

9. World War II: Conquest

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Lebensraum (“Living Space”)

Hitler in 1920: Is it right “that there is eighteen times more land per head for every Russian than there is for a German?” (cited by Milward 1977, p. 134).

And in *Mein Kampf*, 1924: “Only a sufficiently large space on this earth assures a nation of freedom of existence ... If we speak of soil in Europe today, we can primarily have in mind only Russia and her vassal border states.”

- Occupation of Eastern Europe and European Russia was a **strategic goal**.
- By comparison, occupation of Western Europe and Scandinavia was an accidental **side-effect** of the way the war evolved.

Hitler in 1936 (cited by Kay 2006, p. 15): “We are overpopulated and cannot feed ourselves on this basis ... I thus set the following task: I. The Germany army must be fit for action in 4 years. II. The German economy must be capable of waging war in 4 years.”

Lebensraum (“Living Space”)

Square kilometres per thousand, 1938:

USSR	127
Of which, occupied by Germany in 1941/42	16
Norway	110
Finland	105
Romania	19
Greece	18
Bulgaria	16
Yugoslavia	15
France	13
Czechoslovakia	13
Hungary	13
Austria	12
Poland	11
Denmark	11
Germany	7
Italy	7
UK	5
Netherlands	4
Belgium	4

Source: Harrison (1998, pp. 3-8).



Consumption and Food

Aims of occupation:

- Space for German colonial settlement.
- Guaranteed food and raw materials for Germany.

Problem: The Eastern region zoned for occupation did not have a **food surplus** to export to Germany.

- There was only twice as much land per head for every Soviet resident – not
- Wheat yields (< 1 ton/ha) not more than half German level (2 ton/ha).
- Farm labour productivity also well below German average.
- The rural food surplus that existed (mostly in Ukraine) was already used to feed urban and industrial population (e.g. in northern Russia).

Only **a reduction of the non-agricultural population** would meet German goals:

- Food for Germany
- Living space for ethnic Germans.

Consumption and Food

Value of **food rations** for a German worker's family member:

	Calories
1939/40	2,435
1940/41	2,445
1941/42	1,928
1942/43	2,078
1943/44	1,981
1944/45	1,671

Source: Abelshauser (1998). An approximate figure for the minimum daily energy requirement of Central and East European populations is up to 2,000 calories.

In 1940/41:

- The leadership was receiving twice-weekly SD reports on public opinion.
- Frequent concerns about food shortages, rising prices, and “growing unrest” (Kay 2006, p. 49).
- The occupied territories of Western Europe and Scandinavia were adding greatly to the food deficit of the area under German control (Kay 2006, p. 123).

Consumption and Food

German grain stocks, million tons:

	Harvest	Net import	Domestic uses	Δ Stocks
1938/39	29.6	2.5	28.1	4.0
1939/40	27.5	2.1	30.9	-1.3
1940/41	24.0	2.2	30.6	-4.4
1941/42	23.6	3.0	27.9	-1.3
1942/43	22.7	5.1	27.1	0.7
1943/44	23.9	4.6	27.9	0.6

Tooze (2006, p. 686). Stockbuilding is the harvest plus net imports, less domestic uses (consumption, seed, and losses).

- How was the deterioration up to 1941 brought to a halt?

The Hunger Plan

With the approach of war, food took precedence over Lebensraum.

Military economic directives, May 1941 (Dallin 1957, my emphasis):

“(1) The war can be pursued only if in the third war year [i.e. from September, 1941] the entire German Armed Forces can be fed at the expense of Russia. (2) Thereby **tens of millions** will undoubtedly starve to death if we take away all we need from the country.”

Backed by Hitler – but was it compromise or conviction?

Thirty million became the consensus figure for the number to be killed (Kay 2006, pp. 162-163).

- Russian urban population grew by 30 million, 1913 to 1939.
- Continental Europe grain imports in 1939 estimated at 12-13 million tons, required for 25 million people.
- SS Generalplan Ost (approved July 1942) envisaged removing 31 million non-Jews from Poland, Ukraine, and Belorussia (Tooze 2006, p. 467).

The Hunger Plan

With the approach of war, food took precedence over Lebensraum.

Military economic directives, May 1941 (Dallin 1957; my emphasis):

“The population of these [northern] regions will have to look forward to the severest famine. It will be essential to drive the population into Siberia.

“Efforts to save the population from starving to death by bringing in surplus food from the black-soil region [to the northern areas] can be made only at the expense of feeding Europe. They undermine Germany's ability to hold out in the war and to withstand the blockade [imposed by Britain]. There must be absolute clarity on this point. [From it] ... there follows forcibly the extinction of **industry as well as of a large percentage of the human beings** in the hitherto deficit areas [of Russia].”

The Hunger Plan

Lebensraum was temporarily shelved in favour of production.

- With rising wartime demand for labour, Germany no longer had a surplus population to be relocated to the East.
- Food was the priority.

But Lebensraum was not abandoned:

- **No restitution** of nationalized land and property to former owners, or privatization of public assets, in territory formerly under Soviet control, because such property was destined to be handed over to ethnic Germans.
- **Racial killings** by SS special forces (previously tried out in Czechoslovakia and Poland) began immediately in very large numbers (1.5m total) in immediate rear of the front line.

Racial Killing

Racial killing under German occupation had two dimensions:

- The Hunger Plan: a broad intention to cause the deaths of around **30 million Russians and Ukrainians** by deportation, starvation, and other means.
- The Holocaust: An increasingly detailed, specific plan to kill all **11 million Jews** in occupied Europe from West to East.

Both went through various stages of escalation with related triggers.

- The Hunger Plan came first and was relatively advanced before implementation in 1941 (Kay 2006).
- The plan for the Holocaust was finalized only during the early months of the war in Russia.

Racial Killing

The Holocaust was a calculated process, consistent with Hitler's causal beliefs, not blind or irrational.

Hitler viewed the Jews as **enemies within** (Gerlach 1998).

- As potential co-conspirators with the foreign enemy, Hitler believed that Jews had value as hostages.
- But their value fell as scope for negotiation with the foreign enemy disappeared.

Violence against Jews was escalated in a calculated way:

- Atlantic Charter → first deportations of German Jews from Berlin, August 1941 (Jersak 2003).
- Auschwitz gas chambers tried out, September 1941.
- U.S. entry into war and German military setback in Battle of Moscow → Wannsee conference, February 1942 (Roseman 2002).

By this point, the Final Solution was already in full swing.

Occupation Policies: Other Aspects

In Western Europe and Scandinavia the German occupation regime encouraged civic collaboration and punished only resistance and disloyalty.

In the East, the German occupation made few such appeals (Dallin 1957).

A differentiated view

Alfred Rosenberg, minister for the East:

- Treat the Ukrainians, Poles, Belorussians and Balts better than the Russians.
- Even if only on pragmatic grounds, to exploit national tensions.

They are all the same

Himmler, chief of SS:

- They are all Untermenschen.
- Four-year-schooling for the colonial subjects: “The sole goal of this schooling is to teach them simple arithmetic, nothing above the number 500, writing one’s name, and the doctrine that it is divine law to obey the Germans ... I don’t think reading is desirable” (Kochanski 2012).

Effect was to stiffen civil and military resistance, even in areas that initially welcomed German occupation.

Occupation Policies: Other Aspects

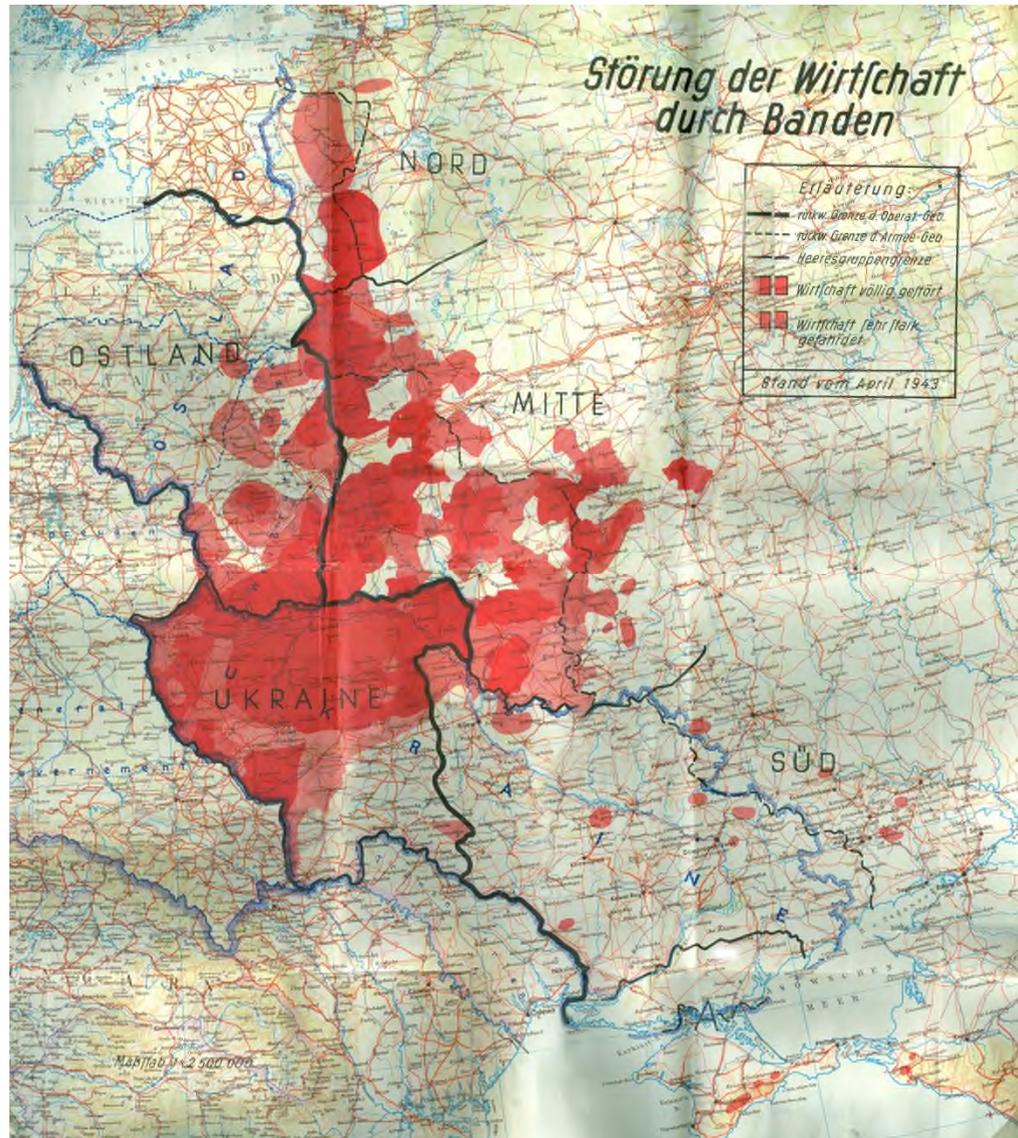
Scorched earth in Russia: a German experience (Dallin 1957):

“The whole centralized system of trade and distribution is disrupted; supplies have been burnt, evacuated or looted; the administrative apparatus has been dissolved, withdrawn, or liquidated. Factories and enterprises have been destroyed in part or in their entirety, their machinery wrecked. Sources of power have been blown up, and their equipment scattered or hidden. Spare parts cannot be located or have wilfully been mixed up. All rosters of parts and machinery have been destroyed. Fuel and lubricants have been burned or looted. There is no electric power. Often the water supply is out of order, and there are no specialists to make repairs.”

The occupation authorities were not interested in urban or industrial reconstruction until 1943, when it was too late.

Occupation Policies: Other Aspects

Resistance to occupation, April 1943 (Klemann and Kudriashov 2012, after p. 180):



Key:

- Shaded in red: Economy **severely** disrupted.
- Blocked in red: Economy **completely** disrupted.

The Transfer of Resources

Channels of exploitation were the same, East and West (Milward 1970, 1977).

Flows:

- Occupation costs, i.e. a direct tax.
- *Die Schleuse* (the “sluice”): trade at terms controlled by a severely overvalued Reichsmark, i.e. an indirect tax.
- Clearing deficits, i.e. unpaid German liabilities.
- Forced labour mobilized by the occupation forces to carry out tasks on the spot.

Stocks:

- One-time confiscation of local property for use by the German armed forces on the spot or transfer to Germany.
- PoWs and labourers deported to work in German factories and farms.

The Transfer of Resources

Occupation costs paid to Germany by region, billion Reichsmarks:

	1940 (June-Dec.)	1941	1942	1943	1944 (Jan.-Sept.)	Total
France	1.75	5.55	8.55	11.10	8.30	35.25
Netherlands	0.80	1.90	2.20	2.20	1.65	8.75
Belgium	0.35	1.30	1.50	1.60	0.95	5.70
Denmark	0.20	0.20	0.25	0.55	0.80	2.00
Italy	2.00	8.00	10.00
All other occupied countries	0.90	1.05	4.50	7.55	8.30	22.30
Total	4.00	10.00	17.00	25.00	28.00	84.00
Of which, % from "all other"	23%	11%	26%	30%	30%	27%
German GNP (full year)	141	152	165	184

Source: Abelshauser (1998).

The Transfer of Resources

France's occupation costs and other payments to Germany:

	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944
Per cent of French national income in 1938 at 1938 prices	10.9	19.3	20.9	36.6	27.6
Per cent of German GNP at 1938 exchange rate	3.0	5.3	5.5	9.1	6.7

Source: Milward (1977, p. 140).

The Transfer of Resources

Annual average **transfers to Germany** from date of surrender through March 1944:

	Billion Reichsmarks	Per cent of 1938 national income
Netherlands	3.1	44
Belgium	2.4	44
Norway	1.3	42
France	9.4	30
Bohemia-Moravia	1.4	30
Denmark	0.6	19
Total	18.2	33 (average)

Source: Liberman (1996, p. 43).

The Transfer of Resources

Deliveries to Germany from the occupied eastern territories, million Reichsmarks

Agricultural goods:

Deliveries from the East	4,000
German counter-deliveries	-500
Subtotal	3,500

Industrial goods and raw materials:

Deliveries from the East	725
Industrial work for the Army	500
German counter-deliveries of equipment and coal	-535
Subtotal	690
All goods, net total	4,190

Source: Dallin (1957, p. 406).

The Transfer of Labour

Until October 1941 there was an explicit ban on the deployment of Soviet PoWs in Germany.

Then a **labour shortage** developed:

- Between 1941 and July 1944 German war production tripled.
- The Germany Army was losing 60,000 killed per month, June 1941 to May 1944, and 200,000/month in June to August 1944.

By 1944:

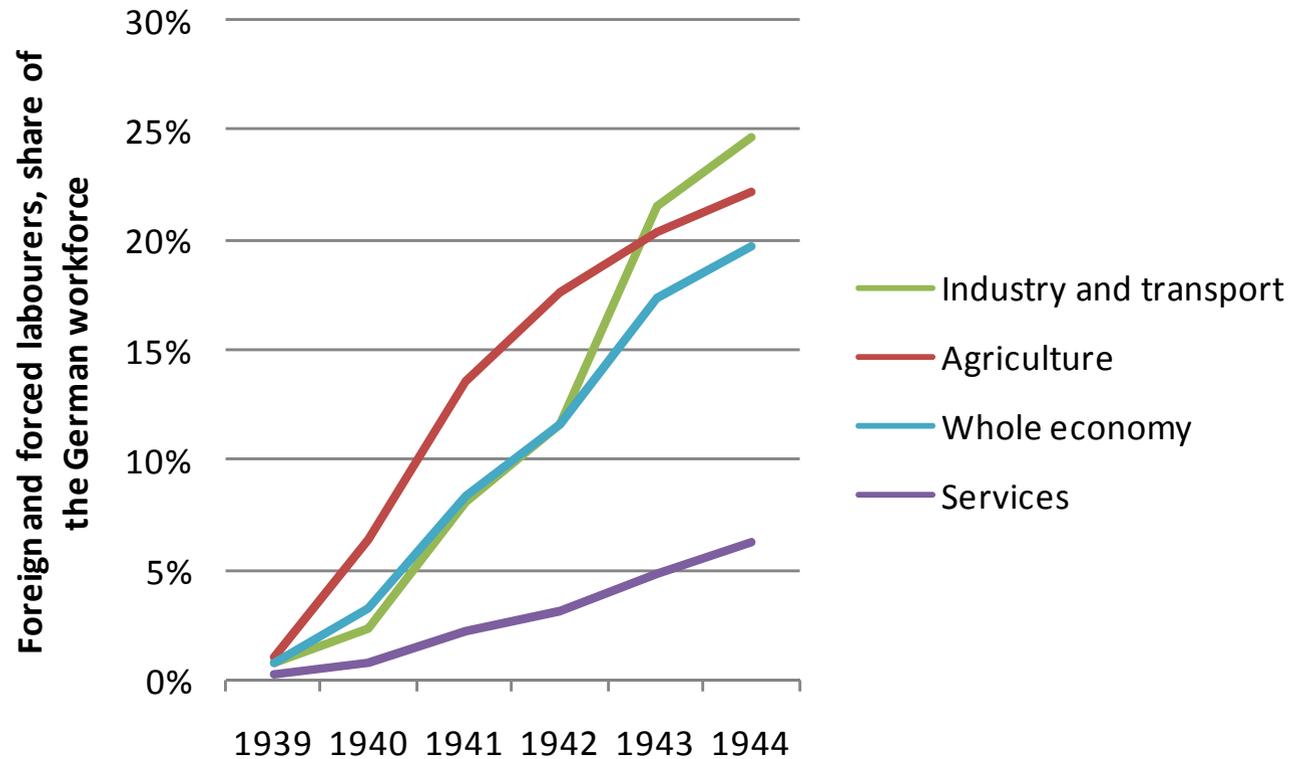
- There were 7.1 million foreign workers in Germany.
- Including 1.9m Soviet civilians and 750,000 PoWs.
- One in five workers in the German economy.

Outcome: The war intended to cleanse Europe brought an influx of foreigners into the heartland of Germany.

Question: Were the foreign labourers mobilized instead of German women?

The Transfer of Labour

Foreign labourers in the German economy:



- The increasing demand for foreign labourers reflected an increasing labour shortage.

- Tooze (2006): As the food requirements of foreign labour in Germany increased, the screw was tightened on the consumers in the East

Source: Abelshouser (1998).

The Transfer of Labour

Soviet prisoners of war held by Germany:

Soviet PoWs (including MIAs), total	4,559,000
– Recovered during fighting	– 940,000
– Freed at end of the war	– 1,836,000
= Died in captivity, residual	= 1,783,000

Source: Krivosheev et al. (2003).

Himmler to SS conference, October 1942 (my emphasis):

“I can give a picture of this first year [of the war in Russia] in a few words. The Russian Army was herded together in great pockets, ground down, taken prisoner. At that time we did not value the mass of humanity as we value it today, **as raw material, as labour**. What after all, thinking in generations, is not to be regretted, but is now deplorable by reason of the loss of labour, is that the prisoners died in tens and hundreds of thousands of exhaustion and hunger ...”

Was Germany's Eastern Front a Mistake?

Germany occupied France in order to occupy the East.

Expecting Ukraine to be the cow that would suckle the homeland.

Milward (1970) showed in practice France was far more lucrative than the East.

- Hmm ...

Liberman (1996) identifies theory that colonial occupation is a **quagmire**, i.e. a swampy wetland from which it is hard to escape:

- Occupation stimulates national resistance.
- Resistance is an increasing function of modern nationalism.
- And of the growing strength of civil societies.
- So, military occupation has diminishing returns.

And finds this theory misleading: true in agricultural Eastern Europe, not in the industrialized West.

Was Germany's Eastern Front a Mistake?

Liberman argues: **Conquest generally pays** – but you have to make it happen.

- More developed societies are more vulnerable to exploitation.
- Opportunity costs of resistance are higher.
- Harder for resisters to sanction free riding.
- And there is more to exploit.

Colonies are assets – unless will (or ruthlessness) to exploit is lacking.

- Or development level of the occupied territory is too low.
- Or time is too short.

Which implies that invading Russia was a mistake; Hitler should have made the occupation of Western Europe his goal.

If Hitler's goal was only to capture the largest revenue stream, the war in the East looks like a **mistake**.

If Hitler's goal was only to conquer, the Holocaust looks like an **irrational diversion**.

Was Germany's Eastern Front a Mistake?

The work of Kay and Tooze suggests otherwise.

The war in the East was not Hitler's mistake; it was **the main point**.

- To clear Eastern Europe and Russia of tens of millions of people: Jews first, then Russians, Ukrainians, and Poles.
- And to divert the food they would otherwise have consumed to Germany.
- Killing the inhabitants was **not a detour**, but the most direct route to his strategic goal.
- Working some of them to death before they died was just a bonus.

What We Have Learned

Germany's strategy of conquest was motivated by memories of blockade and the desire to dominate an ethnically cleansed colonial space.

Occupation policies were directed towards **both food and territory**.

Extermination was the instrument that was intended to release both of these for German exploitation.

There were two unintended consequences:

- Food was easier to extract from Germany's unplanned acquisitions in industrialized Western Europe than from the planned acquisitions in the East.
- When the war became protracted, the war effort required so much labour that it came to depend on growing numbers of non-Germans working as indentured or slave labourers on the German territory.

Did conquest pay?

- Not as it was intended to.
- But yes, where the conditions were right.

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