

MURDEROUS MUTATION OF ANTI-SEMITISM

By Yehuda Bauer Haaretz 24 06 2011

On the 70th anniversary of Hitler's invasion of the USSR, a senior Holocaust researcher proposes a theory to explain the reason why the Fuehrer led his people into war.

What was the cause of World War II? The standard answer is that Nazi Germany wanted a war. Why? Because it aspired to hegemonic domination over Europe, and perhaps the entire world, and wanted to guarantee "living space" for the German people in the eastern part of the continent, as well as control of grain, coal, iron and oil supplies. Furthermore, Germany's leaders wanted to ensure the future of their people by establishing a mass German settlement in the "East." Was this indeed the case?

As early as 1936, Germany had returned to its production levels of 1929, the last year before the global economic crisis. By 1938-1939, it attained full employment, more or less. There wasn't any real pressure by young Germans to leave the country in favor of some government-sponsored settlement. Trade with the Soviet Union guaranteed all of the grain and industrial raw materials Germany needed, in exchange for the industrial products it manufactured. The whole notion of so-called living space was thus an ideological argument that was free of any real economic or political pressures. In that case, why did the leadership want a war?

Was there in 1939 a fierce desire among the German populace to go to war? There is a very large amount of testimony from foreign journalists and diplomats in Germany who all maintain that no such desire existed. This is hardly surprising: We are talking about a people that just 21 years earlier had been traumatized by World War I, which cost it millions of dead and wounded, who left behind widows, orphans and devastated families with men who were not fit to work.

Did the captains of industry and bank presidents want a war? In recent years access has become available to the archives of many of the major industrial and commercial firms, and of the banks. No evidence whatsoever has been found to indicate pressure of any kind from the business sector to go to war. To the contrary: Exports from Germany, particularly to eastern and southeastern Europe, were up again, and profits soared. It is true that industry benefited from the Nazi armament program, but the manufacture of weapons was not accompanied by a strong desire to use them. Perhaps the top military brass wanted a war? In September 1938, when it seemed for a moment that England and France would help Czechoslovakia in a war against Germany, and France had a military treaty with the Soviet Union - an attempted putsch against Hitler was organized by German generals. Heading it was the chief of staff at the time, Ludwig Beck (who would later lead the plot against Hitler in July 1944, as well).

The 1938 conspirators sent a young diplomat to London who was a party to the plot, Adam von Trott zu Solz, to secure the support of the Western powers. However, British government officials told him that they placed "trust in Mr. Hitler" and had no faith in a bunch of Prussian generals. We cannot know whether such a putsch would have been carried out and certainly not whether it would have succeeded; nor is there reason to suspect that the German generals came down with a violent case of the anti-war bug, but it is clear that the heads of the German army feared a defeat similar to that of World War I, and were therefore opposed to Hitler's plans.

Leaders in favor of war

It turns out that it was the Nazi leadership that wanted a war and that the explanation for that can indeed be found. Do we possess documentation that could clarify for us the Nazi leadership's true objectives? I intend to argue that we do, and that it has been partly known to us since the Nuremberg trials in 1945-46, and partly even since before September 1939.

In October 1936, Hermann Goering, who held the No. 2 spot in the Nazi leadership (Rudolf Hess was deputy fuehrer, but he was in charge of organization in the party, and carried no weight with Hitler and his accomplices), was appointed overseer of the four-year economic plan, which prepared Germany for war (the time span was abbreviated later). In August of that year Hitler sent Goering a memo, which he had quite probably written himself, as evidenced by the primitive German language in which it was composed, containing a list of the tasks

Goering was to perform: prepare appropriate supplies and equipment, reserves of coal, iron and chemical products, transportation and so forth. The memo was private, personal, and not an act of propaganda, but rather an order from the leader to his deputy.

The first page was devoted to explaining why Germany must prepare for war within a limited time. The key sentence in the document is this one (the translation, by Yad Vashem, tried to maintain the primitive wording of the original): "Since the beginning of the French Revolution the world has been drifting with increasing speed toward a new conflict, whose extreme solution is named bolshevism, but whose content and aim is only the removal of those strata of society which gave the leadership to humanity up to the present, and their replacing by international Jewry ... For a victory of bolshevism over Germany would not lead to a new Versailles Treaty, but to the final destruction, even the extermination of the German people."

These ideas were completed in, among other things, Hitler's public speech to the Reichstag (German parliament) on January 30, 1939. There he said: "If the international Jewish financiers in and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, then the result will not be the Bolshevization of the earth, and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe!"

In Hitler's view, and that of the party leadership, it was necessary to go to war, because Jewish bolshevism would bring about a horrible disaster, and even the physical annihilation of the German people. To his mind, Jewish bolshevism and the Jewish financiers - in other words, the Western capitalism dominated by the Jews - are one and the same. The phrase "once more" in Hitler's 1939 speech is important: Jewish financiers led to a first world war and would lead to another war.

I would argue, then, that there is a very clear and categorical explanation here for the question of why the war broke out: because of anti-Semitic ideology. The first document was internal, the second public and they complete each other. Where here is the matter of living space? It would seem there isn't much room for error. The goal was to oust the "Jewish bolshevism" that controlled the natural resources in Ukraine and the Caucasus, and then Germany would be able, as leader of the Aryan world, to fulfill its historic calling: to impose its hegemony on all of Europe, and beyond. In other words, the issue of living space was the "positive" side of the plan, as it were, and it too depended on the triumph over international Jewry.

Important implications

If this analysis is correct, it has far-reaching implications. First, it indicates that the war did not break out for economic or social reasons, but rather, first and foremost, for ideological reasons, primarily murderous anti-Semitism.

It is true that at the second level - economic, political, military and social considerations - had a considerable, mainly tactical, effect, but if these contradicted the ideological line of thought, the latter won out - something that I think can be proven. In that terrible war, some 35 million human beings died in Europe alone (and tens of millions more in Asia and Africa). Some 5.7 million of these were Jews, but another 29 million were non-Jews, and they died because of an ideology rooted in hatred of Jews.

The Holocaust was motivated not by structural problems within German society, as many believe: Social structures don't murder; people murder, and they have to be made to understand why murdering is desirable. The Holocaust was the result of a mutation of historic anti-Semitism into a racist and genocidal political act. That mutation played a central part in the forces that led to the war within whose framework it occurred. The Holocaust appears as an ideological genocide within the framework of an ideological world war.

This article is based on a lecture delivered this week by Prof. Yehuda Bauer at a conference organized by the International Institute for Holocaust Research-Yad Vashem, to mark the 70th anniversary of the German invasion of the Soviet Union.