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# U.S. INTELLIGENCE AND THE NAZIS

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## Introduction



NEARLY SIXTY YEARS after World War II, the American public and media continue to investigate parts of its legacy—troubling questions of conscience and history. Who knew what about the Holocaust, and when? Was it possible for the Allies to rescue some Jews from the Holocaust, or was that notion a myth, as one scholar recently put it?<sup>1</sup> Some U.S. businesses collaborated with the Nazi state before and during World War II. What was the extent of these activities, and what was the result? What happened after the war to those who had perpetrated wartime atrocities?

In the 1980s Josef Mengele, whose name has become a symbol of the evil of Auschwitz, became the object of an international manhunt, even though, as it turned out, he had died in Brazil shortly before then. Like the Mengele case, the French trial of Klaus Barbie, the “Butcher of Lyon,” raised questions long after the war about how some Nazi war criminals managed to escape postwar justice. U.S. Army intelligence had used and protected Barbie, a known Nazi war criminal, in return for assistance in the Cold War. Under what circumstances were other Nazi war criminals used directly or indirectly by U.S. intelligence agencies after the war?

All these questions remain pertinent for various reasons—not just for those who are fixated with the past. Genocide and “ethnic cleansing” are still part of human existence. In the current struggle against terrorism, the notion of recruiting intelligence assets from among previous foes remains a powerful urge. Can we learn practical lessons from World War II experiences?

Launching a wave of destruction that threatened Western civilization, Nazi Germany sought to annihilate its self-defined racial enemies physically and culturally, eradicating their presence from Europe and from history itself. Leading Nazi officials feared that “weaker” contemporaries and subsequent generations might not understand the “necessity” of their actions, so they tried to conceal their genocidal policies as well as the corpses of many of their victims.

Nevertheless, many of Nazi Germany’s secrets leaked. Underground organizations, intelligence officials of governments-in-exile, and some anti-Nazi

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Germans all supplied important information about Germany to Britain and the United States during World War II. Britain and the United States also developed their intelligence channels to get at the innermost secrets of the Nazi regime. Allied intelligence organizations made unprecedented efforts during the war to learn about their German intelligence rivals, believing that such knowledge would help them win the war more quickly. After the war, they continued to gather such intelligence, hoping to prevent the resurgence of a Nazi threat in Allied-occupied Germany. All these intelligence-related documents represented a storehouse of valuable historical information.

Yet World War II scholars and students of postwar intelligence have long found it difficult to use this information effectively. Although many millions of pages of intelligence compiled by agencies of the U.S. government were previously declassified and made available in the National Archives, specific categories of this intelligence information were withheld or withdrawn from public view, rendering American intelligence information fragmentary and at times opaque.

Some of the best intelligence about Nazi policies and activities acquired by the U.S. government during World War II, for example, came from foreign sources, especially from Great Britain. But to maintain good relations with foreign governments and organizations, information supplied by foreign governments was automatically excluded from regular declassification practices and was exempted even under the Freedom of Information Act. Intelligence “sources and methods” was another privileged category, and the details related to these issues were blacked out (redacted) or entirely withheld. Existing laws also allowed certain World War II-era information to remain classified for national security and privacy considerations. Relevant information about the activities of Nazis or Nazi collaborators after World War II was inaccessible for other reasons. The act of revealing sources cuts against the grain of what intelligence services do.

Spurred by Senator Michael DeWine of Ohio and Congresswoman Caroline Maloney of New York, in 1998 Congress passed the Nazi War Crimes Disclosure Act. Designed to address moral and historical imperatives, this law obliged the CIA, the U.S. Army, and the FBI to declassify operational information on their recruitment among Nazi and collaborationist veterans in the early Cold War. It also created a new organization, the Nazi War Criminal and Imperial Japanese Records Interagency Working Group (IWG), to implement and oversee a declassification effort that turned out to be the largest targeted declassification in American history.

The volume of documents declassified under the Nazi War Crimes Disclosure Act (an estimated 8 million pages) proved too large for us to examine all of them. But acting as historical consultants to the IWG, we have looked closely at hundreds of thousands of pages of recently opened records of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS)—the ancestor of the CIA—and at a good portion of an even larger collection of new FBI records.<sup>2</sup> We have drawn more selectively upon very large collections of new U.S. Army Intelligence records and State

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Department records. We have used an unprecedented collection of documents from the CIA. Finally, we were able to work with small but important collections from the National Security Agency and some other agencies such as the Office of Naval Intelligence.

At times our research strategy was determined or influenced by external constraints, such as which records had been located and which collections or files had been delivered to the National Archives or declassified up to that time. We began with a sense that we should write about new and significant findings. Of course, our ability to recognize new and significant documents in a vast pipeline of records depended in part upon our previous knowledge. Different researchers might well have found and selected different subjects. Over time we looked to broaden our initial selection of topics.

In this book we have tried to demonstrate that newly declassified documents, particularly when combined with previously available documents, allow us to add to, or even revise, our understanding of certain aspects of the Holocaust, of the looting of assets by Nazi Germany and its allies, and of perpetrators of war crimes or acts of persecution. Unlike many other studies of World War II-era intelligence,<sup>3</sup> we concentrate not on military intelligence, but on political intelligence: not on what made the greatest difference at the time, but often what slipped by and in retrospect seems more important than contemporaries recognized.

We have begun to describe how Allied intelligence organizations reacted to the Holocaust and other war crimes during and soon after the war. We also examine the activities and interactions of intelligence organizations from five Allied or pro-Western governments or communities: the Polish government-in-exile, the Jewish Agency for Palestine, the United States, Great Britain, and West Germany.

The Polish underground gathered information about the vast array of Nazi crimes and murders in Polish territory, including the extermination of millions of Jews in special camps equipped with gas chambers and crematoria. This information reached the Polish government-in-exile in London, and much of it was passed to Britain and the United States. Although they had all the evidence in front of them, Polish government officials did not sufficiently recognize the distinctions Nazi Germany made between Poles and Jews. For the Nazis, the Jews were the prime enemy—the moving force behind most opposition to Germany—which justified an extraordinary effort to eradicate them across Europe. The Polish government-in-exile highlighted the persecution of Poles.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, they recognized the inherently murderous character of Nazi rule and supplied much detailed evidence to Britain and the United States.

The Jewish Agency for Palestine understood Nazi goals and tried, under terrible constraints during the war, to counteract them in limited ways. Kept at arm's length by the Western Allies, the Jewish Agency had neither the resources nor the legitimacy of a government. But it, too, gathered intelligence about Nazi Germany and tried to arrange the escape or rescue of some remnants of Jewish communities in Axis Europe, tasks it saw as directly related. Other Jewish

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organizations—the Bund, the World Jewish Congress, the Joint Distribution Committee, and Agudas Israel—also carried out rescue and relief efforts and ran into similar problems. Their activities forced them to have contacts with some Nazi officials, and these contacts created or increased some Allied suspicions about their loyalty to the Allied cause.

Much remains to be learned about the wartime reactions of American and British intelligence agencies to the Holocaust. The raw evidence is now available for systematic study of OSS, the FBI, and various American military intelligence organizations. Evidence presented here suggests that some American intelligence officials understood Nazi goals and methods for Jews and other persecuted groups, but others clearly did not. Unlike the Jewish Agency, American intelligence agencies did not view World War II and the Holocaust as closely related. Although American intelligence organizations gathered information about a vast range of conditions in Nazi territories, in satellite countries, and even in neutral countries, there are relatively few signs of special intelligence efforts to secure information about the fate of Jews in occupied Europe until President Roosevelt established the War Refugee Board in January 1944. There was more attention to gathering evidence about the perpetrators of what were called atrocities or war crimes (later to be called crimes against humanity), but a great deal of information about what we have come to call the Holocaust came in from other places or was accumulated incidentally—it came in with other matters considered more significant to the war effort.

Since Nazi Germany's policies of genocide, exploitation, and looting were central elements of the regime, some may judge in retrospect that there was at least a partial intelligence failure—a failure to grasp one of the central political goals of the enemy. And, given the range of evidence about specific elements of the Holocaust presented below, it seems that this failure had less to do with collecting information than with recognizing its significance.

On the other hand, American and British intelligence scrutinized their intelligence rivals in Nazi Germany and in the process turned up incriminating evidence about a range of German intelligence organizations and officials. New evidence we have drawn upon here, when combined with previously known documents, indicates that German intelligence organizations, particularly the foreign intelligence branch of the SS Security Service (*Sicherheitsdienst* or SD), were very much part of the Nazi apparatus of persecution and extermination. The ideological conformity required by Hitler and his key subordinates forged a cooperative effort among the SS, the police, and German intelligence organizations that is visible today through detailed historical research. To loyal Nazi intelligence officials, gathering information for the war was directly related to helping Hitler to eliminate what he considered his most dangerous enemy—the Jews.

The central German military intelligence organization known as the Abwehr, subordinate to the High Command of the Armed Forces, certainly contained numerous individuals of conscience—even some leading figures of the anti-Nazi

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resistance. But the Abwehr as an organization could hardly escape the constraints or the criminality of the Nazi regime. The valiant individuals who resisted at best won small victories. We have gone to some length to describe new evidence about Nazi intelligence organizations because it casts light upon the connections between intelligence gathering and Nazi Germany's war against the Jews.

After the end of World War II, thousands of war criminals were prosecuted in different countries. Thousands of others escaped prosecution for reasons that had little or nothing to do with American postwar policies. But a good number of former German intelligence personnel, some of them members of criminal organizations such as the SS or the Gestapo, had special advantages.

The Army Counterintelligence Corps (which was the largest American intelligence organization in the immediate postwar period), the CIA, and the American-sponsored organization under General Reinhard Gehlen that became the basis of the West German Secret Service found it desirable to make postwar intelligence use of a substantial number—at least some dozens—of their former intelligence or police enemies. The notion that they employed only a few “bad apples” will not stand up to the new documentation.

Some American intelligence officials could not or did not want to see how many German intelligence officials, SS officers, police, or non-German collaborators with the Nazis were compromised or incriminated by their past service. Many of those with dubious pasts were eager to sell their knowledge and their services. A good number convinced some Western government and intelligence officials that they could be useful, often against a growing Communist threat. Once they had secured a foothold in postwar Europe, they generally found protection against criminal prosecution, which by the late 1940s was winding down. Others, unable or unwilling to succeed in the new Europe, unreconstructed Nazis or Nazi allies notorious for their crimes, found protection only in South America or the Middle East.

Hindsight allows us to see that American use of actual or alleged war criminals was a blunder in several respects. Granted, some intelligence activities involve a degree of secrecy and messiness which strain conventional moral standards, but there was no compelling reason to begin the postwar era with the assistance of some of those associated with the worst crimes of the war. Lack of sufficient attention to history—and on a personal level, to character and morality—established a bad precedent, especially for new intelligence agencies. It also brought into intelligence organizations men and women previously incapable of distinguishing between their political/ideological beliefs and reality. As a result, they could not and did not deliver good intelligence. Finally, because their new “democratic convictions” were at best insecure and their pasts could be used against them, some could be blackmailed by Communist intelligence agencies. Thus they represented a potential security problem. The new Communist enemy (against whom they were supposed to be useful) could and in some cases did recruit them as double agents. The extent of this security problem did not become evident to American and West German intelligence until the 1960s.

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Perhaps we still need to ponder this chapter in history. At a time when there is renewed emphasis on the need for recruiting agents and informants among the enemies of the United States, the lesson of the postwar intelligence use of former Nazis and collaborationist officials is that it is better not to have some kinds of assistance.

We also need to learn from what we did not find—and we have made some effort to do this in our chapters. Some claims about vast conspiracies involving the American government and Nazi war criminals or the intelligence use of some big-name Nazis in the postwar period turned out to be completely unfounded. The hiring of Nazi criminals, for the most part, occurred on an ad hoc basis, rather than by grand design. And legends and concoctions about certain high-level criminals such as Heinrich Müller, head of the Gestapo, whose fate remained obscure at the end of the war, flourished best in a climate of suspicion and secrecy. The opening of OSS, CIA, and FBI records on Müller will not sway those determined to believe in conspiracy theories, but they should convince those who are willing to base conclusions on the evidence.

Can we learn from history? Some people are optimists, others not. But in a sense we have no choice but to make use of the past. The limitations of our knowledge and the complexity of our problems mean that we inevitably borrow from past experience—individual and collective—in efforts to understand and choose among our options. Is Saddam Hussein another Hitler? Was the Baath regime like the Nazi regime? Can Iraq become a democracy as West Germany did? We cannot begin to answer such explicit or implied questions soundly unless we understand the past in some depth. The real question is not whether we will make use of our past to deal with the present, but rather how well we will do so. To do it well, we need all the documents, particularly the kinds declassified by the IWG.

This work is neither an official history nor an exclusive one. All the documents used here are available to other researchers. We have done our best to give careful citations in our notes—which, for a time, will serve others as entrée into new collections. Those willing to carry out archival research will undoubtedly make their own discoveries in these declassified documents and in related records at the National Archives. The importance of the newly declassified records can best be measured after years of archival research by a wide community of researchers and writers.

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## Notes

1. William D. Rubenstein, *The Myth of Rescue: Why the Democracies Could Not Have Saved More Jews from the Nazis* (London: Routledge, 1997).
2. All documents cited in National Archives, Record Group 226, entries 210–219, were declassified under the Nazi War Crimes Disclosure Act. We have also mentioned in the text the declassification of some significant documents in other entries of RG 226.
3. Among which the largest and most famous is probably F. H. Hinsley et al., *British Intelligence in the Second World War*, published by Cambridge University Press.
4. David Engel, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz: The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews, 1939–1942* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987) and *Facing a Holocaust: The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews, 1943–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).



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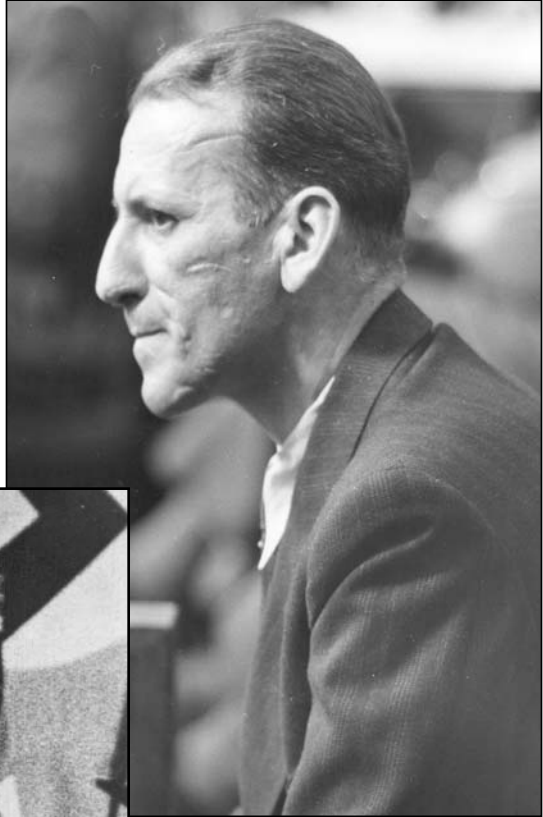
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Right: RSHA chief Ernst  
Kaltenbrunner;  
below: Otto Skorzeny, RSHA  
sabotage and special operations  
expert;  
below right: Walter  
Schellenberg, chief of SD  
Foreign Intelligence.



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# 1

## OSS Knowledge of the Holocaust

Richard Breitman  
with Norman J. W. Goda

INFORMATION ABOUT NAZI SHOOTINGS of Jews started to leak out shortly after they began during World War II. At first, however, U.S. media coverage indicated that large numbers of people in different Nazi-occupied countries were suffering terribly, and there was little distinction between the fate of Jews and that of other groups. In any case, the military situation and the fate of friends and relatives on the battlefronts were the central collective concerns in the United States. The Allies seemed to be struggling to cope with one Axis conquest after another in the early phases of the war. Given this focus, many Americans did not recognize what we have come to call the Holocaust even after an Allied statement in December 1942 that Nazi Germany was carrying out a policy of mass extermination of Jews.

Did American intelligence officials know more, or know earlier? The small office of the Coordinator of Information (COI), and its successor, the new Office of Strategic Services (OSS), both headed by General William J. Donovan, attempted to capture as much information as possible about Nazi Germany, particularly about its military, economic, or sociopolitical weaknesses. As a by-product, the COI and OSS accumulated substantial intelligence about Nazi measures against Jews.

In memoirs and other retrospective accounts, however, a number of former OSS officials have disclaimed recognition of the Holocaust at the time. For example, William J. Casey, stationed in the OSS London office from October 1943 on (and later director of the CIA in the Reagan administration), commented in his memoirs:

I'll never understand how, with all we knew about Germany and its military machine, we knew so little about the concentration camps and the magnitude of the Holocaust. We knew in a general way that Jews were being persecuted, that they were being rounded up in occupied countries, and deported to Germany, that they were brought to camps, and that brutality and murder took place at these