The Wannsee Protocol (January 20, 1942)

Abstract

On July 31, 1941, Hermann Göring (1893–1946), acting on Hitler's instructions, ordered Reinhard Heydrich (1904–1942), head of the Reich Security Main Office, to draw up a complete plan for the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question." Heydrich's so-called Special Operations Units [*Einsatzgruppen*] had already been working for weeks to "cleanse" the conquered territories through mass shootings of Jews and other designated enemies of the people. Although these mass shootings were supposed to continue up to the end of the war, the SS leadership sought to develop more efficient methods for carrying out the planned annihilation of Europe's approximately 11 million Jews. Therefore, in December 1941, experiments with exhaust-fume poisoning started in mobile trucks in Chelmno in occupied Poland; the first annihilation camp opened there the same month. To accelerate the future deportation and murder of the European Jews and to coordinate the efforts of the state and party offices involved, Heydrich hosted a secret conference on January 20, 1942. It was held in Berlin at a Wannsee villa used by the Reich Security Main Office as a guest house and conference center. The fifteen participants, high-ranking representatives of the SS, the NSDAP, and the government, approved a program of annihilation that was actually already well under way. According to the plan, Europe's Jews would be deported to the Eastern territories and murdered there. The protocol of the conference was recorded by Adolf Eichmann (1906–1962), who concealed the planned genocide behind a series of euphemisms. Eichmann's linguistic obfuscations notwithstanding, the protocol represented incontrovertible evidence of the Nazi's "Final Solution"—which is now understood, to quote historian Christopher Browning, as "the systematic attempt to murder every last Jew within the German grasp."

The protocol was discovered in Berlin in 1947 by Robert Kempner, assistant U.S. chief counsel in the Nuremberg Trials. A year later, it was used as an important piece of evidence in the trial against the leading officials of the ministries.

Source

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Minutes of Discussion

I. The following persons took part in the discussion about the final solution of the Jewish question which took place in Berlin, am Grossen Wannsee No. 56/58 on 20 January 1942.

Gauleiter Dr. MEYER and Reichsamtsleiter Dr. LEIBBRANDT	Reich Ministry of the Occupied Eastern Territories
Secretary of State Dr. STUCKART	Reich Ministry of the Interior
Secretary of State NEUMANN	Plenipotentiary of the Four-Year Plan
Secretary of State Dr. Freisler	Reich Ministry of Justice
Secretary of State Dr. Bühler	Office of the Government General
Under Secretary of State Luther	Foreign Office
SS-Oberfuehrer KLOPFER	Party Chancellery

Ministerialdirektor KRITZINGER	Reich Chancellery
SS-Gruppenfuehrer HOFMANN	Race and Settlement Main Office
SS-Gruppenfuehrer MUELLER SS-Obersturmbannfuehrer EICHMANN	Reich Security Main Office
SS-Oberfuehrer Dr. SCHOENGARTH Chief of the Security Police and the SD in the Government General	Security Police and SD
SS-Sturmbannfuehrer Dr. LANGE Commander of the Security Police and the SD for the General district Latvia, as deputy of the Commander of the Security Police and the SD for the Reich Commissariat "Eastland."	Security Police and SD

II. At the beginning of the discussion SS-Obergruppenfuehrer HEYDRICH gave information that the Reich Marshal had appointed him delegate for the preparations for the final solution of the Jewish problem in Europe and pointed out that this discussion had been called for the purpose of clarifying fundamental questions. The wish of the Reich Marshal to have a draft sent to him concerning organisatory, factual and material interests in relation to the final solution of the Jewish problem in Europe, makes necessary an initial common action of all Central Offices immediately concerned with these questions in order to bring their general activities into line.

He said that the Reich Fuehrer-SS and the Chief of the German Police (Chief of the Security Police and the SD) were entrusted with the official handling of the final solution of the Jewish problem centrally without regard to geographic borders.

The Chief of the Security Police and the SD then gave a short report of the struggle which has been carried on against this enemy, the essential points being the following:

a) the expulsion of the Jews from every particular sphere of life of the German people,
b) the expulsion of the Jews from the *Lebensraum* of the German people.

In carrying out these efforts, an increased and planned acceleration of the emigration of Jews from the Reich territory was started, as the only possible present solution.

By order of the Reich Marshal a Reich Central Office for Jewish emigration was set up in January 1939 and the Chief of the Security Police and the SD was entrusted with the management. Its most important tasks were

a) to make all necessary arrangements for the preparation for an increased emigration of the Jews,
b) to direct the flow of emigration,
c) to hurry up the procedure of emigration in each individual case.

The aim of all this being that of clearing the German *Lebensraum* of Jews in a legal way.

All the Offices realized the drawbacks of such enforced accelerated emigration. For the time being they had, however, tolerated it on account of the lack of other possible solutions of the problem.

The work concerned with emigration was, later on, not only a German problem, but also a problem with which the authorities of the countries to which the flow of emigrants was being directed would have to deal. Financial difficulties, such as the demand for increasing sums of money to be presented at the time of landing on the part of various foreign governments, lack of shipping space, increasing restriction of entry permits, or canceling of such, extraordinarily increased the difficulties of emigration. In spite of these difficulties 537,000 Jews were sent out of the country between the day of the seizure of power and the deadline, 31 October 1941. Of these:

as of 30 January from Germany	approx. 360,000
from 15 March 1938 from Austria (Ostmark)	approx. 147,000
from 15 March 1939 from the Protectorate, Bohemia and Moravia	approx. 30,000.

The Jews themselves, or rather their Jewish political organizations financed the emigration. In order to avoid the possibility of the impoverished Jews staying behind, action was taken to make the wealthy Jews finance the evacuation of the needy Jews; this was arranged by imposing a suitable tax, i.e. an emigration tax which was used for the financial arrangements in connection with the emigration of poor Jews, and was worked according to a ladder system.

Apart from the necessary Reichmark exchange, foreign currency had to be presented at the time of landing. In order to save foreign exchange held by Germany, the Jewish financial establishments in foreign countries were—with the help of Jewish organizations in Germany —made responsible for arranging for an adequate amount of foreign currency. Up to 30 October 1941, the foreign Jews donated approx. $ 9,500,000.

In the meantime, the Reich Fuehrer-SS and Chief of the German Police had prohibited emigration of Jews for reasons of the dangers of an emigration during wartime and consideration of the possibilities in the East.

III. Another possible solution of the problem has now taken the place of emigration, i.e. the evacuation of the Jews to the East, provided the Fuehrer agrees to this plan.

Such activities are, however, to be considered as provisional actions, but practical experience is already being collected which is of greatest importance in relation to the future final solution of the Jewish problem.

Approx. 11,000,000 Jews will be involved in this final solution of the European Jewish problem, they are distributed as follows among the countries:

-	Country	Number
A	Germany proper	131,800
-	Austria	43,700
-	Eastern territories	420,000
-	General Government	2,284,000
-	Bialystok	400,000
-	Protectorate Bohemia & Moravia	74,200
-	Estonia	free of Jews
-	Latvia	3,500
-	Lithuania	34,000
-	Belgium	43,000
-	Denmark	5,600
-	France / occupied territory	165,000
-	[France] / unoccupied territory	700,000
-	Greece	69,600
-	Netherlands	160,800
-	Norway	1,300
B	Bulgaria	48,000

-	England	330,000
-	Finland	2,300
-	Ireland	4,000
-	Italy including Sardinia	58,000
-	Albania	200
-	Croatia	40,000
-	Portugal	3,000
-	Rumania including Bessarabia	342,000
-	Sweden	8,000
-	Switzerland	18,000
-	Serbia	10,000
-	Slovakia	88,000
-	Spain	6,000
-	Turkey (European Turkey)	55,500
-	Hungary	742,800
-	USSR	5,000,000
-	Ukraine	2,994,684
-	White Russia with exception of Bialystok	446,484
-	Total over	11,000,000

The number of Jews given here for foreign countries includes, however, only those Jews who still adhere to the Jewish faith as the definition of the term “Jew” according to racial principles is still partially missing there. The handling of the problem in the individual countries will meet with difficulties due to the attitude and conception of the people there, especially in Hungary and Rumania. Thus, even today a Jew can buy documents in Hungary which will officially prove his foreign citizenship.

The influence of the Jews in all walks of life in the USSR is well known. Approximately 5 million Jews are living in the European Russia, and in Asiatic Russia scarcely 1/4 million.

The breakdown of Jews residing in the European part of the USSR, according to trades, was approximately as follows:

in agriculture	9.1 %
communal workers	14.8 %
in trade	20.0 %
employed by the state	23.4 %
in private occupations such as medical profession, newspapers, theater, etc.	32.7%

Under proper guidance the Jews are now to be allocated for labor to the East in the course of the final solution. Able-bodied Jews will be taken in large labor columns to these districts for work on roads, separated according to sexes, in the course of which action a great part will undoubtedly be eliminated by natural causes.

The possible final remnant will, as it must undoubtedly consist of the toughest, have to be treated accordingly, as it is the product of natural selection, and would, if liberated, act as a bud cell of a Jewish reconstruction (see historical experience).

In the course of the practical execution of this final settlement of the problem, Europe will be cleaned up

from the West to the East. Germany proper, including the protectorate Bohemia and Moravia, will have to be handled first because of reasons of housing and other social-political necessities.

The evacuated Jews will first be sent, group by group, into so-called transit ghettos from which they will be taken to the East.

SS-Obergruppenfuehrer HEYDRICH went on to say that an important provision for the evacuation as such is the exact definition of the group of persons concerned in the matter.

It is intended not to evacuate Jews of more than 65 years of age but to send them to an old-age ghetto—Theresienstadt is being considered for this purpose.

Next to these age-groups—of the 280,000 Jews still in Germany proper and Austria on 31 October 1941, approximately 30% are over 65; Jews disabled on active duty and Jews with war decorations (Iron Cross I) will be accepted in the Jewish old-age ghettos.

Through such an expedient solution the numerous interventions will be eliminated with one blow.

The carrying out of each single evacuation project of a larger extent will start at a time to be determined chiefly by the military development. Regarding the handling of the final solution in the European territories occupied and influenced by us it was suggested that the competent officials of the Foreign Office working on these questions confer with the competent “Referenten” from the Security Police and the SD.

In Slovakia and Croatia the difficulties arising from this question have been considerably reduced, as the most essential problems in this field have already been brought near to a solution. In Rumania the Government in the meantime has also appointed a commissioner for Jewish questions. In order to settle the question in Hungary it is imperative that an adviser in Jewish questions be pressed upon the Hungarian government without too much delay.

As regards the taking of preparatory steps to settle the question in Italy SS-Obergruppenfuehrer HEYDRICH considers it opportune to contact the chief of the police with a view to these problems.

In the occupied and unoccupied parts of France the registration of the Jews for evacuation can in all probability be expected to take place without great difficulties.

Assistant Under Secretary of State LUTHER in this connection calls attention to the fact that in some countries, such as the Scandinavian states, difficulties will arise if these problems are dealt with thoroughly and that it will therefore be advisable to defer action in these countries. Besides, considering the small numbers of Jews to be evacuated from these countries this deferment means no essential limitation.

On the other hand, the Foreign Office anticipates no great difficulties as far as the South-East and the West of Europe are concerned.

SS-Gruppenfuehrer HOFMANN intends to send an official from the Race and Settlement Main Office to Hungary for general orientation at the time when the first active steps to bring up the question in this country will be taken by the Chief of the Security Police and the SD. It was determined officially to detail this official, who is not supposed to work actively, temporarily from the Race and Settlement Main Office as assistant to the police attaché.

IV. The implementation of the plans for the final solution is supposed to a certain extent to be based on the Nuernberg Laws, in which connection also the solution of the problems presented by the mixed-

marriages and the persons of mixed blood is seen as the precondition of an absolutely final clarification of the question.

The chief of the Security Police and the SD first discussed, with reference to a letter from the Chief of the Reich Chancellery, the following points theoretically:

1) Treatment of Persons of Mixed Blood of the first Degree

Persons of mixed blood of the first degree will, as regards the final solution of the Jewish question, be treated as Jews.

From this treatment the following persons will be exempt:

a) Persons of mixed blood of the first degree married to persons of German blood if their marriage has resulted in children (persons of mixed blood of the second degree). Such persons of mixed blood of the second degree are to be treated essentially as Germans.
b) Persons of mixed blood of the first degree to whom until now in any sphere of life whatsoever exemption licenses have been issued by the highest Party or State authorities.

Each individual case must be examined, in which process it will still be possible that a decision unfavorable to the persons of mixed blood can be passed.

In any such case only personal essential merit of the person of mixed blood must be deemed a ground justifying the granting of an exemption. (Not merits of the parent or of the partner of German blood.)

Any person of mixed blood of the first degree to whom exemption from the evacuation is granted will be sterilized—in order to eliminate the possibility of offspring and to secure a final solution of the problem presented by the persons of mixed blood. The sterilization will take place on a voluntary basis. But it will be a precondition of permission to stay in the Reich. Following the sterilizations the “person of mixed blood” will be liberated from all restrictive regulations which have so far been imposed upon him.

2) Treatment of Persons of Mixed Blood of the Second Degree

Persons of mixed blood of the second degree will fundamentally be treated as persons of German blood, with exception of the following cases in which persons of mixed blood of the second degree will be treated as Jews:

a) The person of mixed blood of the second degree is the result of a marriage where both parents are persons of mixed blood.
b) The general appearance of the person of mixed blood of the second degree is racially particularly objectionable so that he already outwardly must be included among the Jews.
c) The person of mixed blood of the second degree has a particularly bad police and political record sufficient to reveal that he feels and behaves like a Jew.

But also in these cases exceptions are not to be made if the person of mixed blood of the second degree is married to a person of German blood.

3) Marriages between Full Jews and Persons of German Blood

Here it must be decided from one individual case to another whether the Jewish partner is to be evacuated, or whether in consideration of the effects produced by such a measure upon the German relatives of the mixed marriage he is to be committed to a ghetto for aged Jews.

4) Marriages between Persons of Mixed Blood of the First Degree and Persons of German Blood

a) Without Children
If no children have resulted from the marriage, the parents of mixed blood of the first degree will be evacuated or committed to a ghetto for old Jews. (The same treatment as in the case of marriages between full Jews and persons of German blood, Point 3).

b) With Children
If the marriage has resulted in children (persons of mixed blood of the second degree) these children will be evacuated or committed to a ghetto together with the parents of mixed blood of the first degree, if they are to be treated as Jews. If the children are to be treated as Germans (regular cases) they will be exempt from evacuation and in that case the same applies to the parent of mixed blood of the first degree.

5) Marriages between Persons of Mixed Blood of the First Degree and Persons of Mixed Blood of the First Degree or Jews

In the case of these marriages (including the children) all members of the family will be treated as Jews, therefore evacuated or committed to a ghetto for old Jews.

6) Marriages between Persons of Mixed Blood of the First Degree and Persons of Mixed Blood of the Second Degree

Both partners will be evacuated, regardless of whether or not they have children, or committed to a ghetto for old Jews, since as a rule these children will racially reveal the admixture of Jewish blood more strongly than persons of mixed blood of the second degree.

SS-Gruppenfuehrer HOFMANN advocates the opinion that sterilization must be applied on a large scale; especially because the person of mixed blood, placed before the alternative as whether to be evacuated or to be sterilized, would rather submit to the sterilization.

Under Secretary of State Dr. STUCKART maintains that the possible solutions enumerated above for a clarification of the problems presented by mixed marriages and by persons of mixed blood when translated into practice in this form would involve endless administrative work. On the other hand, in order to take the biological facts into account, it was suggested by Dr. STUCKART to proceed to forced sterilization.

Further, for the purpose of simplifying the problem of mixed marriages further possibilities should be considered to enable legislators to declare, for example: “This marriage has been dissolved.”

Regarding the question of the effects produced by the evacuation of the Jews on economic life, Under Secretary of State NEUMANN declared that the Jews assigned to work in plants of importance for the war could not be evacuated as long as no replacement was available.

SS-Obergruppenfuehrer HEYDRICH pointed out that besides, according to the directives approved by him governing the carrying out of the evacuation program in operation at that time, these Jews would not be evacuated.

Under Secretary of State Dr. BUEHLER stated that it would be welcomed by the Government General if the implementation of the final solution of this question could start in the Government General, because the transportation problem there was of no predominant importance and the progress of this action would not be hampered by considerations connected with the supply of labor. The Jews had to be removed as quickly as possible from the territory of the Government General because especially there the Jews represented an immense danger as a carrier of epidemics, and on the other hand were permanently contributing to the disorganization of the economic system of the country through black

market operations. Moreover, out of the two and a half million Jews to be affected, the majority of cases was unfit for work.

Under Secretary of State BUEHLER further stated that the solution of the Jewish question in the Government General as far as the issuing of orders was concerned was dependent upon the Chief of the Security Police and the SD, his work being supported by the administrative authorities of the Government General. He had this one request only, namely that the Jewish question in this territory be solved as quickly as possible.

Towards the end of the conference the various types of possible solutions were discussed; in the course of this discussion Gauleiter Dr. MEYER as well as Under Secretary of State Dr. BUEHLER advocated the view that certain preparatory measures incidental to the carrying out of the final solution ought to be initiated immediately in the very territories under discussion, in which process, however, alarming the population must be avoided.

With the request to the persons present from the Chief of the Security Police and the SD that they lend him appropriate assistance in the carrying out of the tasks involved in the solution, the conference was adjourned.

Source: English translation of Document No. NG-2586 (Nuremberg Government series of the Nuremberg documents), Office of the Chief Counsel of War Crimes; reprinted in John Mendelsohn, ed., *The Holocaust: Selected Documents in Eighteen Volumes*. Vol. 11, New York: Garland, 1982, pp. 18–32. Edited by GHI staff.

Source of original German text: Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Inland IIg 177 (T120 / 1512 / 372024-28); reprinted in John Mendelsohn, ed., *The Holocaust: Selected Documents in Eighteen Volumes*. Vol. 11. New York: Garland, 1982, pp. 3–17.

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