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Author(s): Alex J. Kay

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Alex J. Kay

Germany's Staatssekretäre, Mass Starvation and the Meeting of 2 May 1941

On 20 January 1942, fifteen senior German officials met at a villa on the shore of Berlin's Lake Wannsee to discuss and co-ordinate the implementation of the so-called 'Final Solution of the Jewish Question'. The agreements reached during the course of the two-hour meeting, called and chaired by Chief of the Reich Security Main Office Reinhard Heydrich, cleared the way for the Europe-wide killing of six million Jews. As a prime example of the chilling matter-of-factness and cold-blooded precision of nazi planning for mass murder, the Wannsee Conference, as it came to be known, is now universally and justifiably infamous.

Over eight months earlier, another meeting of senior officials had taken place which, although its outcome was in many ways just as horrendous as that of the Wannsee Conference, has garnered comparatively little attention. On Friday, 2 May 1941, a little over seven weeks prior to the beginning of Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Soviet Union, those officials responsible for formulating Germany's economic policy in the eastern territories met in Berlin to discuss the tasks which lay before them. The minutes of this gathering, which graphically describe the conclusions reached there, have survived in two parts, both bearing the date of 2 May 1941. They read in translation as follows:

Memorandum
on the result of today's discussion with the Staatssekretäre
regarding Barbarossa

1. The war can only continue to be waged if the entire Wehrmacht is fed from Russia during the third year of the war.
2. As a result, x million people will doubtlessly starve, if that which is necessary for us is extracted from the land.
3. Of greatest importance is the recovery and removal of oilseed, oilcake, [and] only then grain. The available fat and meat will in all probability be consumed by the troops.
4. Industrial activity is only to be resumed in areas of shortage, e.g. transportation works, works for general supply plants (iron), textile works, only those armaments firms for which bottlenecks exist in Germany.

The setting-up of workshops for the troops [is] of course [to take place] on an increased scale.

5. For the securing of the vast areas between the main transit roads, special troops must be made available, perhaps the RAD [Reich Labour Service] or supplementary army formations will be incorporated.

It is necessary to select the areas which are of particular importance and are, therefore, to be protected.¹

Discussion [of the] Staatssekretäre 2.5.41.

1. Directive from the Führer for the Reich Marshal [Hermann Göring] (in accordance with attachment 1) must finally be signed.

Furthermore, the same applies to the letter from the Reich Marshal for the Army C-in-C [Walther von Brauchitsch] (attachment 2).

2. Main transit roads and securing of those areas which lie between them for the purpose of agricultural exploitation.
3. Provision of uniforms for the people in the civilian sector.

The industrial leaders with the insignia of an industrial leader as special leader and greyish-silver arm stripes, the agriculture [officials] in civilian clothing with greyish-silver arm stripes, in the event that they are not entitled to wear the uniform of an officer.²

In an alarmingly matter-of-fact way, those present at the meeting declared that 'x million people' in the soon-to-be-occupied territories of the Soviet Union would have to starve to death if Germany was to win the war. It was intended that starvation on this scale would create a surplus of foodstuffs in the occupied East, which would be used first and foremost to feed Germany's armed forces during the third year of the war (i.e. September 1941 to August 1942), above all those three million soldiers serving on the Eastern Front. Eliminating the necessity of supplying three million men with particularly high rations directly from the Reich would ease the pressure placed on the existing transport routes between Germany and the Soviet territories for the duration of the war in the East, as well as on food stocks in Germany and German-occupied Europe as a whole, thereby contributing to Germany's economic capacity to fight the expected war of attrition against the Anglo-Saxon powers. From the point of view of those who envisaged it, the importance of this ruthless approach in the occupied East cannot be overestimated.

The conclusions reached by those attending the meeting on 2 May 1941 signified the approval of the relevant sections of the German ministerial bureaucracy for a strategy which had been in the process of being developed — above all by Staatssekretär Herbert Backe (1896–1947) and his closest colleagues in the Reich Ministry for Food and Agriculture and the Reich Food Estate — since the beginning of the year.³ As described in the policy guidelines produced by agricultural experts in the wake of the meeting of 2 May, this strategy envisaged the physical division of the Soviet territories according to

1 Der Prozess gegen die Hauptkriegsverbrecher vor dem Internationalen Militärgerichtshof, Nürnberg, 14 November 1945–1 Oktober 1946 (hereafter IMG), vol. 31 (Sekretariat des Gerichtshofs Nuremberg 1948), doc. 2718-PS, 84, 'Aktennotiz über Ergebnis der heutigen Besprechung mit den Staatssekretären über Barbarossa'. Author's own translation.

2 Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (hereafter BA-MA), RW 19/739, fol. 306, 'Besprechung Staatssekretäre 2.5.41', Stab Ia. Author's own translation.

3 For more on the background and development of this policy, see the author's book *Exploitation, Resettlement, Mass Murder. Political and Economic Planning for German Occupation Policy in the Soviet Union, 1940–1941* (New York/Oxford 2006).

agricultural productivity, whereby those regions producing food surpluses (so-called 'surplus territories', namely Ukraine, southern Russia and the Caucasus) would be detached from those which did not (so-called 'deficit territories', namely northern and central Russia and Belarus) and whose inhabitants were, therefore, dependent on the former for their food supply.⁴ The minutes of the meeting of 2 May made explicit what had been inherent in the strategy from the beginning, namely that millions of Soviet citizens were bound to die if this concept were to be implemented. With the agreement evidently reached during this discussion and recorded in the minutes, yet another moral threshold had been crossed by the National Socialist regime.

Of those foodstuffs available in the Soviet Union in large amounts, oilseed, oilcake and grain were to be put at the top of the list of commodities to be plundered. The emphasis placed on the 'recovery and removal' of these items indicates that a significant proportion of the amounts confiscated was to be transported back to the Reich, unlike fat and meat, which would 'in all probability be consumed by the troops' engaged in combat and administrative duties in the occupied East. It can be seen from the minutes that the aim in the industrial sector was by no means to resurrect the infrastructure in the Soviet territories as soon as possible. Instead, industrial activity was only to be resumed in those areas in which there were shortages in the German war economy, for example, in transportation, iron and textile works, armaments and the setting-up of workshops for the troops. Priorities were to be set, with emphasis placed on those products which were of crucial importance to the German war effort. The belief that the Soviet Union ought to return to being a predominantly agricultural land, as it had been prior to the first world war, and the German leadership's intention to bring this about, are implicit in the downplaying of the importance of the industrial infrastructure of the Soviet territories.

Securing the 'main transit roads' and surrounding areas would ensure that the troops advancing eastwards along these routes could live 'off the land', a phrase used repeatedly by the economic planners. The second, and far less striking, part of the minutes appears to cover in the main those issues which were earmarked on 2 May to be dealt with further in the days and weeks following the discussion, and perhaps prior to a follow-up meeting. The mundane was mixed with the murderous at this gathering, as the final point — the provision of uniforms for non-military personnel in the occupied Soviet territories — makes clear.

Beyond the main conclusions reached at the meeting, it is also possible to derive from the minutes something about the form and importance of the gathering. The heading given to the first and main part of the minutes reads: 'Memorandum on the result of today's discussion with the *Staatssekretäre*

4 IMG, vol. 36 (1949), doc. 126-EC, 135-57, 'Wirtschaftspolitische Richtlinien für Wirtschaftsorganisation Ost, Gruppe Landwirtschaft', 23 May 1941, here 138.

regarding Barbarossa'. The congregation of Staatssekretäre — roughly equivalent to the grade of permanent secretary in the British civil service — became an important aspect of governance in National Socialist Germany following the abandonment of formal cabinet meetings at the end of 1937. Thereafter, Hitler practically forbade his ministers to assemble independently. The Secret Cabinet Council, set up by 'decree of the Führer' on 4 February 1938, proved to be a non-starter. Its nominal purpose was to advise Hitler on matters of foreign policy, but it could only be summoned by him and was not able to convene a meeting itself. As Hitler never summoned it, the council never met.⁵ Recent attention has turned to the importance of the regular conferences of the Reichs- and Gauleiter — which often lasted for several days — as a means of disseminating information and co-ordinating policy, and as an opportunity for exchanging viewpoints with Hitler and other senior figures in the Nazi Party.⁶ Despite the obvious value of these conferences, not least in terms of the continuous issuing of directives which evidently took place there, it appears that the interchange of ideas was limited to discussions in pairs or in small groups,⁷ thereby failing to offer a wider forum for debate. In view of this, the Staatssekretäre — as the most effective and easily-assembled medium of policy co-ordination — increased in importance. Bodies like the Office of the Four-Year Plan borrowed the Staatssekretäre from their respective ministries in order to stimulate interagency co-operation. One historian has argued that meetings of the Staatssekretäre became 'in effect a substitute for cabinet government'.⁸ The most notorious example of such a meeting is the aforementioned Wannsee Conference.

In contrast to the extensive coverage of the Wannsee Conference in the historiography, however, the meeting of 2 May 1941 and its minutes have remained fairly obscure. Given the obvious similarities between the two gatherings, this difference in treatment is rather striking. Both were in effect meetings of the relevant Staatssekretäre, i.e. ministers' deputies. At both meetings the main topic on the agenda was the murder of millions of human beings and how this could be brought about. The target group discussed at Wannsee was over eleven million Jews spread across the entire European continent. At the meeting on 2 May, although somewhat vaguely referred to in the minutes as 'x million', the target group was in fact 'many tens of millions' of Soviet citizens, as stated in the economic policy guidelines drawn up and issued exactly three weeks later by some of those present at the meeting on 2 May.⁹ Various other

5 Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde (hereafter BAB), 99 US 7/1108, fol. 92, postwar comments of Dr Hans-Heinrich Lammers, 7 September 1948.

6 Martin Moll, 'Steuerungsinstrument im "Ämterchaos"? Die Tagungen der Reichs- und Gauleiter der NSDAP', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 49 (2001), 215–73.

7 Ibid., 270, 272.

8 Mark Roseman, *The Villa, the Lake, the Meeting. Wannsee and the Final Solution* (London 2002), 57.

9 IMG, vol. 36, 145.

sources provide a more exact figure of 30 million,¹⁰ almost three times as many as those slated to be killed by the men present at the Wannsee Conference. It was no coincidence that 30 million was the number by which the Soviet population — exclusively the urban population in fact — had grown between the beginning of the first world war in 1914 and the beginning of the second world war in 1939.¹¹ It was this very process of industrialization and urbanization which the German leadership sought to reverse as a way of providing a long-term agricultural base in the occupied East for German-dominated continental Europe. What one is dealing with here is the blueprint for a programme of mass murder unprecedented in modern history.

Given that the first part of the minutes was used as evidence at the trials of the major war criminals at Nuremberg immediately after the end of the second world war, the relative neglect of the 2 May meeting and its minutes cannot be explained by the recent unearthing of the minutes. Little over a decade after the Nuremberg trials, the meeting and its minutes were already referred to in the secondary literature,¹² and in the last 15 years they have been increasingly placed in their wider context. Nevertheless, as one historian recently remarked, 'the full significance [of the minutes] for the subsequent occupation policy in the Soviet Union has barely been recognized'.¹³ Whereas scores of articles and books have dealt exclusively with the Wannsee Conference (and rightly so), this other far-reaching meeting of the German Staatssekretäre has failed to be the subject of one single study. In light of the magnitude of the well-documented German plans to conquer, exploit and colonize the European part of the Soviet Union, and the massive implications this meeting had for German occupation policy, this is somewhat surprising. The most likely explanation for this, however, is that the brevity of the minutes and the absence of a list of participants similar to that contained in the Wannsee Protocol have discouraged historians from focusing in depth on the conference.

Having discussed the conclusions reached at the meeting of 2 May and the nature of the gathering itself, and placed both the meeting and its minutes in their immediate context, this article will now concern itself principally with

10 IMG, vol. 4 (1947), 535–6, postwar questioning of Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski, former Higher SS and Police Leader for Russia Centre, 7 January 1946; Jochen von Lang, *Der Adjutant. Karl Wolff: Der Mann zwischen Hitler und Himmler* (Munich/Berlin 1985), 50–1; Czesław Madajczyk, *Die Okkupationspolitik Nazideutschlands in Polen 1939–1945* (Berlin 1987), 92; Rudolf-Christoph Freiherr von Gersdorff, *Soldat im Untergang* (Frankfurt am Main/Berlin/Vienna 1977), 93; Christian Gerlach, 'Deutsche Wirtschaftsinteressen, Besatzungspolitik und der Mord an den Juden in Weißrußland 1941–1943' in Ulrich Herbert (ed.), *Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik 1939–1945. Neue Forschungen und Kontroversen* (Frankfurt am Main 1998), 263–91, here 270–1.

11 IMG, vol. 36, 136; Herbert Backe, *Um die Nahrungsfreiheit Europas. Weltwirtschaft oder Großraum* (2nd edn, Leipzig 1943), 162.

12 Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia 1941–1945. A Study of Occupation Policies* (London/New York 1957), 38–9.

13 Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde. Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrußland 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg 1999), 46.

three issues. First, exactly who attended the meeting and which institutions did they represent? Secondly, can more than superficial linkages be established between the meetings of 2 May 1941 and 20 January 1942 or, put more plainly, between the 'starvation policy' directed primarily against the civilian population of northern and central Russia and Belarus and the annihilation of Soviet Jewry? Thirdly, what were the consequences of the policy agreed at the 2 May meeting for those groups targeted in the occupied Soviet territories?

As Plenipotentiary for the Four-Year Plan, it was Reich Marshal Hermann Göring whom Hitler had already made responsible for the entire economic administration in the soon-to-be-occupied Soviet territories by the time the 2 May meeting took place. Who, however, was responsible for the sentiments contained in its minutes? Who attended on 2 May? The absence of a list of participants means that the presence of any one person cannot be determined with absolute certainty. The piecing together of other sources and a certain degree of supposition are, therefore, required.

Only two copies of the minutes were produced. The first was for the files of the War Economy and Armaments Office in the Wehrmacht High Command (OKW), headed by General Georg Thomas (1890–1946). The first and most important part of this copy (i.e. the first part of the minutes quoted above) is missing from the appropriate set of files located in the German Military Archives for the simple reason that it was used as evidence at the trials of the major war criminals at Nuremberg. The second part of this copy (i.e. the second part of the minutes), on the other hand, remains in the war diary of the War Economy and Armaments Office. The second copy of the minutes was intended for Lieutenant-General Dr Wilhelm Schubert (1879–1972), a senior Luftwaffe officer and head of the Economic Staff East, the organization responsible for formulating and implementing Germany's economic policy of exploitation in the occupied Soviet territories.

Alongside his duties as Chief of the War Economy and Armaments Office, General Thomas at the time of the meeting on 2 May had overall operational control over the Economic Command Staff East. In order that the various elements of the Greater German economic sphere remained in the same hands, this small management committee — not to be confused with the aforementioned Economic Staff East, which was directly subordinated to it — was headed by Reich Marshal Göring in his capacity as Plenipotentiary for the Four-Year Plan and directed on his behalf by his deputy Staatssekretär Paul Körner (1893–1957). Instructions and orders from Göring for Lieutenant-General Schubert were issued through Thomas. Given that the two copies of the minutes were for Generals Thomas and Schubert, the meeting of 2 May was likely to have been a formal meeting of the organization tasked with formulating economic planning for the forthcoming invasion and occupation of the Soviet Union.

The fact that this was a 'discussion with the Staatssekretäre regarding

Barbarossa' has led some historians to conclude that it was a session of the General Council for the Four-Year Plan,¹⁴ which was nominally headed by Göring and made up primarily of Staatssekretäre recruited from those ministries which played a prominent role in the running of the German economy. What makes this highly unlikely, however, is the fact that Staatssekretär Körner opened the eleventh session of the General Council on 24 June 1941 by informing the other participants that the convening of the General Council had not been able to take place 'until now' as a result of the preparations for Operation Barbarossa. He then proceeded to report to those present on the work of the Economic Command Staff East.¹⁵ Unlike the General Council for the Four-Year Plan, the Economic Command Staff East had already held its fourth session on 26 May.¹⁶ In all likelihood, the meeting of the Staatssekretäre on 2 May was an official session of this committee.

At the meeting of the Economic Command Staff East on 26 May, a total of 17 men were present. Only a handful of these, however, were in fact permanent members of that committee. Alongside Göring, Körner and Thomas, Staatssekretär Backe of the Reich Ministry for Food and Agriculture, Unterstaatssekretär Lieutenant-General Hermann von Hanneken (1890–1983) of the Reich Economics Ministry, and Staatssekretär Friedrich Alpers (1901–44) of the Reich Forestry Office constituted the original members.¹⁷ They were soon joined on the committee by Dr Friedrich Syrup (1881–1945) of the Reich Ministry for Labour, Dr Friedrich Landfried (1884–?) of the Reich Economics Ministry, Erich Neumann (1892–1948) of the Office of the Four-Year Plan, and probably also Wilhelm Kleinmann (1876–1945) of the Reich Transport Ministry, all four of whom occupied the position of Staatssekretär in their respective organizations.¹⁸

On 30 April, two days prior to the meeting on 2 May, a Major Günther in the Planning Staff Oldenburg, the forerunner of the Economic Staff East, telephoned General Thomas with the following message:

Reichsleiter Rosenberg invites [the] General in an urgent matter to a discussion on Friday, 2.5.41, [at] 11 o'clock in the morning in the Office of the Reichsleiter.

The Reichsleiter requests that [the] General keep as closely as possible to the appointment for the discussion, in order for him to be able to give the Führer a presentation on Friday afternoon.¹⁹

14 Götz Aly and Susanne Heim, *Vordenker der Vernichtung. Auschwitz und die deutschen Pläne für eine neue europäische Ordnung* (Hamburg 1991), 60, 372.

15 BA-MA, RW 19/177, fol. 163, '11. Sitzung des Generalrats vom 24.6.1941 unter Vorsitz von Staatssekretär Körner'.

16 BA-MA, RW 19/739, fols. 130–6, 'Niederschrift zur 4. Sitzung des Wirtschafts-Führungsstabes Ost unter Vorsitz von Staatssekretär Körner vom 26. Mai 1941', Dr Bergmann.

17 BA-MA, RW 19/164, fol. 228, 'Vortrag bei Reichsmarschall Göring am 19.3.41', 20 March 1941, Chef Wi Rü Amt (Thomas).

18 Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, op. cit., 144, fn. 101; BAB, R 3901/20136, fol. 12, 24 November 1941, OKW; Dietrich Eichholtz, *Geschichte der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft 1939–1945*, Band I: 1939–1941 (Berlin 1969), 234, fn. 127.

19 BA-MA, RW 4/v. 759, fol. 14. Author's own translation.

The invitation from Alfred Rosenberg (1893–1946) had been made at the request of Chief of the OKW Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel. The two men had had ‘an in-depth discussion’ on 29 April. A day later, Keitel had rung Rosenberg to ask if the latter could meet Thomas and Staatssekretär Körner on 2 May. In accordance with this appointment, Rosenberg, who at this time was designated Reich Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories, noted in his diary entry for 1 May that he was due to ‘receive’ Thomas and Körner on 2 May.²⁰ Thus, it is quite feasible not only that it was the meeting of the Staatssekretäre at which the three men met but also that Rosenberg hosted the discussion in his office at Margaretenstrasse 17 in Berlin-Tiergarten.²¹

If Rosenberg was present at the meeting on 2 May, it is quite probable that the Chief of the Operations Staff of the Wehrmacht High Command, General Alfred Jodl (1890–1946), also attended. Since the previous month, Jodl had been the OKW’s representative with the Bureau Rosenberg, the forerunner of the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories.²² The entry for 2 May in the war diary of the OKW contains the remark ‘Chief at Reichsleiter Rosenberg’s’.²³ This indicates that Jodl spent at least a substantial part of the day with Rosenberg. As it was Keitel — Jodl’s immediate superior — who prompted Rosenberg’s meeting with Thomas and Körner, or at least the timing of it, Jodl could in all probability have been sent to Rosenberg by his boss. Given Jodl’s extended presence at Rosenberg’s, it is unlikely that their meeting was separate from that between Rosenberg, Thomas and Körner, particularly since Rosenberg had another meeting to attend that same afternoon — with Hitler. Two days prior to the gathering of the Staatssekretäre, Rosenberg had spoken briefly with Hitler and the two of them had then arranged to discuss ‘the questions of the East in more detail’ on 2 May, which indeed they did.²⁴ This would naturally have given Rosenberg the opportunity to report to Hitler on the outcome of the meeting with the Staatssekretäre.

However, one of Rosenberg’s subsequent diary entries appears to contradict his earlier entry regarding the date of his meeting with Thomas and Körner. On 6 May, in his first diary entry since the gathering on 2 May, Rosenberg wrote that he had met Körner and Thomas to discuss the work hitherto carried out by the Four-Year Plan organization and the OKW on 3 May, i.e. a day *later* than he had been due to meet them according to his earlier diary entry. Gauleiter Dr Alfred Meyer (1891–1945), Rosenberg’s permanent

20 Rosenberg’s diary entry for 1 May 1941, published in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, no. 140, 22.6.1971.

21 Bundesarchiv, Koblenz (hereafter BAK), N 1075/9, ‘Termine am Mittwoch, dem 7. Mai 1941’.

22 IMG, vol. 26 (1947), doc. 865-PS, 385–6, letter from Field Marshal Keitel to Head of the Reich Chancellery Lammers, 25 April 1941.

23 Percy Ernst Schramm (ed.), *Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht (Wehrmachtsführungsstab) 1940–1945. Geführt von Helmuth Greiner und Percy Ernst Schramm*, vol. 1: 1 August 1940–31 December 1941 (Frankfurt am Main 1965), 390.

24 Rosenberg’s diary entries for 1 and 6 May 1941, published in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, no. 140, 22.6.1971.

representative, was recorded as having held consultations with Herbert Backe, Ministerialdirektor Dr Hans-Joachim Riecke (1899–1987), both of the Reich Ministry for Food and Agriculture, and Ministerialdirektor Dr Gustav Schlotterer (1906–89) of the Reich Economics Ministry, presumably at the same time as Rosenberg talked to Körner and Thomas.²⁵ Although he made no reference in his entry to any alteration in the original plans, it would be rather presumptuous to assume that this inconsistency was the result of an error on Rosenberg's part and that the discussion had in fact taken place on 2 May. Although the possibility that he was referring to a second meeting with Körner and Thomas — the first being in the company of the Staatssekretäre a day earlier, on 2 May — should not automatically be ruled out, it does not seem very probable. Nevertheless, even if Rosenberg did not attend the meeting on 2 May, but rather discussed its results with Körner and Thomas the day after, it is certain that he approved of what he heard. He described the discussion as 'a good piece of general staff work founded on long experience'.²⁶ It was only one of very many talks Rosenberg held during the months of April, May and June 1941 to discuss the objectives of the Economic Command Staff East. In a report on his preparatory work for the occupation of the Soviet territories which he compiled just under a week after the beginning of Operation Barbarossa, Rosenberg confirmed that the 'most extensive agreement' had been reached regarding 'eastern questions' during talks with Schlotterer, Thomas, Körner, Backe, Riecke, Schubert and others. With Schlotterer indeed, Rosenberg took part in 'almost daily discussions' regarding 'the economic intentions of the Economic Command Staff East'.²⁷

Beyond the reference in Rosenberg's diary to consultations between Staatssekretär Backe and Gauleiter Meyer on 2 (or 3) May, there is good reason to believe that Backe attended the meeting of the Staatssekretäre on 2 May. As author of the strategy which envisaged the starvation of millions of Soviet citizens in order to manufacture food surpluses artificially to supply the invading troops and the German home front, Backe's failure to attend such an important meeting on the subject would have been almost unthinkable. In addition, with Hitler's knowledge and approval, complete powers over the agricultural exploitation of the Soviet territories had been transferred to him on 12 April.²⁸

Although Reich Marshal Göring was nominally in charge of the Economic Command Staff East and has been described in the literature as a 'certain participant' of the 2 May conference,²⁹ it can, on the contrary, be established with certainty that he did not, in fact, attend. In the second part of the minutes to the meeting, it was noted: 'Directive from the Führer for the Reich Marshal

25 Rosenberg's diary entry for 6 May.

26 Ibid.

27 IMG, vol. 26, doc. 1039-PS, 584–92, 'Bericht über die vorbereitende Arbeit in Fragen des osteuropäischen Raumes', 28 June 1941, here 586.

28 BAK, N 1094/II 20, Mappe III, 'Geheime Reichssache!', 12 April 1941, Körner.

29 Eichholtz, *Geschichte der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft 1939–1945*, Band I, op. cit., 240.

[. . .] must finally be signed. Furthermore, the same applies to the letter from the Reich Marshal for the Army C-in-C.³⁰ If Göring *had* been present, one would have expected him to have signed the letter to Field Marshal von Brauchitsch there and then. Furthermore, according to his appointments diary, Göring was in Paris on 2 May and it is very unlikely that the discussion took place in the French and not the German capital.³¹ In addition, Göring did not attend either of the subsequent meetings of the Economic Command Staff East on 26 May and 31 July.³²

There is little doubt that Generals Thomas and Schubert, as recipients of the protocol and being, in the first case, in charge of the Economic Command Staff East and, in the second, head of the Economic Staff East, both attended the meeting on 2 May. As Staatssekretäre (or Unterstaatssekretäre) and members of the Economic Command Staff East, Körner (also Göring's deputy), Backe, von Hanneken, Alpers and Syrup were almost certainly present as well. Depending on the accuracy of Rosenberg's diary entries, he, Jodl, Meyer, Schlotterer and Riecke can be regarded as very probable participants. Even without overly relying on Rosenberg's diary entries, Schlotterer and Riecke should be viewed as very likely attendees. In the Economic Staff East, the two men headed Group W and Group La, respectively. The former was responsible for the entire commercial economy in the occupied Soviet territories, including raw materials, forestry, finance, property and trade, whilst the latter dealt with all questions of food and agriculture.³³ Furthermore, Schlotterer was the leading planner in the Reich Economics Ministry for the future European New Order,³⁴ whilst Riecke was Backe's right-hand man and responsible for the economic policy guidelines of 23 May already mentioned. Both men would go on to occupy senior positions in the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories. In addition, both were present at the subsequent meetings of the Economic Command Staff East on 26 May and 31 July, as were Körner, who chaired both meetings, Thomas, Schubert, Backe, von Hanneken and Syrup.³⁵

The participation of other officials, from both the military and civilian sectors, should not be ruled out. Possible participants are the Staatssekretäre

30 BA-MA, RW 19/739, fol. 306. The letter was in fact signed by Göring, sent to and received by von Brauchitsch by 14 May at the latest. See BA-MA, RW 19/739, fol. 267, 'Aktenvermerk. Betr.: Wirtschaftsorganisation Barbarossa', 14 May 1941, VO Wi Rü Amt bei OKH/Gen Qu.

31 Archiv des Instituts für Zeitgeschichte (hereafter IfZ), ED 180/5, Terminkalender Hermann Göring, fol. 62, entry for 2 May 1941.

32 BA-MA, RW 19/739, fol. 130; BAB, R 94/9, 'Niederschrift über die Sitzung des Wirtschaftsführungsstabes Ost vom 31. Juli 1941'.

33 Group M, responsible for armaments, the requirements of the troops and the transport of economic goods, was headed by von Hanneken. See IMG, vol. 27 (1948), doc. 1157-PS, 32-8, 'Besprechung mit den Wehrmachtteilen am Dienstag, den 29. April 1941, 10 Uhr', here 33-4; BAB, R 43 II/686a, fols. 55-6; Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, op. cit., 147-8. See also BAB, R 26 IV/33a, 'Richtlinien für die Führung der Wirtschaft in den neubesetzten Ostgebieten (Grüne Mappe)', Teil I (2. Auflage), July 1941, 7.

34 Ludolf Herbst, *Der Totale Krieg und die Ordnung der Wirtschaft. Die Kriegswirtschaft im Spannungsfeld von Politik, Ideologie und Propaganda 1939-1945* (Stuttgart 1982), 129, 133-4.

35 BA-MA, RW 19/739, fol. 130; BAB, R 94/9.

Kleinmann, Landfried and Neumann, Ministerialdirektor Dr Friedrich Gramsch (1894–1955) and Regierungsrat (retired) Dr Joachim Bergmann (1906–?), both from the Office of the Four-Year Plan, and Colonel Rudolf Hünemann (1895–1955), Chief of Staff in the War Economy and Armaments Office. All six attended the meetings of the Economic Command Staff on 26 May and 31 July, apart from Neumann, who attended just the latter of the two.³⁶ As the almost certain author of the minutes,³⁷ Lieutenant-Colonel von Gusovius, Thomas's Ia (or first general staff officer, command section), must also have been present.

It is clear from this list of twelve probable and six possible additional participants (not including von Gusovius) why the meeting was referred to as the 'discussion with the Staatssekretäre'. Of the eighteen, eight held the position of Staatssekretär or Unterstaatssekretär. As Rosenberg's permanent representative, Gauleiter Meyer also possessed the rank of Staatssekretär,³⁸ and can, therefore, be added to this figure. Those who attended the meeting were for the most part senior, though not top-level, officials. General Jodl was Hitler's closest military adviser, yet nobody of the rank of Minister (the equivalent of a British cabinet secretary) was present, although Syrup had been Reich Minister for Labour in the years 1932–3,³⁹ whilst both Rosenberg and Backe were subsequently to attain the rank of Reich Minister, in July 1941 and April 1944 respectively. The same can be said of the Wannsee Conference, whose participants were also Staatssekretäre rather than Minister. It was also referred to internally as a *Staatssekretärsbesprechung* (discussion between Staatssekretäre) or *Konferenz der Staatssekretäre* (conference of the Staatssekretäre),⁴⁰ although a marginally smaller proportion of those who attended — namely six out of fifteen — were in fact Staatssekretäre or their deputies. Of those who attended the Wannsee Conference, only Meyer and potentially Neumann had also been present eight-and-a-half months earlier at the meeting in Berlin on 2 May.

The absence in both cases of top-level officials can largely be explained by Hitler's effective ban, mentioned earlier, on gatherings of his ministers in the wake of the demise of cabinet meetings at the end of 1937. In addition, despite the undeniable significance of both the Berlin and Wannsee meetings, neither was a forum for major decision-making as such, but rather for the essential inter-ministerial dissemination, discussion and co-ordination of policies already

36 Ibid.

37 Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, op. cit., 46, fn. 59.

38 IMG, vol. 26, doc. 1019-PS, 555–60, 'Anhang zur Denkschrift Nr. 2. Personelle Vorschläge für die Reichskommissariate im Osten und die politische Zentralstelle in Berlin', 7 April 1941, here 559; IMG, vol. 26, doc. 1024-PS, 560–6, 'Allgemeiner Aufbau und Aufgaben einer Dienststelle für die zentrale Bearbeitung der Fragen des osteuropäischen Raumes', 29 April 1941, here 560.

39 Wolfgang Benz, Hermann Graml and Hermann Weiß (eds), *Enzyklopädie des Nationalsozialismus* (4th edn, Munich 2001), 887.

40 Wolfgang Scheffler, 'Die Wannsee-Konferenz und ihre historische Bedeutung' in *Erinnern für die Zukunft — Ansprachen und Vorträge zur Eröffnung der Gedenkstätte* (Berlin 1992), 17–34, here 25; Aly and Heim, *Vordenker der Vernichtung*, op. cit., 60.

sanctioned by Hitler and his inner circle. Without the conferences of the Staatssekretäre, many of the radical decisions taken by the Nazi élite would still have been made, but the effective implementation of such decisions would have been seriously impaired.

The participants who at the meeting on 2 May made clear their approval of the 'starvation policy' formulated by Germany's leading economic planners represented a wide range of prominent German ministries and departments. In addition to the four senior military personnel present, four members of the Office of the Four-Year Plan attended, as did three members of the Reich Economics Ministry, two members of both the Reich Ministry for Food and Agriculture and the Bureau Rosenberg, and one member each of the Reich Ministries for Labour and for Transport and the Reich Forestry Office. Several of the participants held positions in more than one of these organizations, in some cases in addition to their aforementioned membership of either the Economic Command Staff East or its directly subordinate body, the Economic Staff East. Von Hanneken, for example, was also a high-ranking soldier, but attended the meeting in his capacity as Unterstaatssekretär in the Reich Economics Ministry. Backe, Landfried, Syrup, Kleinmann and Alpers — like Thomas — sat on the General Council for the Four-Year Plan, although they exercised their principal function as Staatssekretäre in other ministries.

Most of the institutions represented at the conference had a direct interest in the agricultural and logistical gains to be made from the successful implementation of a programme of mass starvation. The presence of two members of the Food Ministry is natural, given that the idea originated there and that this institution was responsible for food issues in the Reich and, by extension, in German-occupied Europe. The fact that those troops serving in the East were to be the primary beneficiaries of the 'starvation policy' is sufficient to explain why the military was represented at the meeting by up to four senior officers. The Office of the Four-Year Plan, which possessed overall control of economic policy Europe-wide, also sent up to four officials. The Economics Ministry sent as many as three, although its influence in economic matters — with the possible exception of questions relating to currency — had been on the wane since the inception of the Four-Year Plan almost five years earlier. The presence of two members of Rosenberg's staff, including the designated East Minister himself, was due to its responsibility for civil administration in the occupied East. The speed of the German advance, on which victory itself rested, was dependent on the ability of the supply apparatus to provide the troops with fuel, ammunition and food. Drastically restricting the transportation of food supplies to the troops and expecting them to feed themselves as far as possible from the occupied territories would relieve the considerable strain on the limited transport routes. These considerations explain the presence at the meeting of a senior member of the Transport Ministry. It is less clear why it was necessary for the Labour Ministry and the Reich Forestry Office each to send an official, though it was probably because both men sat on the General Council for the Four-Year Plan. Perhaps the only surprising

absentee was a representative from the Office of the Army Quartermaster-General, which was responsible both for supplying the troops and for matters of military administration in the occupied territories.⁴¹ As already explained, however, there is no way of being absolutely certain who did and did not attend.

The average age of those present was approaching 50,⁴² though the ambitious and highly-valued Schlotterer and Riecke were only 35 and 41 respectively. Many of the participants were well-educated men; nigh on half held a doctorate. The majority of those who attended were salaried civil servants. A substantial proportion were in the Party, and although at least a third of those present were also members of the SS,⁴³ for none of them was this their main function, unlike six of the fifteen men who attended the Wannsee Conference. They were there on that spring day in Berlin first and foremost because of their expertise as economic specialists. This does not, however, place their ideological commitment to National Socialism in doubt. On the contrary, their enthusiasm for what they heard that day, despite their function as 'mere' bureaucrats, makes their ideological commitment all the more apparent. On 2 May 1941, they voiced their unequivocal endorsement of the priority to be given to supplying the German armed forces in the occupied Soviet territories. By doing so, they not only declared their willingness to accept Soviet deaths from starvation on an unprecedented scale, but indeed stated that their objective could not be achieved without this enormous loss of life. Although the gains to be made from creating food surpluses by physically cutting off millions of Soviet consumers from their sources of nutrition were chiefly economic, it was the thoroughly racist view towards its intended victims of those responsible for formulating this strategy that made the contemplation of such an idea possible in the first place.

Although the parallels between the meeting of the Staatssekretäre in May 1941 and the meeting at Lake Wannsee in January 1942 have been highlighted here, the extent to which there was a direct linkage between the two meetings in terms of policy is less clear. In other words, did the importance of food and supply issues in German economic policy vis-à-vis the occupied Soviet territories shape Nazi policy towards the Jewish population in those territories and influence the transition to genocide there?

In view of the fact that the principal victims of the 'starvation policy' were to be those living in the so-called 'wooded zone' of northern and central Russia and Belarus and those living in the Soviet Union's large cities, it has

41 See Christian Gerlach, 'Militärische "Versorgungszwänge", Besatzungspolitik und Massenverbrechen: Die Rolle des Generalquartiermeisters des Heeres und seiner Dienststellen im Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion' in Norbert Frei, Sybille Steinbacher and Bernd C. Wagner (eds), *Ausbeutung, Vernichtung, Öffentlichkeit. Neue Studien zur nationalsozialistischen Lagerpolitik* (Munich 2000), 175–208, here 177–82.

42 The average age of the men was 48.

43 Alpers, Backe, Körner, Neumann, Riecke and Schlotterer.

been argued that, as almost all Soviet Jews lived in urban areas, it was planned prior to the German invasion of June 1941 to kill the bulk of Soviet Jewry by means of starvation.⁴⁴ It is indeed the case that most — almost 85 per cent — of Soviet Jews lived in towns and cities⁴⁵ and, moreover, the Nazi planners were well aware of this fact.⁴⁶ However, one must be careful about drawing conclusions where there is no evidence that the Nazis themselves drew the same conclusions. Just because almost all Soviet Jews lived in the cities and the urban population of the Soviet Union constituted one of the primary target groups for starvation, it does not automatically mean that the intention of the National Socialist regime was in fact to annihilate the Soviet Jews in the course of implementing the 'starvation policy'. It is unclear, and was indeed unclear to the Nazi planners themselves, how this concept was to be carried out in practice or exactly how the anticipated millions of victims were to be selected. Furthermore, there is no mention of the Jewish population of the Soviet Union in the guidelines of 23 May 1941, which constituted the detailed written version of the conclusions reached by the Staatssekretäre three weeks earlier.

At this stage in the planning process, however, preparations were already under way to deport Europe's Jews — presumably along with those Soviet Jews who survived the hostilities and the accompanying massacres — to the wastes of northern Russia, i.e. precisely those territories which were to be starved out. Thus, whilst this 'solution' may have been a territorial one, as opposed to one which provided for the immediate and systematic murder of European Jewry, for many of the victims it would nevertheless have amounted to a death sentence. Although no preparations had been made before the beginning of Operation Barbarossa for the genocide of the Jews, none had been made for a Jewish 'reservation' in the Soviet territories either.⁴⁷ What was to happen to Europe's Jews in territories where millions of people were to starve as a result of the wilful severance of their food supply by the German occupation forces? Those officials in the Reich Security Main Office entrusted with the planning for this 'solution' would have been fully aware of the deadly implications of their proposals. One can, therefore, see a clear overlap, indeed a fundamental compatibility, between the concepts formulated by the agro-economic planners and those developed by the Reich Security Main Office and other branches of the SS.

44 Gerlach, 'Deutsche Wirtschaftsinteressen', op. cit., 272; idem, 'Die Ausweitung der deutschen Massenmorde in den besetzten sowjetischen Gebieten im Herbst 1941: Überlegungen zur Vernichtungspolitik gegen Juden und sowjetische Kriegsgefangene' in Christian Gerlach, *Krieg, Ernährung, Völkermord. Forschungen zur deutschen Vernichtungspolitik im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Hamburg 1998), 10–84, here 27–30; idem, *Kalkulierte Morde*, op. cit., 630–1.

45 Gert Robel, 'Sowjetunion' in Wolfgang Benz (ed.), *Dimension des Völkermords. Die Zahl der jüdischen Opfer des Nationalsozialismus* (Munich 1991), 499–560, here 501.

46 See IfZ, Fd 52, 'Verteilung d. jüd. Bevölkerung im ehem. Estland, Lettland, Litauen u. Nordpolen', 23 April 1941. Here it is stated that 'Juden wohnen fast aussch[ließl]ich in den Städten' ('Jews live almost exclusively in the cities').

47 Peter Longerich, *Der ungeschriebene Befehl. Hitler und der Weg zur 'Endlösung'* (Munich 2001), 92.

If it is now evident what the *implications* of the 2 May meeting were for German economic policy in the occupied Soviet territories, the question remains as to what *impact* the course of action fixed there actually had after the German invasion began on 22 June 1941. It should be pointed out here that the policy had already been sanctioned by Hitler and Göring in advance of the meeting on 2 May. The meeting served to confirm this decision among the relevant ministerial bureaucracy, to consolidate the inter-departmental co-ordination process and to establish — if only in general terms — the parameters of the strategy. In addition to those present at the meeting on 2 May (which included the most senior members of the economic organization and the future chief of the civil administration in the occupied Soviet territories), Hitler, Göring, Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler, Chief of the OKW Keitel, Army Quartermaster-General Eduard Wagner and other leading civilian and military personnel all signalled their explicit agreement in the months preceding the invasion itself.⁴⁸ Agreement within the German leadership was almost unanimous.

Although the intention of deliberately producing mass starvation was incorporated at an early stage into occupation policy as a factor of fundamental importance, the whole notion was too insufficiently thought through to be described as a ‘plan’.⁴⁹ It can best be defined as a concept — it seems that there was no clear idea among the economic planners as to how it was actually to be implemented. It was uncertain exactly where and, above all, how it was to be applied in the occupied Soviet territories. There can be no doubt, however, either of the significance within official policy of this exterminatory approach or of the wide-ranging agreement obtained for it in advance of the German invasion.⁵⁰

In any case, it soon proved impossible to implement the ‘starvation policy’, at least in the form in which it had originally been intended. With limited numbers of available troops and a military situation which rapidly began to deteriorate, it turned out to be impossible to cordon off whole regions and bring about the deaths of millions of people through starvation. In the event, thousands of Soviet civilians took to the country roads in search of food and

48 For Rosenberg: BA-MA, RW 19/739, fos. 135–6 and IMG, vol. 26, 622; for Hitler: IMG, vol. 36, 140; for Göring and Keitel: BAB, R 26 IV/33a; for Himmler: IMG, vol. 4, 535–6; for Wagner: see Gerlach, ‘Militärische “Versorgungszwänge”’, op. cit., 184–5. See also the author’s *Exploitation, Resettlement, Mass Murder*, op. cit., esp. chaps 4, 7 and 8, where the process of agreement is traced in more detail.

49 The term *Hungerplan* is used by Christian Gerlach. See Gerlach, ‘Die Ausweitung der deutschen Massenmorde’, op. cit., 13–30; idem, *Kalkulierte Morde*, op. cit., 46–59.

50 This has recently been contested by Klaus Jochen Arnold, *Die Wehrmacht und die Besatzungspolitik in den besetzten Gebieten der Sowjetunion. Kriegführung und Radikalisierung im ‘Unternehmen Barbarossa’* (Berlin 2005), 79–101, esp. 88–90, 92–4, 96–101. Arnold disputes the existence of a fixed programme, largely exonerates Thomas (in fact one of the main exponents of the strategy), questions not only the agreement of the Wehrmacht leadership but also its awareness of such intentions, and claims that it was Hitler, Göring and Backe alone who advocated the intentional starvation of large numbers of Soviet citizens. Arnold’s arguments, based on a questionable interpretation of the existing sources rather than the utilization of new ones, fail to convince.

trade on the black market thrived,⁵¹ exactly what the economic planners had hoped and sought to avoid.⁵² The starving out of Leningrad between 1941 and 1943, to which at least 600,000 people fell victim, was an exception, and was only possible on this scale because substantial parts of two German armies were made available to take part in the siege.⁵³

As a result of this unexpected scenario, the principal victims of the 'starvation policy' were ultimately the Soviet prisoners of war, who were viewed by the economic planners and the military leadership alike as the German troops' direct competitors for scarce food supplies. Although they had not been targeted explicitly prior to the invasion, it was clear to those responsible on exactly what scale the Wehrmacht could expect to capture Soviet troops, and yet they neglected to make the requisite preparations for feeding and sheltering the captured soldiers.⁵⁴ Thus, a consensus of opinion existed within the German leadership prior to the beginning of Barbarossa to the effect that the Soviet POWs would suffer gravely as a result of undernourishment. Given the obvious limits on their freedom of movement, in contrast to the majority of the Soviet civilian population, it was possible to segregate large numbers of captured Soviet soldiers and starve them to death. Thus, from the German point of view, the Soviet prisoners became the ideal victims of a policy seeking to isolate large groups of people who would otherwise have had to be fed from German-occupied territory and to let them starve.⁵⁵ The fact that over three million Soviet prisoners died in German captivity⁵⁶ — the vast majority directly or indirectly as a result of undernourishment — is truly horrific, and yet the anticipated number of victims of the 'starvation policy', to which the Staatssekretäre committed themselves on 2 May 1941, was ten times as many.

Alex J. Kay

obtained his doctorate in Modern and Contemporary History in 2005 at Berlin's Humboldt University, where he has given courses on early modern British history. A revised version of his doctoral thesis recently appeared under the title *Exploitation, Resettlement, Mass Murder. Political and Economic Planning for German Occupation Policy in the Soviet Union, 1940–1941*. He is currently working on a new book on antisemitism in late Weimar parliamentary politics.

51 See Gerlach, 'Die Ausweitung der deutschen Massenmorde', op. cit., 29–32.

52 IMG, vol. 36, 138.

53 Gerlach, 'Die Ausweitung der deutschen Massenmorde', op. cit., 29, fn. 48.

54 Christian Streit, *Keine Kameraden. Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen 1941–1945* (3rd edn, Bonn 1991), 76; Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, op. cit., 783; Ulrich Herbert, *Fremdarbeiter. Politik und Praxis des 'Ausländer-Einsatzes' in der Kriegswirtschaft des Dritten Reiches* (Bonn 1999), 156.

55 On the fate of Soviet POWs till the end of 1941 see Gerlach, 'Die Ausweitung der deutschen Massenmorde', op. cit., 30–56.

56 Streit concludes that 3.3 million Soviet troops died out of a total of 5.7 million captured between June 1941 and February 1945. For the calculations see Streit, *Keine Kameraden*, op. cit., 128–37 and 244–9, esp. 244–6.