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Alex J. Kay

Revisiting the Meeting of the Staatssekretäre on 2 May 1941: A Response to Klaus Jochen Arnold and Gert C. Lübbers

In my article ‘Germany’s Staatssekretäre, Mass Starvation and the Meeting of 2 May 1941’,¹ I posit that the meeting of the Staatssekretäre on 2 May 1941 was an official session of the Economic Command Staff East, the management committee responsible for economically administering the occupied Soviet territories. Those present, namely the relevant representatives of the German ministerial bureaucracy and the Wehrmacht, signalled their endorsement of the ruthless exploitation of Soviet foodstuffs for the benefit of the invading troops and the home front, and at a cost of the lives of tens of millions of Soviet civilians. The meeting served to elaborate and co-ordinate the approach already sanctioned by Germany’s supreme leadership. In this way, the meeting had massive implications for German occupation policy in the Soviet Union. With their article ‘The Meeting of the Staatssekretäre on 2 May 1941 and the Wehrmacht: A Document up for Discussion’,² Klaus Jochen Arnold and Gert C. Lübbers have written a direct response to and critique of my article and the theses contained therein.

In writing their article, Arnold and Lübbers have two principal aims. First, they seek to exonerate the Wehrmacht from their participation in the planning — that is, the premeditated preparation — of atrocities against civilians and prisoners of war in the Soviet territories at all costs. They do this in two ways: by playing down the importance of senior Wehrmacht officers such as General Georg Thomas in endorsing and planning these atrocities; and by giving the responsibility for this criminal intent exclusively to Adolf Hitler, his nominated successor Hermann Göring, and the Staatssekretär in the Ministry for Food and Agriculture, Herbert Backe. Secondly, by laying the blame at the door of a mere few, Arnold and Lübbers contest the centrality of the forced creation of food surpluses in German occupation policy for the Soviet Union, the agreement reached between the Wehrmacht, Party agencies and the German ministerial bureaucracy on this policy and, in particular, the nature and significance

1 ‘Germany’s Staatssekretäre, Mass Starvation and the Meeting of 2 May 1941’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 41(4) (October 2006), 685–700. This article has since been awarded the journal’s George L. Mosse Prize for 2006.

2 ‘The Meeting of the Staatssekretäre on 2 May 1941 and the Wehrmacht: A Document up for Discussion’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 42(4) (October 2007), 613–26.

of the 2 May meeting. These two aims and the tactics used to achieve them are closely related and will be examined below. The arguments Arnold and Lübbers use in their article appear plausible to the layman. Someone with more extensive knowledge of the subject matter, however, is able, without too much difficulty, to uncover the misinformation and non sequiturs that are plentiful in their article.

Given the space restrictions of this response piece, it is not possible to address every point made by Arnold and Lübbers. An attempt will be made, however, to deal with as many as possible. In seeking to demonstrate Wehrmacht ignorance of Backe's plans for economic policy in the East, Arnold and Lübbers make the following claim early on in their article:

At the beginning of March 1941, in order to forestall any discussion about the consequences of the interdiction doctrine that Backe later formulated in the notorious 'Economic Policy Guidelines' of 23 May 1941 — namely, the cutting-off of supplies to the Greater Russian 'deficit territories', leading to the starvation of the population of large areas — Hitler forbade further conversations between Wehrmacht departments and Backe. (page 616)

According to the passage in the source cited here by Arnold and Lübbers, however, Hitler did no such thing; he merely stated: 'Discussions with the Staatssekretäre Dr Stuckart (Interior Ministry) and Backe (Food Ministry) are for the time being unnecessary.'³ This passage is from instructions issued by Hitler for the drafting of the Guidelines for Special Fields to Directive No. 21 (Case Barbarossa). Discussions between Wehrmacht departments and the Staatssekretäre Stuckart and Backe were not yet necessary, because preparations for the future civil administration in the occupied Soviet territories were not sufficiently advanced to warrant such discussions. In any case, just nine days later, on 12 March, General Thomas and Backe did in fact meet to discuss the incorporation of agriculture into the economic organization that was in the process of being set up by the former.⁴ So much for Hitler supposedly forbidding any meeting between Backe and members of the Wehrmacht.

One particular tactic in the efforts of Arnold and Lübbers to exonerate the Wehrmacht is to play down the importance of General Thomas. In referring to Thomas' notorious memorandum of 13 February 1941, they merely state: 'Since the time of the so-called "Thomas memorandum" on the "effects on the war industries of an operation in the East", Hitler himself was aware of various concerns that an operation in the east might not be economically successful' (page 616). They fail, however, to mention that Thomas suggested that the German grain deficit could be offset at the expense of the Soviet population:

³ 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, entry for 3 March 1941.

⁴ Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, Freiburg im Breisgau (hereafter BA-MA), RW 19/164, fol. 213, 'Besprechung Amtschef bei Staatssekretär Backe', 12 March 1941.

Even if it appears uncertain as to whether M.T.S. [Machine and Tractor Stations] and supplies can be protected from destruction in large amounts; if, moreover, as a result of the effects of war, a harvest of 70% at the most can be expected, it must be considered that the Russian is accustomed to adapting his needs to poor harvests and that with a population of 160 million, even a *small reduction* of the consumption per head would free up considerable quantities of grain.

Under these circumstances, it could be possible to meet the German *shortfall* for 1941 and 1942.⁵

These words were very similar to the terminology used by Backe himself three and a half months later in his infamous ‘12 Commandments’, issued to the agricultural leaders deployed in the Soviet territories. The eleventh commandment served as a reminder, if one was needed, of the plan to starve large sections of the Soviet population: ‘The Russian has already endured poverty, hunger and frugality for centuries. His stomach is elastic, hence no false sympathy. Do not attempt to apply the German standard of living as your yardstick and to alter the Russian way of life.’⁶ Ignoring the true nature of Thomas’ memorandum allows Arnold and Lübbers to assert that ‘Backe alone had commended to Hitler the gains in food supplies that might be expected from the occupation of Soviet territory’ (page 616). Their sole source for this claim, indeed, is a self-serving statement made at Nuremberg after the war by Paul Körner, Staatssekretär on the Economic Command Staff East and Göring’s deputy in all economic matters, who also attended the 2 May meeting.

When it comes to the 2 May meeting itself, Arnold and Lübbers have little more to offer than conjecture. The central paragraph of their article comes part way down page 619. They allege that a ‘drastic turn of events’ occurred at the meeting:

One of the participants, Staatssekretär Backe, used the occasion to demand that the economic policy should have radical objectives. He called for the occupied Soviet territories to be plundered, if necessary at the cost of deaths running into millions. This demand could have been made only under Hitler’s instructions. In making it, Backe lifted the lid on the secret planning that had been taking place and on Hitler’s decision that millions of deaths were an acceptable price to pay for the acquisition of maximum ‘surpluses’ — ideas which until then had had only the status of a rumour. The minutes record Backe’s demands as the ‘result’ of the meeting: it does not represent a ‘decision’ taken by those who were there.

This whole section, however, is entirely without references, which begs the question: how do Arnold and Lübbers know this? The simple answer is: they don’t; it is purely speculation. There is no indication whatsoever in the minutes that it was only Backe who demanded radical objectives; in fact, the minutes

⁵ For the full text of the memorandum, see Georg Thomas, *Geschichte der deutschen Wehr- und Rüstungswirtschaft (1918–1943/45)* (Boppard am Rhein 1966), 515–32, ‘Die Wehrwirtschaftlichen Auswirkungen einer Operation im Osten’, here 517.

⁶ *Der Prozess gegen die Hauptkriegsverbrecher vor dem Internationalen Militärgerichtshof, Nürnberg, 14 November 1945–1 Oktober 1946* (hereafter *IMG*), vol. 39 (Nuremberg 1949), doc. 089–USSR, 367–71, ‘12 Gebote’, 1 June 1941, here 371.

make no mention of Backe. Thus, Arnold and Lübbers cannot possibly know that it was Backe and Backe alone who was in favour of a radical policy of starvation. The minutes of the meeting do not record Backe's demands as the result of the meeting; the result of the meeting is presented in the minutes — entitled 'Memorandum on the result of today's discussion with the Staatssekretäre regarding Barbarossa' — as an agreement reached by those present:

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, tens of millions of people will doubtlessly starve, if that which is necessary for us is extracted from the land.⁷

Arnold and Lübbers claim furthermore — again without any supporting evidence — that a 'conflict of view on 2 May' resulted in Thomas being 'forced to accept a significant weakening of his position' on the Economic Command Staff East, to the point that he became 'an ordinary member of the Command Staff on a par with the other members, below the Staatssekretäre' (page 622). It does appear that Thomas fell to some extent from favour by mid-May. This can be seen in the discrepancy between a draft of a letter from Göring to the Army Commander-in-Chief, Field Marshal von Brauchitsch, dated 29 April, and the final version of the letter sent out sometime during the first two weeks in May. The draft has Thomas in charge of the Staff, whilst according to the final version he is merely one, 'among others', of those belonging to the Staff.⁸ However, this is for two reasons unlikely to have been as a result of supposed differences arising at the 2 May meeting. First, Thomas was still in charge of the Command Staff as at 8 May,⁹ a fact dismissed by Arnold and Lübbers as a 'description [that] had ceased to conform to the reality' (page 622). Secondly, there is simply no evidence for a 'conflict of view' at the 2 May meeting. In fact, the minutes indicate that agreement was reached as to the ruthless approach to be taken in the Soviet territories. Furthermore, that the results of the 2 May meeting also reflected Thomas' own point of view is evident from notes he made three days later:

In my opinion, 4 main points are urgent here:

- a) Provisioning of the fighting troops
- b) Agricultural exploitation by means of the highest increase in the production of vegetable oil and grain

⁷ IMG, vol. 31 (1948), doc. 2718-PS, 84, 'Aktennotiz über Ergebnis der heutigen Besprechung mit den Staatssekretären über Barbarossa', 2 May 1941.

⁸ BA-MA, RW 19/739, fol. 68, draft of a letter from Göring to Brauchitsch, 29 April 1941; BA-MA, RW 19/739, fol. 267, 'Aktenvermerk. Betr.: Wirtschaftsorganisation Barbarossa', 14 May 1941, VO Wi Rü Amt bei OKH/Gen Qu.

⁹ See Rolf-Dieter Müller (ed.), *Die deutsche Wirtschaftspolitik in den besetzten sowjetischen Gebieten 1941–1943. Der Abschlußbericht des Wirtschaftsstabes Ost und Aufzeichnungen eines Angehörigen des Wirtschaftskommandos Kiev* (Boppard am Rhein 1991), Appendix 7, 412–17, 'OKW/Wi Rü Amt, Befehl über Gliederung, Einsatz und Aufgaben der Wi Org Ost vom 8.5.1941', Thomas, here 412.

- c) Industrial exploitation by means of the highest increase in the production of mineral oil and the extraction of coal and raw materials of which there are shortages
- d) Strengthening of the transport system for transporting the above products.

A transfer of armaments tasks to the occupied territory is possible for the time being only for particular products of which there are shortages.¹⁰

These notes are very similar to the results recorded for the meeting of the Staatssekretäre, thus testifying to the shared point of view.

In concluding their article, Arnold and Lübbers write: ‘Like other scholars before him, Kay overestimates the scope of General Thomas’s authority during this period’ (page 625). On this issue Arnold and Lübbers appear to be in a minority. In 1984, Rolf-Dieter Müller identified Backe and his ‘partner’ Thomas as the ‘two men’ who — ‘in absolute agreement’ — set up a new economic organization and ‘formulated its objectives’.¹¹ In his 1999 study of German occupation policy in Belarus, Christian Gerlach explicitly supported Müller’s assessment by characterizing Thomas and Backe as ‘the two chief exponents of the starvation course’.¹² In 2006, Johannes Hürter referred to Göring, Backe and Thomas as ‘the persons most responsible’ for ‘the radical economic line’,¹³ whilst Adam Tooze remarked on ‘the alacrity with which Backe’s breathtaking suggestion was taken up by the rest of the Ministerial bureaucracy in Berlin, above all by . . . General Thomas’.¹⁴ Indeed, Thomas recommended at the end of January 1941 that his staff collaborate with Backe.¹⁵ Thus, there can be no doubt that the picture created by Arnold and Lübbers of Thomas at odds with Backe and his staff over the economic policy to be pursued in the occupied Soviet territories is purely a product of their imagination.

10 Rolf-Dieter Müller, ‘Industrielle Interessenpolitik im Rahmen des “Generalplans Ost”. Dokumente zum Einfluß von Wehrmacht, Industrie und SS auf die wirtschaftspolitische Zielsetzung für Hitlers Ostimperium’, *Militär-geschichtliche Mitteilungen*, 29 (1981), 101–41, here doc. 4, 118, ‘Auszug aus einer geheimen Aufzeichnung von General Thomas vom 5. Mai über von Hitler bzw. Göring noch zu entscheidende Fragen’, 5 May 1941.

11 Rolf-Dieter Müller, ‘Das “Unternehmen Barbarossa” als wirtschaftlicher Raubkrieg’, in Gerd R. Ueberschär and Wolfram Wette (eds), *“Unternehmen Barbarossa”. Der deutsche Überfall auf die Sowjetunion 1941: Berichte, Analysen, Dokumente* (Paderborn 1984), 173–96, here 180–3.

12 Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde. Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrußland 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg 1999), 68.

13 Johannes Hürter, *Hitlers Heerführer. Die deutschen Oberbefehlshaber im Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion 1941/42* (Munich 2006), 493. On page 243 of his book, Hürter writes: ‘As the result of such a radical siphoning off of foodstuffs for the troops, the death by starvation of “tens of millions” of Russians was consciously accepted from the outset. This plan, drawn up predominantly by the Reich Ministry for Food (Staatssekretär Herbert Backe) and the OKW/War Economy and Armaments Office (General Georg Thomas), was put into words on 23 May 1941 in the “Economic-Political Guidelines” of the Economic Staff East.’

14 Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (London 2006), 478.

15 BA-MA, RW 19/164, fol. 126, ‘Vortrag Hauptmann Emmerich beim Amtschef’, 30 January 1941.

Another important point for Arnold and Lübbers is Hitler's directive to Göring on the economic approach to be pursued in the Soviet territories. They point out that the draft of the directive was never signed and no corresponding order issued either by Göring or by Hitler 'before the invasion' (page 620). This is another red herring. Whilst it is true that no corresponding order was issued prior to the invasion, one was issued exactly a week afterwards. In this decree, dated 29 June, Göring was empowered to order 'all measures that are necessary for the most extensive exploitation possible of the available supplies and economic capacities and for the expansion of economic forces for the benefit of the German war economy'.¹⁶ The fact that Hitler waited until after the launch of the military campaign was not unusual. In fact, other orders of similar significance for the Wehrmacht commanders, for Reichsführer-SS Himmler and for the civil administration in the occupied Soviet territories were all issued *after* the campaign, the first on 25 June and the other two on 17 July.¹⁷ The decree regarding Göring's powers, when issued, was then signed by Hitler, Chief of the Wehrmacht High Command (OKW) Field Marshal Keitel and Head of the Reich Chancellery Lammers. In light of the fact that an order was issued, the claim made by Arnold and Lübbers in their following sentence is not only pure speculation but also simply incorrect: 'It was plainly understood that circulating instructions to the huge number of departments involved would create enormous problems of secrecy and also generate resistance within the Wehrmacht' (page 620). Furthermore, many significant decrees and guidelines were in fact issued unsigned. The best example of this is the official economic handbook for the occupation troops, the so-called Green Folder.¹⁸

Without any supporting evidence, Arnold and Lübbers argue that the second part of the minutes quoted in full in my article — and containing a reference to the necessity for Hitler's directive to Göring to be signed — was in fact 'a memorandum prepared for the 2 May meeting' (page 619). In the relevant footnote they write: '[Christian] Gerlach . . . at least speaks of a demand by Thomas and characterizes the document as a memorandum for the meeting' (page 619, fn 36). Gerlach, however, does nothing of the sort. Instead, he writes that 'At the session on 2 May' General Thomas demanded that a directive from Hitler for Göring 'corresponding to this plan', — the plan 'to starve millions of people in the USSR' — had finally to be signed.¹⁹ Hence, in the absence of any evidence for their untenable claim, Arnold and Lübbers cite in

16 Martin Moll (ed.), *"Führer-Erlasse" 1939–1945* (Stuttgart 1997), 179–80, doc. 93, 'Erlaß des Führers über die Wirtschaft in den neu besetzten Ostgebieten', 29 June 1941, here 179.

17 See Moll (ed.), *"Führer-Erlasse"*, 178–9, doc. 92, 'Erlaß des Führers über die Ernennung von Wehrmachtbefehlshabern in den neu besetzten Ostgebieten', 25 June 1941; Moll (ed.), *"Führer-Erlasse"*, 188–9, doc. 100, 'Erlaß des Führers über die polizeiliche Sicherung der neu besetzten Ostgebiete vom 17. Juli 1941'; *IMG*, vol. 29 (1948), doc. 1997-PS, 235–7, 'Erlaß des Führers über die Verwaltung der neu besetzten Ostgebiete', 17 July 1941.

18 Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde (hereafter BAB), R 26 IV/33a, 'Richtlinien für die Führung der Wirtschaft in den neubesetzten Ostgebieten (Grüne Mappe)', Teil I (2. Auflage), July 1941. See also Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, op. cit., 47. Of the first edition, issued on 16 June, 1000 copies were distributed. The second edition, issued the following month, was printed 2000 times.

support of their argument a historian who does not in fact share their assessment of the document.

It is also in respect of the participants of the 2 May meeting that Arnold and Lübbers make untenable claims. On page 622 they state that 'only Staatssekretäre from the Economic Command Staff East could in fact have been involved' in the 2 May meeting. That this was simply not the case can clearly be seen from other sessions of the Command Staff. The fourth session of the Command Staff, for example, was attended by a total of 17 men. A mere five of these, however, were Staatssekretäre (six if we include Unterstaatssekretär Generalleutnant von Hanneken).²⁰ In response to my conclusion that Alfred Rosenberg, designated head of the civil administration in the Soviet territories, was in attendance, and that the meeting may even have been held in his own office, Arnold and Lübbers assert that 'a meeting of the Staatssekretäre would never have taken place in Rosenberg's department' (page 623). Once again, they offer no explanation or supporting evidence whatsoever to support their sweeping claim. In fact, to name just two of many possible examples, Rosenberg met with Staatssekretär Backe in his own office just five days after the 2 May meeting and with Staatssekretär Körner, again in his own office, a day later.²¹ They conclude from their belief that 'a meeting of the Staatssekretäre would never have taken place in Rosenberg's department' that Rosenberg's participation 'was never even planned' (page 623). This is, again, purely speculation and does not stand up in the face of the opposing evidence. 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.²²

19 Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, op. cit., 47. Italics mine.

20 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. One of those present at this session on 26 May 1941 was the Chief of Transportation in the Army High Command (OKH), Generalleutnant Rudolf Gercke. This patently contradicts the claim by Arnold and Lübbers that no OKH representative attended 'meetings of the Economic Command Staff' (page 620). In fact, not only did Gercke attend meetings, he was even an official member of the Staff. See Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, op. cit., 144, fn. 101. I actually noted in my article the surprising (probable) absence from the meeting of a representative of the Office of the Army Quartermaster-General and not a representative of the OKH per se, which is what Arnold and Lübbers intimate.

21 Bundesarchiv Koblenz, N 1075/9, 'Termine am Mittwoch, dem 7. Mai 1941'; Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich, Nbg. Dok. PS 1018, fols 64–73, 'Aktennotiz über die Unterredung mit Staatssekretär Körner', 8 May 1941. See also *IMG*, vol. 26 (1947), doc. 1039-PS, 584–92, 'Bericht über die vorbereitende Arbeit in Fragen des osteuropäischen Raumes', 28 June 1941, here 586.

22 BA-MA, RW 4/ v. 759, fol. 14.

The invitation from Rosenberg had been made at the request of Chief of the OKW Field Marshal 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.²³ To this, Arnold and Lübbers respond: ‘In fact, however, it was General Jodl, the Chief of the Operations Staff of the OKW’ (page 623). They neglect, however, to provide an explanation for their divergent point of view. That the invitation was for General Thomas and not for General Jodl can be deduced from a document in the German Military Archives in Freiburg. The invitation from Rosenberg was passed on by an employee of the ‘Planning Staff for special duty OKW’ (Arbeitsstab z. b. V. OKW) to ‘the general’. In the planning staff, which was also called the Planning Staff Oldenburg and, later, the Economic Staff East, General Thomas was at this point in time a leading member, whereas Jodl was not a member at all.²⁴ The numerous mistakes and oversights on the part of Arnold and Lübbers regarding the meetings of the Staatssekretäre lead one to the conclusion that they know too little about the issue and have carried out insufficient research on it.

Arnold and Lübbers repeatedly emphasize the difference of opinion between Backe and the Wehrmacht over the policy of starvation, even when this means demonstrating how highly suspect their interpretative methods are. Thus, when referring in a footnote to a meeting of the economic planners on 31 March, they write: ‘Agreement was reached “after a long discussion of the pros and cons”, a phrase which suggests that there had been conflicting views’ (page 617, fn 23). Surely the important point here is that agreement was reached and not that there had been ‘conflicting views’, for which there is, in any case, no evidence. In emphasizing these supposed ‘conflicting views’, Arnold and Lübbers — as mentioned above — are quite willing to acknowledge that Backe and his colleagues developed and promoted a barbarous strategy of starvation, whilst denying that senior Wehrmacht officers were party to this. For this reason, they are comfortable with describing my argument that ‘it seems that there was no clear idea among the economic planners as to how it [i.e. the starvation policy] was actually to be implemented. It was uncertain exactly where and, above all, how it was to be applied in the occupied Soviet territories’ as ‘a bewildering one’ (page 621). It is true that the Economic-Political Guidelines issued by the agricultural section of the Economic Staff East on 23 May 1941

²³ Rosenberg’s diary entry for 1 May 1941, published in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, no. 140, 22 June 1971.

²⁴ I also addressed this point in my response to Arnold’s first attack on my work, namely his review of my book, *Exploitation, Resettlement, Mass Murder: Political and Economic Planning for German Occupation Policy in the Soviet Union, 1940–1941* (New York/Oxford 2006). See Alex J. Kay, ‘Replik zu K.J. Arnold’, *H-Soz-u-Kult*, 17 March 2007.

provide a detailed delineation of the policy of starvation and a blueprint for mass murder:

A cordoning off of the black earth territories must make more or less large surpluses in these territories available to us at all costs. The consequence is the non-delivery of the entire wooded zone including the important industrial centres of Moscow and [St.] Petersburg . . . Because of this, the famine there cannot be averted. Many tens of millions of people in this territory will become superfluous and will die or must migrate to Siberia. Attempts to rescue the population there from death through starvation by obtaining surpluses from the black earth zone can only be at the expense of the provisioning of Europe. They prevent the possibility of Germany holding out till the end of the war, they prevent Germany and Europe from resisting the blockade. With regard to this, absolute clarity must reign.²⁵

However, exactly how the German invaders, with limited numbers of available troops, would in practice be able to cordon off whole regions, prevent Soviet civilians from taking to the country roads in search of food, and thus bring about the deaths of millions of people through starvation, was not explained in the guidelines. Hence, in this respect at least, there was no detailed plan of execution.²⁶ As the Consultant for Eastern Questions in the Office of the Four-Year Plan, Leutnant Richter, later wrote, the thesis that ‘one must separate the western and southern Russian territories, as main producers, from their consumer territories in central Russia and incorporate them once more into the European supply zone [was] a real possibility if one is militarily in a position to keep the central Russians from their fields for a long period of

25 *IMG*, vol. 36 (1949), doc. 126–EC, 135–57, ‘Wirtschaftspolitische Richtlinien für Wirtschaftsorganisation Ost, Gruppe Landwirtschaft’, 23 May 1941, here 138, 145.

26 On this, see Alex J. Kay, ‘“Viele zehn Millionen Menschen werden überflüssig”. Gab es im Russlandfeldzug eine logistische Katastrophe oder Massenverhungern als Staatspolitik? Eine Antwort auf Stefan Scheil’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 13 June 2007, no. 134, N 3. The obvious limitations on the freedom of movement of Soviet prisoners of war, and the relative ease with which large numbers could be segregated and their rations controlled, were crucial factors in the death of over three million of them directly or indirectly as a result of undernourishment. Christian Streit’s pioneering work on the treatment and fate of Soviet POWs in German captivity, *Keine Kameraden. Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen 1941–1945* (4th edn, Bonn 1997), remains the benchmark on the subject. Arnold and Lübbers regard ‘Streit’s thesis that those responsible deliberately neglected to make preparations for supplying provisions to prisoners, of war, with the result that they would starve to death’ as ‘disproved’ (page 621, fn. 47) and cite in support Rolf Keller and Reinhard Otto, ‘Das Massensterben der sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen und die Wehrmachtbürokratie. Unterlagen zur Registrierung der sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen 1941–1945 in deutschen und russischen Institutionen’, *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* 57 (1998), 149–80. Keller and Otto examine, however, not the preparations for supplying the prisoners, but rather the *registration* of arrivals (and of their deaths) in the camps in the Reich itself. There is nothing whatsoever in their article to support Arnold and Lübbers’ claim. On the contrary, Keller and Otto write on page 151: ‘Although prisoners were absolutely expected on this scale, preparations made for their reception and provisioning were at most only rudimentary.’ For an excellent recent summary of the subject, see Christian Streit, ‘Die Arbeitsausbeutung und Massentötung sowjetischer Kriegsgefangener’, paper presented at the *Arbeit und Vernichtung. Holocaust Studies Tagung* in Vienna, 27–29 June 2007. I am grateful to Christian Streit for providing me with a copy of the text.

time'.²⁷ It was precisely due to this point, however, that the German planners did not give due thought during the pre-invasion planning phase. It did indeed prove impossible to implement the starvation policy, at least in the form in which it had originally been intended. The starving out of Leningrad between 1941 and 1943, to which at least 600,000, and perhaps as many as a million, people fell victim, was an exception, and was possible on this scale only because substantial parts of two German armies were made available to take part in the siege.²⁸

One of the most crucial reasons that the starvation policy was able so smoothly to gain wide-ranging acceptance from leading Party and state agencies was its perceived status as a necessary prerequisite for the success of the German military's operational plans. It was abundantly clear to the military leadership that the success of the campaign depended on the speed with which the German advance could be carried out. This was in turn dependent on the ability of the supply apparatus to provide the troops with fuel, ammunition and food. Therefore, in order to keep to a minimum those military supplies which had to be transported from the Reich, thereby relieving the strain on the limited transport routes, the transportation of food supplies was to be drastically restricted and the German troops were expected to feed themselves — as clearly stated at the meeting of the Staatssekretäre on 2 May 1941 — 'from the land'. Thus, Germany's chances of victory were directly related to the extent to which the troops succeeded in feeding themselves from the occupied Soviet territories, clearly to the disadvantage of the indigenous population. In that sense, pursuing the starvation policy was in the interests of the Wehrmacht.²⁹ Accordingly, the OKW's Special Instructions to Directive No. 21 (Case Barbarossa), issued on 19 May, just two and a half weeks after the 2 May meeting, stated: 'The troops must realize that *every reduction in supplies*, particularly in rations, increases the scope of the operations.'³⁰

In the very first paragraph of their piece, Arnold and Lübbers identify my article as illustrative of the tendency of recent historiography on National Socialist Germany to be 'not more scholarly, more neutral, more academic, but less so' (page 613).³¹ In actual fact, it is the scholarliness and neutrality of the

27 BAB, R 6/60a, fols. 1–4, 'Auszug aus einem Feldpostbrief von Leutnant Dr. Friedrich Richter, Referent für Ostfragen vom Vierjahresplan, vom 26.5.1943', here fol. 1.

28 Christian Gerlach, '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 29, fn. 48; Hürter, *Hitlers Heerführer*, op. cit., 497–507.

29 Kay, *Exploitation, Resettlement, Mass Murder*, op. cit., 131–2.

30 Ueberschär and Wette (eds), "*Unternehmen Barbarossa*", op. cit., 308–12, doc. 7, 'Besondere Anordnungen Nr. 1 zur Weisung Nr. 21 (Fall "Barbarossa") vom 19.5.1941 mit Anlage 1: Gliederung und Aufgaben der im Raum "Barbarossa" einzusetzenden Wirtschaftsorganisation, und Anlage 3: Richtlinien für das Verhalten der Truppe in Rußland', here 308. Italics in original.

31 In doing so, Arnold and Lübbers quote one of the editors of this very journal, Richard J.

Arnold/Lübbers article that is highly questionable. Their concluding paragraph begins with the following sentence: 'In recent years debates among historians of the Third Reich have been less about facts and more about interpretations, the latter often diametrically opposed to one another. Disagreements have reflected the points of view that scholars have adopted towards their subject-matter — the premises with regard to which they categorize and evaluate their data' (page 625). This perfectly describes Arnold's own book,³² which was mauled by a whole host of experts in the field, including Christoph Dieckmann, Christian Gerlach, Thomas Kühne and Armin Nolzen.³³ Nolzen concluded his review with the words: 'Irritating, furthermore, is the unusually great understanding that the author shows for the Wehrmacht. Such a degree of empathy for the perpetrators leaves the reviewer stunned.'³⁴ The final sentence of Arnold and Lübbers' article runs as follows: 'What is crucially needed in the study of the role of the Wehrmacht in the Third Reich, however, is not all-embracing theories but accounts of complex contexts and processes of development. This is the only way in which a balanced assessment of these events can be made' (page 626). This is absolutely true. Unfortunately, Arnold and Lübbers do not offer 'a balanced assessment' of the events. Their call for one is a smokescreen, a tactic designed to distract their readers from the agenda that they bring to their work, including — as we have seen — to the article discussed here.

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Evans (see R.J. Evans, 'Introduction', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 39(2) (April 2004), 163–7, here 163). It is not the first time, however, that Arnold has used this quotation to attack another historian's work. The passage is identical to the conclusion of Arnold's review of the book *Paul Carell. Ribbentrops Pressechef Paul Karl Schmidt vor und nach 1945* (Berlin 2005) by the Karlsruhe historian Wigbert Benz (see *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 54(3) (2006), 303).

32 Klaus Jochen Arnold, *Die Wehrmacht und die Besatzungspolitik in den besetzten Gebieten der Sowjetunion. Kriegführung und Radikalisierung im "Unternehmen Barbarossa"* (Berlin 2005).

33 Christoph Dieckmann in Sven Reichardt and Armin Nolzen (eds), *Faschismus in Italien und Deutschland. Studien zu Transfer und Vergleich* (Göttingen 2005), 253–5; Christian Gerlach in *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung*, 55(2) (2006), 295–7; Thomas Kühne in H-German, H-Net Reviews, May 2006; Armin Nolzen in *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 53(7) (2005), 668.

34 Nolzen, op. cit., 668. Christoph Dieckmann, in his review, refers to the 'one-sided and exclusive empathy of Arnold with the Wehrmacht troops' (255). He furthermore writes: 'One reads Arnold's findings for the individual chapters with increasing astonishment, and in the course of the book the certainty hardens that one is dealing here with a relatively skilfully formulated apologia of right-wing nationalist origin' (253).

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