941 German invasion of Russia. It was located in the Masurian woods, about five miles from the East Prussian town of Rastenburg, which today is the Polish town of Ketrzyn.

[17]Christian Gerlach, *Krieg, Ernährung, Völkermord: Forschungen Zur Deutschen Vernichtungspolitik Im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Hamburg, 1998), p. 215.

Yehuda Bauer also makes reference to this note, and recounts that "in response to Himmler's question 'what to do with the Jews of Russia?' Hitler's response was recorded in meeting minutes as: 'exterminate them as partisans' ('*als Partisanen auszurotten')*" Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven, 2001), p. 5.

living under British protection in Arab lands."[18] Overall, these internal Nazi documents clearly show that Hitler not only sanctioned the Final Solution, but actively planned and gave the orders to instigate it.

In addition to the aforementioned Nazi writings and internal documents, a number of recollections of conversations and verbal admissions made by high ranking Nazi bureaucrats also point directly to Hitler having personally ordered the Final Solution. An example of this is seen in an excerpt from Auschwitz Commandant Rudolf Hoess' memoirs, detailing a meeting he had with Heinrich Himmler in the summer of 1941: "Himmler received me and said in effect: 'The Führer has ordered that the Jewish question be solved once and for all and that we, the SS, are to implement that order...The Jews are the sworn enemies of the German people and must be eradicated.'"[19] In addition to this, former SS-Obersturmbannführer Adolf Eichmann, during a 1960 interrogation in Israel by police officer Avner Less, was recorded as saying "The war with the Soviet Union began in June 1941. I believe it was two months later that [SS-Obergruppenführer Reinhard] Heydrich[20] sent for me. I reported...He began with a little speech. And then: 'The Führer has ordered physical extermination of the Jews.'...Then Heydrich said: 'Go and see [SS-Obergruppenführer Odilo] Globocnik,[21] the Führer has already given him instructions.'" [22] Another verbal Nazi admission that the order for the Final

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[18]Gerald Fleming, *Hitler and the Final Solution (*Berkley, 1984), pp. 101-104.
See also Robert Fisk, *The Great War For Civilisation: The Conquest of the Middle East* (London, 2006), p. 443.

[19]Rudolf Hoess, *Commandant of Auschwitz: the Autobiography of Rudolf Hoess* (London, 2000), p. 183.

[20]Reinhard Heydrich (March 7, 1904 – June 4, 1942) was a high-ranking Nazi official during World War II, and one of the main architects of the Holocaust. He was an SS-Obergruppenführer (General) and Chief of the Reich Main Security Office. Heydrich is best known for having chaired the January 1942 Wannsee Conference, during which Nazi leaders laid out plans for the final solution to the Jewish Question—the deportation and extermination of all Jews in German-occupied territory.

[21]Odilo Globocnik (April 21, 1904 – May 31, 1945) was a prominent Austrian Nazi and SS leader. He played a major role in the extermination of Eastern Europe's Jews during the Holocaust. Globocnik is best known as the lead administrator of Operation Reinhard, which established the Chelmno, Belzec, Treblinka, and Sobibor concentration camps in German-occupied Poland. As many as two million Jews are thought to have been killed at these camps between Fall of 1941 and Summer of 1943.

[22]Avner Less, *Eichmann Interrogated* (New York, 1983), pp. 74-82.
Later in that same interrogation session, Less asked who gave the orders for the physical extermination of the Jews, and whether or not there had been written orders issued. Eichmann responded: "I never saw a written order, Herr Less. All I know is that Heydrich said to me: 'The Führer has ordered the physical extermination of the Jews.' He said that as clearly and surely as I'm repeating it now" Avner Less, *Eichmann Interrogated* (New York, 1983), p. 87.

Solution was generated by Hitler comes from the 1947 trial of Einsatzgruppen[23] commander, SS-Obersturmbannführer Dr. Martin Sandberger, during which he stated: "I myself was present during the discussions in the Palais Prinz Albrecht in Berlin and during the speech by [SS-Gruppenführer Bruno] Streckenbach[24] when the well-known Führer order was announced...Streckenbach personally informed me about the Führer order, which said that, in order to secure the Eastern territory permanently all Jews...were to be eliminated."[25] A final recollection that verbally points to Hitler's personally ordering the Final Solution comes from an excerpt of the memoirs of Heinrich Himmler's personal masseur, Felix Kersten, in which he recounts a conversation with his boss: "I said that the world would no longer tolerate the extermination of the Jews; it was high time that he put a stop to it. Himmler said that it was beyond his power; he was not the Führer and Adolf Hitler had expressly ordered it...I told him he should think of his reputation, not sully it with that reproach. Himmler replied that he had done nothing wrong and only carried out Adolf Hitler's orders."[26] Overall, these various recollections by Nazi bureaucrats and Reich insiders point to Hitler's directly ordering and leading the implementation of the Final Solution.

The Functionalist vs. Intentionalist debate has raged since the end of the Second World War, and in the continued absence of unimpeachable documentary evidence directly proving Hitler's authorization of the Final Solution, it will likely continue indefinitely. That being said, in looking for definitive evidence of Hitler's direct responsibility for the Holocaust one need only look at the highly authoritarian nature of his rule, as summed up in a public statement he made following his assumption

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[23]German for "task forces," the Einsatzgruppen were mobile SS death squads. The Einsatzgruppen carried out massacres of Jews throughout German-occupied Poland in 1939 and German-occupied Russia in 1941. The Einsatzgruppen are especially infamous for carrying out the massacres of 33, 771 Jews over two days at Babi Yar Ravine in Kiev, Ukraine, and 25,000 Jews over two days at Rumbula Forest in Riga, Latvia. The Einsatzgruppen were the main Nazi instruments for exterminating Jews prior to the beginnings of the Final Solution.

[24]Bruno Streckenbach (February 7, 1902 – October 28, 1977) was an SS-Gruppenführer (Nazi Lieutenant General) who oversaw the training and indoctrination of the four Einsatzgruppen units that would massacre thousands of Jews in German-occupied Russia during Operation Barbarossa in 1941.

[25]From the testimony delivered for the Einsatzgruppen Case, 1947-1948, vol. 6, pp. 2143-2176, as quoted in Andrew Ezergailis, *The Holocaust in Latvia, 1941-1944: The Missing Center* (Riga, 1996), pp. 204 - 205

[26]Felix Kersten, *The Kersten Memoirs: 1940-1945* (New York, 1957), pp. 162-163.

of the Chancellorship in 1933: "Every bullet that is now fired from the barrel of a German pistol is my bullet. If that is called murder, then I have committed murder, for I have ordered it all; I take the responsibility for it."[27] It is not only naïve, but downright dishonest to imagine that a program of genocide as massive in scope and methodical in execution as that undertaken by the Nazis against Europe's Jews could have occurred without the express planning and direction of its supreme leader. Overall, in spite of the lack of a Führer-signed decree, by carefully examining Nazi primary source materials such as speeches, private writings, and interview transcripts, Hitler's direct responsibility for planning and implementing the horrors of the Holocaust can be firmly established.

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