

6 Misjudging Hitler

A. J. P. Taylor and the Third Reich

Richard Overy

In 1981 A. J. P. Taylor was invited by the German Historical Institute in London to give a lecture on the origins of the Second World War. Twenty years had elapsed since the publication of Taylor's own account. He took the lecture as the opportunity to go back over those twenty years and to reflect on whether his interpretation had stood the test of time. Characteristically, he made few if any concessions to his many critics. The evidence missing from his original volume, and its subsequent "Second thoughts," was material that he believed only confirmed his view of British and German behavior in the 1930s. Above all, he stood by his argument that Hitler was merely interested in treaty revision, like Stresemann or Brüning: "I think one can see a pattern, that [Hitler] was operating within a framework of revisionism, at any rate until 1939, and was then caught in a situation where he was prepared to make peace."¹

No single aspect of Taylor's argument has occasioned more criticism than his judgment of Hitler's political intentions and behavior in the years leading to war.² Revisiting the subject in 1981 Taylor refused to see Hitler as anything more than representative of the long thrust of German history towards domination of Europe, a latter-day Bismarck whose rhetoric and world-historical fantasies weighed little against his evident opportunism, and whose role in the conduct of German foreign policy was limited in 1939. Consistent with this interpretation, Taylor rejected the view that Hitler's ambitions in the USSR in 1941 had anything to do with the search for economic empire or ideological confrontation. He argued instead that Hitler seized the opportunity afforded by having a large mobilized army on his hands to "knock Russia out" in the hope of winning the negotiated peace with Britain that he failed to get in 1939 or 1940.³

It has always been tempting to dismiss Taylor's views on German foreign policy either as an unintended defense of Hitler, and as such morally repugnant, or as an extension of Taylor's robust prejudices against Germany exposed in his earlier writings, and so morally irresponsible. Taylor, of course, was writing at a time when Hitler was widely regarded as the man who planned the war of 1939, a uniquely evil tyrant who held his people in a mesmeric trance. Taylor's reaction to this characterization was understandable, and it was to a great extent

rooted in the available scholarship and the published sources. Taylor sought to make Hitler plausible: "Hitler had no clear-cut plan and instead was a supreme opportunist, taking advantages as they came."⁴ In Taylor's hands Hitler was no more a monster, but a vain power-seeker whose ideological rhetoric amounted to mere incantations, "phrases to produce the popular roar." Hitler was not possessed of "genuine beliefs," but "craved for power" alone.⁵

More than thirty years of scholarship on German foreign and military policy in the 1930s, and on the role of Hitler himself, threaten to make Taylor's view of Germany nothing more than a historiographical curiosity. Yet it is important to remember in the first instance what Taylor got right. German policy in the 1930s was rooted in the longer course of German history and did not represent a sharp rupture with the past. It can be clearly demonstrated that the main elements in Hitler's view of foreign policy derived in almost a straight line from the radical nationalism of the pre-1914 Reich. These elements were three: the pan-German longing for the territorial unity and independence of all racial Germans; the pursuit of *Lebensraum* (living-space) in order to achieve the proper match between the territory and the economic needs of a people (with the strong implication that space should rightfully be allocated to peoples with superior cultures and forms of social organization); the pursuit of *Weltpolitik*, or global policy, in which the united and enlarged state engaged in worldwide imperial politics.⁶

Taylor, of course, did not express the continuities in this way. He acknowledged that Hitler came from a Viennese pan-German background, but he did not accept that Hitler's ideological baggage mattered at all. In reality it mattered a great deal. The infant *Deutsche Arbeiter Partei (DAP)* founded by Anton Drexler in 1919, which was the immediate forerunner of the Nazi Party, was directly linked with the pan-German *Vaterlandspartei* founded by Alfred Hugenberg in September 1917 to rally patriotic support for the German war effort, and with the radical nationalist Thule Society. Both organizations sought the moral and spiritual regeneration of Germany, the unity of all Germans and the predominance of the German race in Europe. Drexler found both organizations too dominated by bourgeois intellectuals, and set up his own party. The DAP admitted Adolf Hitler in September 1919, and the following year changed its name to the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (NSDAP)*.⁷ The new Party's twenty-five-point program included demands for the unity of all Germans, and the right to living space. These ambitions owed something to the Versailles settlement and German revisionism, but in effect their pedigree considerably predated Versailles. Hitler's program did not simply amount to treaty revision, as Taylor claimed in 1981, but rested on a popular radical nationalist discourse which held racial unity and violent economic imperialism at its core.

During the 1920s Hitler became an important spokesman for nationalist circles in Germany that kept alive these prewar ambitions. German nationalism itself was always a fractured movement. Many Germans, across the political spectrum from right to left, sought revision of some kind. The terms of the Versailles settlement were never accepted, and the well-known efforts of Gustav Stresemann,

foreign minister from 1924 to 1929, and Heinrich Brüning, chancellor from 1930 to 1932, to ameliorate or remove treaty restrictions scarcely merit repetition.⁸ Germany was reabsorbed into the states system when the Treaty of Locarno was signed in 1925, respecting the western frontiers of Germany established in 1919, and when Germany was permitted to join the League of Nations a year later. The Allied Control Commission in Germany, charged with monitoring the disarmament clauses of the treaty, left in 1927. In 1930 the occupation forces were finally withdrawn from the Rhineland. The most hated symbol of German inferiority, the annual payment of reparations to the Allies for German “war guilt,” were finally suspended at the Lausanne conference of 1932. It is almost certain that if Hitler had not come to power in 1933, another German government would have continued the revisionist thrust and might have achieved through negotiation much of what Hitler ultimately achieved by a defiant unilateralism.

The other elements of German nationalism in the 1920s were potentially more dangerous, but were for much of the period confined to the radical nationalist fringe. Hitler expressed them in *Mein Kampf*, which Taylor dismissed as fantasy, and more elaborately in his so-called “Second book,” dictated in 1928 but not published until 1961, when it appeared in German and in English. This latter book came too late for Taylor’s first edition, but whether he would have treated it any more seriously than he did *Mein Kampf* is open to question. Yet the second book, even more than the first, shows Hitler’s rejection of what he called the “patriotic-national bourgeois” circles in Germany, who had sold the Reich “to an organization of pimps, pickpockets, deserters, black marketeers and hack journalists.”⁹ Hitler was not concerned just with treaty revision, with its strong implication of a “restoration” of the Germany of pre-1914, but saw in Germany’s future the building of a solid racial core, the race-contest with international Jewry, and the build-up of sufficient military power to allow Germany to seize an economic empire in the spaces of the ill-defined “east.”¹⁰ This hardly constituted a clear program, but it reflected a unique strand in German nationalism that transcended treaty revision, or conventional balance-of-power politics, and ultimately embraced just what the Nazi regime in fact embarked upon – ethnic cleansing on a grotesque scale and a grandiose imperialism in the east. The distinction between the cautious foreign and military policy of German revisionists in the inter-war years, and the violent pursuit of a race-based New Order is too fundamental to be dismissed lightly. Hitler had beliefs, borrowed beliefs perhaps, but beliefs nonetheless. They were not, in Taylor’s trivial formulation, “the conversation of any Austrian café or German beer-house,”¹¹ but quite the reverse. Hitler’s ideological outlook was widely echoed in universities and professional associations colonized by a nationalist intelligentsia that also gazed beyond revisionism.¹²

Taylor was right, however, in another respect. Hitler did not act alone in the conduct of foreign policy in the 1930s, neither did he dictate its course exclusively. There were continuities of personnel and policy across the divide of 1933. There was not one but several strands in the formation of German

foreign policy in the 1930s, what Wolfgang Michalka has called “a plurality of conceptions.”¹³ For much of the period between 1933 and 1939 foreign policy was run by traditional career diplomats whose nationalism was based on a cautious revisionism and the reassertion of Germany’s power-political position that had been lost between 1914 and 1919. They were represented by the German foreign minister Constantine von Neurath, a conservative nationalist who was appointed before Hitler came to power, and kept his office until 1938. Neurath, together with conservatives in the armed forces’ leadership and in economic affairs, was concerned that the pace of revision should not prejudice the establishment of domestic stability, nor invite the dangerous intervention of other states. Hitler left much of the day-to-day conduct of diplomacy in Neurath’s hands, just as he left economic policy to Schacht, and the practical achievement of rearmament to the armed forces. Up until 1939 and the German demand for the return of Danzig and renegotiation of the terms of the Polish Corridor (which conservatives cared about more fervently than any other aspect of revision), little that Hitler had achieved ran counter to the conservative view of revision (except the *Anschluss* with Austria, with its implicit rejection of Bismarck’s conception of a Prussia-centered Germany). Where conservatives parted company with Hitler was over the methods used to achieve revision, methods which ran much greater risks than they were prepared to accept.¹⁴

The conservatives also shared further preferences in foreign policy. They hoped, as before 1914, to secure the friendship of Britain; they disliked Poland but courted Russia; they favored the establishment of some kind of economic/political bloc in central and eastern Europe (the prewar vision of *Mittleuropa*); they were hostile to collaboration with Italy (Albert Speer recalled after the war that President von Hindenburg had once asked Hitler never again to enter Germany into alliance with Italians¹⁵); finally, they wanted colonies and the reintegration of Germany with the wider world economy. Some of these preferences Hitler himself shared. Up until 1937 he too favored an alliance with Britain, and had written so in the 1920s. Hitler was not a particular enthusiast for Italy, despite the fact that it was governed by a fellow-radical nationalist. Hitler was all for constructing a system of alliances and trade agreements in eastern Europe, and did so right through to 1939 culminating with an agreement with the USSR. There always existed sufficient congruence between Hitler and the conservative nationalists to blur the differences, and it was in this sense that Taylor could claim that Hitler’s foreign policy was “that of his predecessors, of the professional diplomats at the foreign ministry, and indeed of virtually all Germans.”¹⁶

There was more, of course, to German foreign policy in the 1930s than either Hitler or the foreign ministry. The current view is that the Third Reich operated in a polycratic way, with no single and consistent agenda and with a high level of systemic tension generated by rivalry between the Party leaders. Alfred Rosenberg, the Party’s official ideologue, harbored the idea of a German-dominated Eurasia made up of ethnically defined states freed from Bolshevik rule; Hermann Göring played a major part in securing better relations with

Poland, and with Italy, and tried to act as a brake on Hitler in 1938 and 1939 when he felt the risks his leader played were too great.¹⁷ Above all, Joachim von Ribbentrop, one of the Party's foreign affairs' advisers, pursued a policy derived more from pre-1914 *Weltpolitik*: the pursuit of colonies; re-entry into global politics along with Italy and Japan; and a possible reconciliation with Russia to cover potential conflict with Britain. Some historians have seen his appointment as foreign minister in February 1938 to replace von Neurath as evidence that von Ribbentrop now played a prominent part in formulating German foreign policy,¹⁸ particularly as he followed Hitler in 1937 in promoting a strongly anti-British line, and apparently secured the German–Soviet Pact in August 1939. Though his influence now seems to have been far short of decisive, von Ribbentrop did clearly play some part in shaping Hitler's attitude toward the balance of power in the critical months leading to war, particularly in his efforts to persuade Hitler to call Britain's bluff over Poland.¹⁹ Yet none of the leading Nazis with foreign-policy interests, Von Ribbentrop included, was able to impose them on Hitler in any systematic way.

Finally, Taylor was surely right to view the outbreak of war in 1939 as part of a broader crisis of the international order of which Hitler was able to take particular advantage, as did Japan and Italy. Hitler clearly did perceive opportunities to exploit as the League system broke up in the 1930s. The two global powers, Britain and France, faced pressures on all fronts, domestic, foreign, and imperial to which, in Hitler's view, they manifestly failed to respond with vigor. All the revisionist states profited from the partial decline of Britain and France; Hitler hoped to exploit that decline when he sought war with Poland in 1939. Not all historians accept that Hitler wanted to isolate Poland and avoid a general conflict, but the evidence weighs heavily in favor of this interpretation. Take, for example, the notes of Hitler's army adjutant, Gerhard Engel, published in 1974. On August 22, 1939 he recorded Hitler's views, expressed at a conference with his generals: "He repeats again, he is convinced that Poland remains isolated, England and France would only bluff, and he does not intend to settle business with these in the foreseeable future." On August 27 Engel heard Hitler again argue that Britain would not intervene. Two days later Hitler was determined to finish off Poland "but indeed wants no war at all with the others."²⁰ Hitler's immediate entourage was less sanguine about the chances of avoiding a general war, but as Göring concluded in one of his postwar interrogations: "[Hitler's] main idea was to try to keep the western powers out of the war...As we saw it he held much too rigidly to this."²¹

Hitler was not, of course, acting in wilful disregard of reality. He was supplied with a diet of information, some of it culled from intercepted diplomatic traffic between France, Britain and Poland, that seemed to confirm western hesitancy. It is known that intelligence information which contradicted this interpretation was deliberately withheld from him.²² For a man already predisposed to see in the democracies only signs of decadence and double-dealing, the accumulating weight of evidence suggested that Poland would be left in the lurch. Hitler's decision to invade Poland was a risk, but one which he judged to be worth taking,

even more so after the German-Soviet Pact, which ended any prospect of a revived strategy of "encirclement" which he, like any German statesman, was anxious to avoid. In this sense he might well appear the unprincipled opportunist of Taylor's version of 1939, seizing a favorable moment to complete the program of German revanchism for which millions had voted for him in 1932. Hitler did not break down the European political order. It was already deep in crisis when he delivered the fatal blow in 1939.²³

The weaknesses of Taylor's argument about Germany and Hitler lie not in the realm of diplomacy but in that of domestic politics. His insistence that Hitler had only a limited program of treaty revision, which was widely approved by the conservative elites and by the German people, blinded him to the dynamic nature of the dictatorship, and in particular to the sharp break in domestic politics that occurred between 1936 and 1938. The structure and aims of German foreign policy, and the means to achieve them, altered fundamentally in the mid-1930s at the expense of the conservative nationalists who had applauded the early stages of treaty revision. This was not perhaps immediately evident from the formal foreign-office archive on which Taylor relied, which reflected what Klaus Hildebrand has called "seemingly familiar historical phenomena," but behind the conventional diplomacy of the late 1930s lay, in Hildebrand's words, "a dogma which took over everything," driven by the "destructive excess of [Hitler's] historical vision."²⁴

The break in the mid-1930s was rooted in one of the most important documents of the whole period, the strategic memorandum that Hitler drew up at Berchtesgaden in August 1936, which has come to be known as the "Four-Year Plan Memorandum." Its significance derives from the fact that Hitler hardly ever put pen to paper throughout the entire dictatorship, but on this occasion the substance of his thoughts was sufficiently important to the future development of German policy for him to set them down himself. Hitler treated the document with a solemn self-importance. When it was written he summoned Göring to Berchtesgaden where he discussed its contents and presented him with one of only four copies. Others were given to Fritz Todt, the engineer who was responsible for Hitler's grandiose construction plans, and to general Werner von Blomberg, the war minister.²⁵

Hitler's central argument was simply that the world had reached a historic climacteric: the French Revolution had worked its evils on European culture for more than a century, and its natural progeny, Bolshevism, in alliance with world Judaism, was poised to do to Europe what the barbarian invasions had done to ancient Rome. "No nation," Hitler argued, "will be able to avoid or abstain from this historical conflict."²⁶ The western powers had forfeited leadership of the world struggle, corrupted as they were by democratic values and infected by Marxism. Germany stood in the way of the worldwide triumph of Judaeo-Bolshevism, aided by Italy and Japan. Hitler regarded conflict as inevitable if Europe were to avoid "the most gruesome catastrophe" since "the downfall of the states of antiquity." All other aims paled into insignificance. Hitler called for a program of massive militarization, and the unrestricted mobilization

of the nation's economic resources to prepare for the apocalyptic struggle: "the political movement among our people knows only one goal, the preservation of our existence..."²⁷

Taylor makes no mention of this memorandum, and that he would have taken it at all seriously is questionable. It did not constitute a clear program of objectives, and was couched in the same language of historical generality already evident in *Mein Kampf*. Hitler was obsessed with the weight of the historical moment he confronted and the struggle for the future which that moment made necessary. The memorandum was not a detailed statement of policy; rather, it had the quality of an oracular pronouncement, pointing the way towards the harsh historical path that Germany must tread. What distinguishes the memorandum from Hitler's other writing is both its timing – for it was written well into the dictatorship rather than in the years of political apprenticeship before 1933 and its practical consequences.

The 1936 memorandum cannot be regarded simply as some flight of fancy, for it was developed as the basis for a complex and far-reaching transformation of German foreign, economic, and military policy. It is well to remember that it was written shortly after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and Hitler's decision to send military assistance to help the nationalist rebels. There were, of course, practical reasons to explain German intervention. Valuable raw materials – pyrites, wolfram – were imported from Spain and had to be safeguarded for German rearmament.²⁸ Göring was keen to find an opportunity to try out aircraft capabilities and tactics. But intervention in Spain was also prompted by the fear that Spain might undergo a communist revolution that would hem in the fascist powers. The election of the Popular Front government in France in June, with Communist support, posed a further threat. Taken together with the knowledge of Soviet modernization and rearmament, Hitler's belief in an imminent reckoning of accounts with Bolshevism appears anything but fanciful.

It can scarcely be coincidence that the two states singled out in Hitler's memorandum as "standing firm in the face of the world peril,"²⁹ Italy and Japan, now became more closely aligned with Germany. Up until 1936 both the German foreign ministry and the general staff had worked to create close links with China rather than with Japan,³⁰ whose value as an ally and as a market was not regarded as high. Hitler, however, influenced by von Ribbentrop, took a rosier view of Japan, whose anti-Soviet stance he shared. Four days after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, Hitler spoke with the Japanese ambassador at Bayreuth, where he agreed to pursue negotiations for a pact with Japan and approved a secret protocol on benevolent neutrality. The discussions led to the drafting of the Anti-Comintern Pact on October 23 1936, and its final signature in Berlin in November, despite the continued hostility of the foreign ministry to any policy that threatened Germany's links with China.³¹

Intervention in the Spanish Civil War also drew Germany into alignment with Fascist Italy. Again this was not the preference of the foreign ministry, nor was it an alignment altogether welcomed by either Mussolini or Hitler. The Italian leader had refused Franco's request for aid until news came of German assistance.

Isolated after the Ethiopian war, and uncertain of German ambitions in central Europe, Mussolini was interested in closer links with Germany. When Count Ciano, the newly appointed Italian foreign minister, visited Berlin in the autumn of 1936 he was warmly received. In November Mussolini announced the Rome-Berlin Axis, which was little more than a statement of mutual goodwill in defense of the Fascist ideal. A year later Italy formally joined the Anti-Comintern Pact, following further assiduous negotiation by von Ribbentrop.³²

The re-alignment with Italy and Japan, expressed as a front against international Marxism, made little strategic or military sense (nor did Germany, in the end, derive much benefit from the connection). The German army thought that Italy would be of more use to them as an enemy than as an ally; the generals were keen to continue assistance to the nationalist Chinese against Japan. But the alignment was made because it conformed with Hitler's desire publicly to sustain the struggle against the Bolshevik menace. The reorientation also coincided with a more substantive shift in Hitler's foreign-policy outlook away from the idea of a British alliance, around which his pre-1933 diplomatic conception had been based, to one in which Britain and France became obstacles to be overcome or set aside. The development during 1937 of a policy *ohne England*, without England, has been explained too often to be repeated here, but it represented another important step away from conservative world policy and the search for German colonies.³³

The colonial question united a great many nationalists in Germany. It was always assumed that at some point the return of colonies would be negotiable, and in the context of declining world trade and raw material shortages German leaders expected colonies to play an important part in sustaining Germany's world-economic position. When, in 1936, Hjalmar Schacht, minister of economics, and a spokesman for conservative business circles in Germany, began his own program of negotiations with western statesmen over the return of colonies, he did so from traditional social-imperialist motives: colonies could be used to divert the enthusiasm of radicals in the Nazi Party, and to soften economic conditions at home in order to avert a revival of socialist agitation.³⁴ Hitler paid lip-service to this aspect of revisionism for as long as it gave him the prospect of keeping diplomatic lines open to London, but there seems little doubt that he was not essentially committed to the return of colonies at that juncture though he would not have refused them had the opportunity arisen. He argued in the second volume of *Mein Kampf* that German interests lay fundamentally in "the strengthening of continental power by the winning of new soil and territory in Europe," a priority to which he remained consistently committed.³⁵

Indeed, negotiations over colonies foundered on British insistence that Germany should trade a colonial settlement for promises of good behavior in eastern Europe, and were finally broken off in March 1938, after Schacht had been forced to resign as economics minister. Göring told a British contact in February 1937 that the regime wanted "a free hand in Eastern Europe" but was happy to leave colonies to the British.³⁶ The changing focus of German foreign policy in 1936-37 was strongly driven by ideology rather than *Realpolitik*.

Intervention in Spain, closer ties with Japan and Italy, the gradual rejection of any deal with Britain that did not grant a free hand to construct living-space in the east, all stemmed from the desire to confront international Marxism and to remodel the "east" in Germany's favor. This reorientation was not achieved without important political changes, since much of it was driven by the more radical elements in the Party who regarded the regime's conservative allies in the armed forces, the economy, and the ministerial apparatus as a brake on policies that were more assertively National Socialist. In this sense the changing direction of German foreign policy was intimately related to the changing course of German domestic politics. Between late 1936 and the spring of 1938 conservatives were slowly eased out of key areas of responsibility and were replaced by Party appointments. Göring was given wide responsibilities for economic policy and rearmament in October 1936, when the Second Four-Year Plan was formally established, loosely based on Hitler's memorandum of August.³⁷ Göring set out to develop a comprehensive program of autarky, or self-sufficiency, which cut across Schacht's aim to expand exports and living standards. By November 1937 Schacht was sufficiently disillusioned with the new direction in economic policy to resign, leaving the field clear for Göring and another Party hack, Walther Funk, to dominate economic policy thereafter.

The armed forces were also unhappy with the implications of Göring's appointment, which relinquished, in their view, too much of a say in rearmament, over which they had exercised close control since 1933. Conservatives in the army feared, as did Schacht, that an irresponsible economic policy and excessive levels of remilitarization would invite the danger of social unrest and hence undo much of the valuable work done since the late 1920s in repairing Germany's military base. Nor were von Neurath and the foreign-office officials satisfied with the increasing intervention of von Ribbentrop, and the tendency, explicit since the 1936 negotiations with Japan and Italy but evident even before that, to sidestep the foreign office altogether in the conduct of foreign affairs. They were well aware that any congruence between Hitler's policy and their conservative nationalism was now more apparent than real, a distinction between what Hildebrand has called "revisionist Great Power policy" and Hitler's "expansionist race policy."³⁸

The rumblings of discontent did not go unnoticed. When in November 1937 Hitler chose to reveal to von Neurath and senior military leaders his view of how foreign and military policy would develop, the response was muted, even hostile. In the spring of 1938 the political revolution was completed. The foreign minister was replaced in February by von Ribbentrop, who personified the shift in the power balance between the Party and the traditional elites. That same month the war minister, von Blomberg, and the army commander-in-chief, von Fritsch, were forced to resign on trumped-up charges of sexual scandal. Whether or not Hitler was privy to the plots that ensnared Germany's most senior soldiers is still unclear, but he used the crisis as the opportunity to face the logic of his growing personal power by abolishing the war ministry and establishing a

supreme headquarters (OKW) with himself as the supreme commander of the armed forces.³⁹

The political significance of this decision is often overlooked. It was without precedent to establish a supreme headquarters organization in peacetime. The innovation was an expression of Hitler's recognition that only he understood the nature of the grand tasks that lay before Germany and should therefore hold the reins of military strategy in his own hands. The creation of the OKW revealed publicly the alteration in the relationship between the military and society. Military affairs were now dominated by the Führer in a more direct way than any other area of state, a situation that greatly reduced the ability of the military leadership to influence decisions about strategy in the broadest sense, as they had done before 1914. By the middle of 1938 the key areas of policy in which the conservatives had played a major part since 1933 – foreign affairs, economic reconstruction and remilitarization – were now the province of Party bosses close to Hitler. Many of them regarded this as a dangerous development, which prejudiced the revival of German international strength and domestic stability in which they, like their pre-1914 forebears, had a powerful vested interest. Conservative disillusionment was manifest, though it did not prevent many of them continuing to work with the regime. Senior generals toyed with overthrowing Hitler in 1938 and again in 1939, though their hostility to Hitler's risk-taking was much weakened in the case of Poland because of their long-held desire to emasculate the peace settlement in the east. In January 1939 Schacht, who had remained head of the Reichsbank, submitted a lengthy critique of financial policy, echoed in a long memorandum on the threat and consequences of inflation forwarded by the army.⁴⁰ Schacht was sacked for his pains, but conservative anxieties about the political ambitions of the new elite survived through to the failed July plot in 1944.⁴¹

The establishment of the OKW was, above all, indicative of the changing nature of the dictatorship. Up to 1938 there was considerable room for maneuver in military and diplomatic affairs for those who did not necessarily follow the Party line. Policy issues were argued out, and decisions taken without automatic recourse to the Führer. From early 1938 Hitler assumed a more central role, both by virtue of his new office, but also because the men in charge of foreign affairs and economic development were his creatures, who discussed issues with him regularly and in detail. Though Göring or von Ribbentrop might disagree or recommend, they depended ultimately on Hitler's goodwill, and were always hostage to the fact that he now held the political initiative.

The changing structures of decision-making meant that Hitler assumed an exceptional prominence, at the same time as the structural pressures that might have limited or modified his strategic ambitions were much reduced. This model does not suggest a simple "intentionalist" approach, which Taylor, for one, would have rejected. In effect Hitler constructed a political apparatus between 1936 and 1938 which allowed his own ideas and ambitions a degree of force in the formation of policy that no German statesman, even Bismarck, had ever enjoyed.⁴² The structural changes in fact magnified the significance of intentions.

Hitler did not, of course, do everything himself. He created what might be called a “climate of permission” for the radicals in his entourage, and in the Party and ministerial apparatus, to push on further and faster with plans for racial hygiene and economic imperialism. However, they too could operate only to the extent that their activities could be reconciled when necessary with Hitler’s current priorities, ill-defined as they often were.

Under these circumstances it is essential to establish just what those intentions were. Here the significance of the strategic memorandum of 1936 becomes clear. In it Hitler developed lines of policy – some of them very specific – which indicated the overall conceptual framework he was working with in the mid-1930s. First, he expected some kind of major conflict, provoked by the threat posed by Bolshevism and world Jewry, but by no means confined to them. There are other fragments of evidence from the same period which show that he had privately recognized that such a world-historical conflict was imminent and inescapable. Second, he believed that Germany would survive that contest only by developing into an economic and military superpower. The following passage in the memorandum was put in italics: “*The extent of the military development of our resources cannot be too large, nor its pace too swift.*” Such a program could be achieved, Hitler continued, only by subordinating all other national and social tasks to the one aim of strengthening Germany materially and psychologically. Finally, Hitler remained committed to the idea of seizing *Lebensraum* at the appropriate time, in order to secure the material foundation for global superpower status.⁴³

These were broad goals and general expectations, certainly no blueprint for aggression of the kind Taylor so resolutely criticized. The most obvious thing that can be said about them is that between 1936 and 1945 Hitler’s regime gave form and substance to them all. German society was heavily militarized and the economy diverted to vast strategic projects; living-space was carved out of central and eastern Europe; finally, Hitler decided in 1940 to launch the predicted reckoning with Bolshevism, and in 1941 with the Jews. While it is obviously tempting to argue that the thought was father to the deed, the actual course of events after 1936 clearly depended on circumstances and opportunities, and was neither pre-planned in any deliberate sense, nor remotely predictable. The paradox can best be explained by recognizing that Hitler operated at two distinct levels. The broad ideological and geopolitical aspirations acted as permanent reference points or markers in the day-to-day conduct of affairs; on the other hand Hitler acted like any politician in responding opportunistically to events or an altered set of conditions.⁴⁴ Improvisatory and reactive tactics in diplomacy are no more inconsistent with a broad strategic vision than they are on the battlefield.

Evidence of how the two levels interacted can be exemplified by a document for which Taylor had little respect: the so-called “Hossbach memorandum.” The memorandum, written by Colonel Friedrich Hossbach, an army adjutant, is the record of a meeting at the Reich Chancellery on November 5, 1937. Taylor was skeptical of its provenance and authenticity, and of the views it purported to express, partly, no doubt, on grounds of scholarship, but partly because the

document – taken at face-value – made it hard for him to argue that Hitler was at heart a moderate revisionist with no discernible program. The authenticity and accuracy of Hossbach’s account should now no longer be in doubt.⁴⁵ Hitler used the meeting with senior representatives of the armed forces and von Neurath to give them a detailed insight into his views on foreign policy, and in particular the acquisition of living-space for the German people in Europe in a future great power conflict. This time, however, he gave a rough timetable, and an indication of his immediate priorities. The final date for the conflict over living-space he fixed at 1943–45, when the great military programs would be complete and potential enemies not yet so heavily armed. The exact timing of the conflict and against whom it would be fought depended on circumstances. Hitler never confined himself to the promised conflict in the east. But he expected to be able to incorporate Austria and to conquer Czechoslovakia, his initial aims, when the opportunity arose, and that, he told his audience, might be sooner rather than later.⁴⁶

Both the projected date for conflict and the plans for *Lebensraum* are independently confirmed – indeed Hitler’s colleagues made little secret of German aims in central Europe. In February 1937 Göring was reported to have told a British acquaintance: “Austria will come into our Reich of its own free will, but if the Czechs remain unyielding, we shall have to take Böhmen und Mähren [Bohemia and Moravia]. We don’t want the province of Slovakia...some day the Corridor and Danzig must come back into the Reich.”⁴⁷ It was Göring too who told another British visitor in December 1937: “First we shall overrun Czechoslovakia, and then Danzig, and then we shall fight the Russians.”⁴⁸ Hitler had told Goebbels earlier in 1937 that the “great world conflict” would come in five or six years’ time, and perhaps be over by 1950, the approximate date by which Albert Speer had been told to complete the “victory” buildings in Berlin.⁴⁹

It is no doubt possible, even if the Hossbach memorandum is taken at face value, to argue that it amounts to little more than treaty revision in its final stages, as Taylor suggested. But such a perspective is convincing only if the issue of *Lebensraum* is set aside, for the conquest of territory outlined in November 1937 took Germany beyond treaty revision, just as the hints of world conflict suggest a vision of the 1940s that transcended revisionism entirely. There is not enough evidence to demonstrate a clear blueprint, and it would be surprising if any statesman, however committed to long-term aspirations, would draw one, but the balance between long-term aims and short-term goals suggest that Hildebrand’s idea of a *Stufenplan*, moving on step-by-step from immediate revisionist goals to the seizure of living-space, and ultimately a contest for world power, may more accurately reflect Hitler’s outlook.

Even the “step-by-step” formulation is, perhaps, too programmatic to be explained by what Hitler actually said before 1939. At the height of the struggle with the Soviet Union, in November 1942, he told an audience that three years beforehand he “could not even have suspected this outcome”⁵⁰ – who indeed could have done so? Hitler did not plan to destroy Poland and wage war on the Soviet Union in the sense that the Schlieffen Plan before 1914 predicated for

years a war with Russia and France, but neither course was inconsistent with his more general views about the prospect of war and its proximate cause. On the basis of the prewar evidence there is little that can be known with certainty about Hitler's detailed plans for the future, beyond the stated intention to destroy Poland and dominate eastern Europe, as Taylor maintained. But there are elements of a broader conception that cannot be disregarded if sense is to be made of what followed on from the war with the Poles. These were not necessarily shared by all of Hitler's colleagues, and certainly not by the German public as a whole, but because by the late 1930s Hitler had come to play such a central role in the establishment and conduct of foreign policy it is his views that bear the greatest historical weight.

First, Hitler was obsessed with the idea of waging war at some time. War was for him a necessary condition of the international system, as the struggle for survival was natural to the evolutionary process. War was the instrument for altering the conditions for a people's existence. War was the means to keep a people aware of its historic racial mission and to build a population committed to self-sacrifice and physical regeneration. When he looked at the Czech issue in 1938 he chose war above any of the other options for resolving German-Czech disputes. In 1939 Danzig and a revised Corridor might have been acquired by negotiation, but in April 1939 he made it clear that war against Poland was his preferred option. In the same speech in November 1942 he reflected on the dangers that might have overtaken Germany if Britain had decided to give him Danzig: "I have felt a shiver run down my spine when I read these proposals again, and I can only thank Providence for dictating a different course...". "War," as he wrote in 1936, was part of Germany's "destiny."⁵¹

Second, Hitler saw the solution to this destiny in turning Germany into an economic and military superpower capable of absorbing any and every crisis by striking the opponent with massive force. "If you want to lead a war," he told Goebbels in November 1937, "then this must be its name: destruction of the enemy with every means."⁵² The key to becoming a superpower was to seize living-space in central and eastern Europe by force, so that Germany could get access to the resources that the post-1919 German state lacked. At the least it required the establishment of the Greater Economic Area (*Grossraumwirtschaft*) that began to take shape in the late 1930s as a complement to the strategy of domestic autarky. Food, materials, and labor were essential to sustain a large war effort whoever the enemy was and however long the war lasted. Hitler's concern was to avoid the risk-taking of 1914 by ensuring that Germany possessed sufficient armed might to be able to emerge from the imminent re-ordering of the world system as the victor.

Third, Hitler remained a consistent enemy of Bolshevism and Judaeism to the extent that ideology colored some of the critical choices made in German foreign policy. That is not to say that Hitler had definite plans in the late 1930s to annihilate Europe's Jews and destroy the Soviet Union. But he believed that Jewish world opinion was mobilized to stir up anti-German hatred in Britain and America, and thus sow the seeds of conflict between them – a belief that

fits ill with the idea that in foreign policy the Hitler regime was governed by balance-of-power rationality. He also regarded Soviet Marxism as the most serious threat posed to Europe's future, and although he could make a pact with the devil in August 1939, it is impossible not to see the decision taken in 1940 to move eastwards as a product of the ideologically inspired battle with Bolshevism as much as it stemmed from calculations of military expediency or *Realpolitik*. Hitler's worldview was shaped by these preconceptions and governed the choices he made when he was face-to-face with the issues of ethnic cleansing and living-space in 1941.⁵³

Some of this outlook was shared by those around Hitler, even by wider circles in the radical nationalist constituency. For German conservative nationalists, however, the sum of Hitler's views on foreign and military policy ran directly counter to the conservative agenda. They did not want to risk waging war, though they were prepared to make Germany defensible if war should break out. They did not share the more fantastic elements of Hitler's vision of superpower status, though they hoped to constitute some form of central European power bloc dominated by Germany through political pressure and economic collaboration, which might restore Germany as an equal of the other great powers. They disliked the risks for social peace that the costs of becoming a military superpower entailed, and were fearful that if the German people were forced to accept sacrifices through heavy arms' spending there might be a return to the revolutionary crisis of 1918–19. Finally, they did not share Hitler's savage xenophobia and the "barbarous utopia" it presaged in the 1940s, though many of them became instruments in the attempt to achieve it. The problem faced by those who might have opposed the radical aspects of Hitler's strategy lay in the shifting political balance, which favored a Hitler-centered system and promoted the more radical elements of the Party to the forefront of German politics. The possibilities for resistance or dissent did not disappear entirely, particularly in the more routine day-to-day conduct of foreign or military policy, but they were greatly restricted by the nature of the political structures that emerged after 1936.

Taylor had one more string to his bow. Using the work of the American economist Burton Klein, Taylor argued in his 1963 supplement "Second thoughts" that the economic evidence confirmed his argument that Germany had not armed heavily in the 1930s, and had indeed a very narrow military base, designed to achieve the kind of quick Bismarckian victories that a limited revision required. Taylor felt that he, like everyone else in the 1930s, had been tricked by Hitler and that there had been "no overwhelming advance in armaments" after all. The arms' gap was "pure myth."⁵⁴ Hitler, Taylor concluded, was "pretending to prepare for a great war" but in fact "put butter before guns."⁵⁵

Klein's work on the German economy, first published in 1959, was based upon his experience as a young economist on the United States Strategic Bombing Survey team in 1945, which was sent to Germany to assess the economic and moral impact of bombing on the beaten enemy. The investigation arrived at the conclusion, after a few weeks' study, that Germany had armed only lightly, in width, during the 1930s and had then maintained a "peace-like"

war economy in the first two years of war until forced to adopt fuller mobilization in 1942. The motive for limited rearmament was believed to be political – Hitler was thought to be anxious to improve living standards to avoid a social crisis. Although there was little detailed evidence to suggest that these were actual policy choices, Klein based his argument on the fact that German weapons' production was relatively modest in 1939–42, while the output of "consumer goods" was maintained at almost a constant level in the first years of war.⁵⁶ This was the kind of opportunistic rearmament that matched the brief opportunistic wars Hitler was believed to favor.

Once again the strategic memorandum of 1936 is the starting-point for a very different interpretation of German rearmament in the 1930s. Until then military procurement was left to the armed forces, who built upon the Second Rearmament Plan drawn up in 1932 and introduced in 1933.⁵⁷ Military spending was relatively low during this early period, constituting only 1.3 percent of GNP in the period 1932–35. Priority was given to the slow build-up of the military infrastructure of the state which had been dismantled in 1919–20, and to the reestablishment of a specialized armaments industry. The military capability of the armed forces was extremely limited, and aroused fears that Germany's neighbors might intervene to prevent the restoration of German armed power. In 1935 conscription was reintroduced, leaving the armed forces with the substantial and expensive administrative task of rebuilding mass armed forces after almost two decades of enforced disarmament. In 1936 the armed forces suggested a new armaments program, published in August, which was to expand the peacetime army to 800,000 men and complete the final phase of the remilitarization programme. This, too, was an expensive short-term project, but it was widely assumed that once the necessary level of military reconstruction had been achieved the yearly costs of maintaining the system would reach a plateau, or might even decline.⁵⁸

This period of cautious military reconstruction was brought to an end in 1936, when Hitler's memorandum made it clear that he wanted "the premier army in the world" and the mobilization of resources for war preparation on the largest scale. The economy, Hitler wrote, has no other task than the "self-assertion of the nation." He continued: "Parallel with the military and political rearmament and mobilization of our nation must go its economic rearmament and mobilization, and this must be effected in the same tempo, with the same determination, and if need be with the same ruthlessness as well." The memorandum concluded with the injunction that "the German economy must be fit for war in four years."⁵⁹

There were practical explanations for the decision to increase the scale and tempo of rearmament in 1936. The economy was stronger and the state more stable than it had been in 1933, when a great rush for arms might have compromised the economic revival and resurrected social tensions. The international situation deteriorated sharply in 1936 with the Ethiopian crisis, during which the western states showed their willingness to resort to economic pressure on Italy, and with the Civil War in Spain. Hitler sensed that the

unraveling of the existing order was now underway. In February 1937 Goebbels recorded in his diary a conversation with Hitler: "He expected a great world conflict in five or six years. In 15 years he would have liquidated the Westphalian peace. He developed grandiose visions of the future. Germany will be victorious in the coming conflict or will live no more."⁶⁰ For Hitler the most dangerous development was the modernization and rearming of the Soviet Union, and he referred to the "menacing extent of this development" in the memorandum. When he discussed rearmament with Goebbels in January 1937 he measured German achievements against "Russia's strength"; in a speech that same year Hitler told his audience that on the issue of rearmament "the USSR as the leader of the tempo should show the way."⁶¹

Above all, rearmament was governed by Hitler's conception of the nature of modern war. He accepted the widely held view that future conflicts, like that of 1914–18, were likely to be on a large-scale and costly, drawing on the full material and moral resources of the nation. Here he was at one with much of the military leadership in Germany, which had since the mid-1920s been urging the case for a "defense-based economy" (*Wehrwirtschaft*). The concept was widely discussed and understood in 1930s' Germany. At root it represented a strategy designed to avoid the mistakes of the First World War: the provision of adequate foodstuffs to prevent internal unrest; the supply of essential war materials from domestic resources to avoid the effects of blockade; the preparation of detailed mobilization plans for industry and labor to ensure their rapid and effective conversion to war production; the reorientation of domestic priorities to ensure that developments in key areas such as transport, energy, and communications conformed with potential military requirements.⁶²

The object was to ensure that Germany would be capable of fighting a "total war" if called upon to do so (though it obviously did not exclude fighting wars of lower intensity). Hitler did not have a particular war in mind. His aim seems to have been to create the sinews of a military and economic superpower which would then be in a position to emerge victorious from any possible conflict that might develop in the 1940s, a vision not very different from the one that had driven the Soviet build-up in the 1930s. The record that we have of Hitler's thoughts on the nature of war preparation all point in this direction, most famously in his address to the generals on May 23, 1939:

Everybody's Armed Forces and Government must strive for a short war. But the Government must, however, also prepare for a war of from ten to 15 years' duration. History shows that wars were always expected to be short. In 1914 it was still believed that long wars could not be financed....However, every state will hold out as long as it can....The idea of getting out cheaply is dangerous, there is no such possibility.⁶³

In 1939 Colonel Thomas, head of the OKW war economy staff, recorded Hitler's view "that any mobilization must be a total one," and in September 1939, when Britain and France declared war, that is what he ordered.⁶⁴

Throughout the period 1936–39 the language that Hitler used to describe mobilization and war preparation was entirely consistent with the views expressed in the memorandum – the nature of military preparation “cannot be too large, nor its pace too swift.” The view that he deliberately ran a calculated risk by preferring butter to guns is a speculation rooted in nothing more than the impression that Germany was less-heavily armed in 1939 than the generation that had lived through the 1930s, Taylor included, were led to expect. From 1936 the regime made no attempt to hide the fact that sacrifices would have to be made to satisfy the broad ideas of the “defense-based economy.”⁶⁵ The clearest way to demonstrate the military priority of the regime lies in the macroeconomic picture. By 1938 Germany’s GNP was 39 percent greater than in 1928, the pre-Depression peak, but aggregate consumer expenditures were only 9 percent higher than a decade before, and in per capita terms had increased by only 4 percent, an increase largely accounted for by the higher proportion of adults in the population in the late 1930s.⁶⁶ As a proportion of national income, private consumption fell from 71 percent in 1928 to 59 percent in 1938, a fall of exceptional magnitude in an economy the size of Germany’s. The additional spurt of growth in the economy in the late 1930s was almost all accounted for by war-related projects and high state spending.

The consequences of the increased tempo in 1936 were many. The military budget expanded rapidly, taking up 17 percent of GNP in 1938–39. In the last peacetime year 52 pfennigs out of every mark the German government spent went on defense. These were not remotely moderate proportions. In 1913, at the height of the pre-1914 arms race, the German government spent an estimated 3 percent of GNP, and devoted 24 percent of a much smaller state budget to defense purposes. In the 1960s western states spent between 3 and 7 percent of GNP on the military. There can be no question but that the level of military spending in the late 1930s in Germany was exceptionally high by any peacetime measurement.⁶⁷

Why then did Klein, and afterwards Taylor, argue that German preparations were limited? Part of the explanation lies in a misreading of the regime’s economic priorities in the 1930s. In 1936 Hitler used the August memorandum as the opportunity to bring the economy into relation with his military thinking. The instrument for achieving this was a new Four-Year Plan organization, set up in October 1936 under Göring who saw his new office as the centerpiece of a broad strategy for creating a defense-based economy. The Four-Year Plan was ostensibly concerned with the achievement of self-sufficiency, or autarky, in a range of sectors deemed to be vital for a blockade-free war economy. These included chemicals, iron-ore production, aluminum, synthetic rubber, synthetic textiles, synthetic fuel oil and foodstuffs. There was never any intention to achieve full self-sufficiency, and ultimately the regime intended to enlarge the resource base by taking over or controlling the material resources of central and eastern Europe. Nevertheless the programs that were initiated were very large in scale, absorbing almost two-thirds of all industrial investment in Germany between 1936 and 1939. Investment in the new iron-ore and iron producer set up in 1937 – the *Reichswerke “Hermann*

Göring" – topped 800 million RM before the outbreak of war; state investment in synthetic rubber production was 280 million RM, out of a total investment of 940 million. These sums were vastly greater than the amounts spent on weapons production, since they were large, complex, and capital-intensive sectors. They were the fruit of what Hitler had called "economic rearmament", a concept now generally described by the term "indirect rearmament" to distinguish it from the regular military budget which devoted considerably less to investment purposes and spent a great deal on wages and administration.⁶⁸

Indirect rearmament took many other forms. Agriculture was given subsidies and technical aid to try to raise yields. Labor was retrained in skills more appropriate for a war economy, 1.2 million in total. The Four-Year Plan also became involved in expanding the machine-tool industry, and the research and development of a range of new substitute products. The broad framework for war preparation set up by Hitler in 1936 meant that much of the economy was engaged by 1939 on war-related activity, either direct or indirect. By May 1939 it was estimated by *Reichsgruppe Industrie* (Reich Group Industry) that 21 percent of the workforce was engaged on direct orders for the armed forces (28 percent in manufacturing).⁶⁹ If precise details on the labor force of the other strategic sectors built up under the Four-Year Plan were available, the final claim on the civilian workforce for war-related activity would be considerably higher, perhaps as high as one-third. To have more than one-quarter of the manufacturing workforce engaged on war contracts suggests not a regime committed to a strategy of "butter before guns" but an exceptional diversion of resources away from civilian consumption and exports.

The second explanation for Klein's argument lies in the comparatively low level of finished weapons produced in 1939. Taylor had scant regard for British and French rearmament, but he was surprised to discover that Germany was producing at levels that were no higher. The reason for the apparent discrepancy between national commitment to defense and the output of finished weapons lies partly in the large diversion of resources in Germany to establish the economic foundation for future war-making (raw materials and factory capacity), but largely from the fact that German forces were not yet prepared for a general war in 1939, and had not expected to fight one. The major arms programs were set up only in 1938 and 1939, and were far from ready when war broke out. In the summer of 1938 an explosives plan was drawn up which dwarfed the output figures of the First World War; in October Göring was ordered by Hitler to treble the general level of arms output and to expand the air force five-fold; in January 1939 Hitler authorized the naval Z-Plan (*Z = Ziel*, or "goal") for a large battle-fleet by the late 1940s, a decision that has encouraged some historians to see Hitler moving towards a global strategy, *Weltpolitik*, in the late 1930s.⁷⁰ All of these many programs were to be realized by 1942 at the earliest, the time when Hitler had suggested in the "Hossbach" meeting that German armaments would reach their peak in relation to those of other great powers.

These armaments plans were to provide Germany with its superpower status. They are entirely incompatible with a policy of short local wars and a

limited commitment to military spending. Indeed, many in the military and the ministerial apparatus regarded Hitler's programs as completely unrealizable under the economic conditions of the late 1930s, and were opposed to what they saw as Hitler's financial and political irresponsibility. By then the re-orientation of the economy was difficult, if not impossible, to reverse, for Hitler was committed to his vision of massive German military power and the defence-based economy. Had a general war not broken out in September 1939, it is difficult to believe that Hitler would have abandoned the attempt, having gone so far down the road to achieving the "room for maneuver" that the economic and military preparations allowed him.⁷¹ As he saw it, war preparation was a task for which the German people would have to make sacrifices in the present to secure a rosy future for the race: "However well-balanced the general pattern of a nation's life ought to be there must at particular times be certain disturbances of the balance at the expense of other less vital tasks....For this task [rearmament] involves life and the preservation of life, and all other desires...are unimportant."⁷²

In the end Taylor misjudged Hitler, just as many in the 1930s misjudged him. Unable to take Hitler's writing seriously, he assumed that Hitler was in the tradition of German *Realpolitik*, another in the line of German statesmen and soldiers who, since Bismarck, had sought German power in Europe and, without scruple of principle, used any opportunity to achieve it. With little interest in, or sympathy for, German domestic politics, he failed to see the relationship between the dynamic transformation of the dictatorship and the development of German foreign and military policy, which were transformed in the late 1930s by the shift towards economic empire-building, ethnic cleansing and a military build-up based on the ideas of the "defense-based economy." Because war broke out over Danzig, an issue long on the revisionist agenda, Taylor assumed that Hitler was just another revisionist, who had misjudged the temper of the western states. Hitler was a revisionist, but he was also a geopolitical fantasist; he was an opportunist, but he was also a dreamer. He did not plan the Second World War any more than he planned the Holocaust, but it was not mere historical accident that found him trying to remodel the world order and slaughter Europe's Jews between 1939 and 1945.

Notes

- 1 A. J. P. Taylor, "1939 revisited," German Historical Institute, London, Annual Lecture 1981, 1982, p. 9.
- 2 See A. Sisman, *A. J. P. Taylor: A Biography*, London, 1994, pp. 294–301; R. Cole, *A. J. P. Taylor: The Traitor Within the Gates*, London and New York, 1993, pp. 190–203.
- 3 Taylor, "1939 revisited," pp. 14–15.
- 4 A. J. P. Taylor, *A Personal History*, London, 1983, p. 299.
- 5 A. J. P. Taylor, "The supermen: Hitler and Mussolini," in *Europe: Grandeur and Decline*, London, 1967, p. 221.
- 6 See particularly W. D. Smith, *The Ideological Origins of Nazi Imperialism*, Oxford, 1986, esp. pp. 244–52.

- 7 J. Hatheway, "The pre-1920s origin of the National Socialist German Workers' Party," *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 29, 1994, pp. 448–53.
- 8 See the discussion in A. Rödder, *Stresemanns Erbe: Julius Curtius und die deutsche Aussenpolitik, 1929–1931*, Paderborn, 1996; K. Hildebrand, *Das vergangene Reich: Deutsche Aussenpolitik von Bismarck bis Hitler, 1871–1945*, Stuttgart, 1995, esp. pp. 557–9.
- 9 T. Taylor (ed.), *Hitler's Secret Book*, New York, 1961, pp. 89–90.
- 10 On Hitler's foreign policy conception, see G. Stoakes, *Hitler and the Quest for World Dominion*, Oxford, 1986, esp. pp. 209–23. On differing perceptions of the "east," see M. Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards*, Cambridge, 1988.
- 11 A. J. P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, London, 1961, p. 98.
- 12 On varieties of nationalist outlook, see M. Laffan, "Weimar and Versailles: German foreign policy, 1919–33," in M. Laffan (ed.), *The Burden of German History, 1919–1945*, London, 1988, pp. 91–9. On the nationalist intelligentsia, see G. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich*, London, 1970; F. Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the German Ideology*, Berkeley, CA, 1961.
- 13 W. Michalka, *Von Ribbentrop und die deutsche Weltpolitik, 1933–1940*, Munich, 1980, p. 305.
- 14 Hildebrand, *vergangene Reich*, pp. 632–7; H.-A. Jacobsen, *Nationalsozialistische Aussenpolitik, 1933–1938*, Frankfurt am Main, 1968, pp. 32–3. On von Neurath see J. L. Heinemann, *Hitler's First Foreign Minister*, Berkeley, CA, 1979, esp. pp. 162–83. For a full statement of the conservative nationalist outlook see W. Michalka (ed.), *Deutsche Geschichte, 1933–1945: Dokumente zur Innen- und Aussenpolitik*, Frankfurt am Main, 1993, pp. 128–34, doc. 105, notes by the state secretary in the foreign office, Bernhard von Bülow, 13 March 1933.
- 15 Imperial War Museum (IWM), London, Speer collection box S362, Interrogation report 19, part II: Examination of Albert Speer, p. 1. On the central-European economic bloc, see B.-J. Wendt, "Aspects économiques d'une politique de sécurité nationale entre le révisionnisme et l'expansionnisme," *Revue d'histoire de la deuxième guerre mondiale*, vol. 39, 1989, pp. 47–59.
- 16 Taylor, *Origins*, p. 97. On Anglo-German relations, see D. Aigner, *Das Ringen um England: das deutsch-britische Verhältnis*, Munich, 1969.
- 17 On Rosenberg, see S. Kuusisto, *Alfred Rosenberg in der nationalsozialistischen Aussenpolitik, 1933–1939*, Helsinki, 1984; on Göring, see A. Kube, *Pour le mérite und Hakenkreuz: Hermann Göring im Dritten Reich*, Munich, 1986, esp. chs 3–4.
- 18 See especially Michalka, *Von Ribbentrop*.
- 19 For a more sober assessment of von Ribbentrop's capacity to influence Hitler, see S. Kley, *Hitler, Von Ribbentrop und die Entfesselung des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, Paderborn, 1996, pp. 326–43; M. Bloch, *Von Ribbentrop*, London, 1992, pp. 250–62.
- 20 G. Engel, *Heeresadjutant bei Hitler, 1938–1943: Aufzeichnungen des Majors Engel*, Stuttgart, 1974, pp. 58–60. There are many more examples.
- 21 IWM, FO 645, Box 156, Göring interrogation, September 24, 1945, p. 6.
- 22 For example, in August 1939 the German ambassador to London, von Dirksen, made repeated efforts to get his views on British firmness communicated to Hitler, but was stifled by von Ribbentrop. See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, *Documents and Materials relating to the Eve of the Second World War*, vol. 2: *The Dirksen Papers (1938–9)*, Moscow, 1948, pp. 190–1 (memorandum by H. von Dirksen on the development of political relations between Germany and Britain, September 1939).
- 23 See particularly W. Murray, *The Change in the European Balance of Power, 1938–1939*, Princeton, NJ, 1984; W. Mommsen, L. Kettenacker (eds), *The Fascist Challenge and the Policy of Appeasement*, London, 1983.
- 24 K. Hildebrand, "Reich–nation state–great power: reflections on German foreign policy, 1871–1945," German Historical Institute, London, Annual Lecture 1993, London, 1995, pp. 22–3.

- 25 W. Treue, "Der Denkschrift Hitlers über die Aufgaben eines Vierjahresplans," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, vol. 3, 1954.
- 26 J. Noakes and G. Pridham (eds), *Nazism, 1919–1945: A Documentary Reader*, vol. 2: *State, Economy and Society*, Exeter, 1984, p. 281 (all quotations from the memorandum are from this translation).
- 27 Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, vol. 2, pp. 282–3.
- 28 C. Leitz, *Economic Relations Between Nazi Germany and Franco's Spain, 1936–1945*, Oxford, 1996, ch 1.
- 29 Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, vol. 2, p. 282.
- 30 J. Fox, *Germany and the Far Eastern Crisis, 1931–1938: A Study in Diplomacy and Ideology*, Oxford, 1982, chs 3, 5.
- 31 Fox, *Far Eastern Crisis*, pp. 200–1.
- 32 D. Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire*, London, 1976, pp. 95–8; W. C. Frank, "The Spanish Civil War and the coming of the Second World War," *International History Review*, vol. 9, 1987, pp. 389–406. On the dilemmas of Italian policy, see E. di Nolfo, "Der zweideutige italienische Revisionismus," in K. Hildebrand, J. Schmäddeke, and K. Zernack (eds), *1939: an der Schwelle zum Weltkrieg*, Berlin, 1990, pp. 94–114.
- 33 See Aigner, *Das Ringen um England*, and, more recently, G. T. Waddington, "Hitler, von Ribbentrop, die NSDAP und der Niedergang des Britischen Empire, 1935–1938," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, vol. 40, 1992, pp. 273–306.
- 34 On Schacht's campaign for colonies see A. J. Crozier, *Appeasement and Germany's Last Bid for Colonies*, London, 1988, pp. 171–98. Schacht's comment on Party radicals is documented in the Phipps Papers, Churchill College, Cambridge, I 1/17, Phipps to Eden, 10. 22. 36.
- 35 E. Jäckel, *Hitler's Weltanschauung: A Blueprint for Power*, Middletown, CT, 1972, p. 36.
- 36 The Christie Papers, Churchill College, Cambridge, 180/1 5, contain notes of a conversation with Göring on February 3, 1937. "Don't forget," Christie reports Göring as having said, "in the Europe Plan we guarantee the British Empire."
- 37 Details in R. J. Overy, *Goering: The "Iron Man"*, London, 1984, pp. 46–52.
- 38 G. Niedhart, "The problem of war in German politics in 1938," *War and Society*, vol. 2, 1984, pp. 56–8. There is a full discussion of the arguments over rearmament and economic policy in A. E. Simpson, "The struggle for control of the German economy, 1936/7," *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 21, 1959, pp. 37–45. See, too, Hildebrand, *vergangene Reich*, pp. 633–7.
- 39 On the fall of von Blomberg and von Fritsch, see H. Deutsch, *Hitler and his Generals: The Hidden Crisis, January–June 1938*, Minneapolis, MN, 1974, pp. 80–7, 98–104.
- 40 Army memorandum reproduced in M. Geyer, "Rüstungsbeschleunigung und Inflation: zur Inflations Denkschrift des OKW von November 1938," *Militär-geschichtliche Mitteilungen*, vol. 23, 1981, pp. 121–86. On the finance ministry's objections, see L. Schwerin von Krosigk, *Staatsbankrott: Finanzpolitik des Deutschen Reiches, 1920–1945*, Stuttgart, 1974, pp. 281–5. Schacht details in H. Schacht, *76 Jahre meines Lebens*, Bad Wörishofen, 1953, pp. 491–7.
- 41 See P. Steinbach, "The conservative resistance," and T. Childers, "The Kreisau circle and the twentieth of July," both in D. C. Large (ed.), *Contending with Hitler: Varieties of Resistance in the Third Reich*, Washington, DC, 1991, pp. 89–118. This is not to say that the Conservatives were unable to take any initiative, or even argue with Hitler, which his generals regularly did. See H. Koch, "Hitler's 'programme' and the genesis of Operation 'Barbarossa,'" *Historical Journal*, vol. 26, 1983, pp. 894–7.
- 42 Hildebrand, "Reich–nation state," pp. 22–3. On the centrality or otherwise of Hitler, there is now a vast literature. See the discussion in I. Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship*, 3rd edn, London, 1993, pp. 59–79.

- 43 Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, vol. 2, pp. 282–4. On Hitler's world aims, see the discussion in M. Michaelis, "World power status or world dominion?" *Historical Journal*, vol. 15, 1972, pp. 345–59.
- 44 This was a conclusion arrived at by the prosecutors at the Nuremberg Trials. See Michaelis, "World power," p. 336.
- 45 See J. Wright and P. Stafford, "Hitler, Britain and the Hossbach memorandum," *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen*, vol. 42, 1987, pp. 78–84, for a full discussion of its authenticity. See, too, B.-J. Wendt, *Grossdeutschland: Aussenpolitik und Kriegsvorbereitung des Hitler-Regimes*, Munich, 1987, pp. 11–37.
- 46 Minutes of the conference in the Reich Chancellery, November 5, 1937, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, series D, vol. 1, pp. 29–39.
- 47 Report of meeting with Göring, July 28, 1937, in the Christie Papers, 18/1 5.
- 48 Lord Gladwyn, *The Memoirs of Lord Gladwyn*, London, 1972, p. 66.
- 49 E. Fröhlich (ed.), *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels: Sämtliche Fragmente*, 4 vols, Munich, 1987, vol. 3, p. 55; A. Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, London, 1970, p. 154.
- 50 W. Maser (ed.), *Hitler's Letters and Notes*, New York, 1974, p. 189–90.
- 51 Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, vol. 2, p. 282; Maser, *Hitler's Letters*, p. 190. On Hitler's commitment to war, see J. Fest, "Hitlers Krieg," in N. Frei and H. Kling (eds), *Der nationalsozialistische Krieg*, Frankfurt am Main, 1990, pp. 103–21.
- 52 Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, vol. 3, p. 348.
- 53 See particularly Jacobsen, *Aussenpolitik*, pp. 446–8, 452–60; K. Pätzold, "Antikommunismus und Antibolschewismus als Instrumente der Kriegsvorbereitung und Kriegspolitik," and Y. Bauer, "Antisemitismus und Krieg," both in Frei and Kling (eds), *nationalsozialistische Krieg*, pp. 122–36, 146–61. Bauer concludes: "Hitler's war was from first to last a war against the Jews."
- 54 Taylor, "1939 revisited," pp. 6–7.
- 55 Taylor, "Second thoughts," in *Origins* (1963 edn), pp. 17–18.
- 56 See B. H. Klein, *Germany's Economic Preparations for War*, Cambridge, MA, 1959, and an earlier article which Taylor did not see, "Germany's preparations for war: a reexamination," *American Economic Review*, vol. 38, 1948. The genesis of the thesis of limited war is discussed in J. K. Galbraith, *A Life in Our Times*, London, 1981, pp. 212–25.
- 57 H. J. Rautenberg, "Drei Dokumente zur Planung eines 300,000-Mann Friedenheeres aus dem Dezember 1933," *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen*, vol. 22, 1977, pp. 103–39.
- 58 Details in W. Deist, *The Wehrmacht and German Rearmament*, London, 1981, pp. 36–53. Costs for the army were to rise sharply during 1937–39 and then, for the 1940s, fall back to an annual level little higher than that of 1936.
- 59 Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, vol. 2, p. 283. In his "Secret book" (p. 96) Hitler had written: "[I]n the future the enlargement of people's living space...will require staking the whole strength of the people."
- 60 Goebbels, *Tagebuch*, vol. 3, p. 55.
- 61 Goebbels, *Tagebuch*, vol. 3, p. 33; Notes of a 1937 speech by Hitler, Christie Papers, 180/1 5.
- 62 On the theory of *Wehrwirtschaft*, see W. M. Stern, "Wehrwirtschaft: a German contribution to economics," *Economic History Review*, series 2, vol. 13, 1960–1, pp. 270–81. For a useful summary of the concept, see E. Hesse, "Wehrwirtschaft auf lange oder kurze Sicht?" *Der deutsche Volkswirt*, vol. 10, 1936, pp. 1,384–5. The background can be found in H.-E. Volkmann, "Aspekte der nationalsozialistischen 'Wehrwirtschaft,' 1933 bis 1936," *Francia*, vol. 5, 1977, pp. 513–38.
- 63 *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, series D, vol. 6, p. 577.
- 64 IWM, EDS files, Mi 14/377 (file 2), Thomas memorandum, March 28, 1939, p. 2; Mi 14/328 (d), OKW conference, September 3, 1939, pp. 1–2.
- 65 In December 1936, for example, Germany's most important economic journal, *Der Deutsche Volkswirt* (vol. 11, December 24, 1936, p. 625) included the following in a

- leading editorial on government economic policy: "It requires the sacrifice of living-standards, at least temporarily...in the end it is better to limit the demand for luxuries in order to build up ourselves what is necessary for food, clothing, housing and [military] security."
- 66 Klein, *Economic Preparations*, pp. 251-3; C. W. Guillebaud, *The Economic Recovery of Germany*, London, 1939, pp. 204-6.
- 67 R. J. Overy, *War and Economy in the Third Reich*, Oxford, 1994, p. 20.
- 68 On the Reichswerke, see Overy, *War and Economy*, pp. 190-1; on chemicals, A. BagelBohlan, *Hitlers industrielle Kriegsvorbereitung, 1936 bis 1939*, Koblenz, 1975, pp. 117-21; on synthetic rubber, G. Plumpe, "Industrie, technischer Fortschritt und Staat. Die Kautschuksynthese in Deutschland, 1906-1944/5," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, vol. 9, 1983, p. 594.
- 69 Statistical material on the German manpower position during the war period, July 31, 1945, table 7, in IWM, Speer Collection, FD 3056/49.
- 70 On naval rearmament, see M. Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung, 1939-1945*, 2 vols, Frankfurt am Main, 1970, vol. 1, pp. 58-65; see, for example, G. Weinberg, "Hitler and England, 1933-1945: pretense and reality," in *Germany, Hitler and World War II*, Cambridge, 1995, who argues that changed armaments priorities indicate a clear intention to turn westward in 1939. This is a view that sits ill with the reality of German naval and air planning. Neither service was ready to face Britain in 1939, and their operational studies carried out that year made this situation clear to senior German commanders.
- 71 For Hitler's views on massive military build-up, see the interesting remarks of Albert Speer in Speer interrogation, July 13, 1945, in IWM, Box 8368:
- [Hitler] anticipated an intensification of the war...he had repeatedly drawn attention to the dangers of the second front or of additional theatres of war....He knew the supply figures of the last war in detail and could reproach us with the fact that output in 1917/18 was higher than we could show for 1942. I only knew that these were the requirements which had been fixed in his mind for a long time. They were in nearly every case three to six times the armament production of 1941.
- 72 Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, vol. 2, p. 282.