

BLOODLANDS

EUROPE BETWEEN HITLER AND STALIN

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written in Hebrew characters, and Belarusian, Russian, and Ukrainian are written in Cyrillic alphabets.

For each of these languages there are competing systems of transliteration, each with its advantages and disadvantages. To make matters worse, many of the people and places discussed in this book were known by different names in different languages written with different characters. So there might be a dozen legitimate ways, for example, to spell the name of a Jew from Ukraine in English. For many readers, the people and places discussed in this book will be unfamiliar enough without the burden of the more elaborate solutions to the transliteration problem. The risk with too much precision is that people and places become more rather than less exotic.

I have generally given names in simpler and more familiar forms rather than those that correspond perfectly to transliteration. I spell Russian surnames ending with a double *ii* just that way, partly so that readers can tell the difference between Russian surnames (ending with *ii*), Ukrainian surnames (ending with *yi*), and Polish surnames (ending with *i*). I usually give city names in an English form if one is familiar, so Warsaw rather than Warszawa and Kiev rather than Kyïv. All of the cities were spelled differently by different inhabitants at any given time—and at different times fell under different rulers with different official topographies. I tend to favor current English spellings, although I make exceptions when it would seem absurd not to do so. Cities in the Soviet Union had a tendency to change names; I use the names under which they were known at the time. Thus famine and terror strike Stalino (not Donetsk) in the 1930s and the German Sixth Army is destroyed at Stalingrad (not Volgograd) in 1942. I try to refer to cities by the same name throughout the book, although in certain cases where boundaries moved and populations were transferred (Lwów/Lviv, Wilno/Vilnius) this would have been too distorting. In citations I give the name of the author as it appears in the cited work, even though this means that some authors' names will be spelled different ways in different citations. In the notes and bibliography I transliterate more precisely than in the main text, following simplified versions of the Library of Congress guidelines. These are all matters of judgment; readers with experience in these problems will understand the impossibility of avoiding certain compromises. Translations, except where otherwise noted, are my own.

ABSTRACT

The killing in the bloodlands took five forms. First, Stalin undertook *modernization* by way of the self-colonization of his Soviet Union. The Soviets created a vast system of labor camps known as the Gulag, collectivized agriculture, and built factories, mines, and canals. When collectivized agriculture led to hunger, this was blamed on particular groups, primarily the Ukrainians. More than five million people starved to death in the Soviet Union in the early 1930s, most of them in Soviet Ukraine. The hunger was caused by collective agriculture, but the starvation was caused by politics.

Then the Soviets effected a *retreat* into terror. In the Great Terror of 1937 and 1938, the Soviet leadership identified peasants, the victims of collectivization, as the primary threat to Soviet power. People who had survived hunger and the Gulag were shot. At the same time, the Soviet leadership defined certain national minorities as enemies. Nearly seven hundred thousand people were recorded as executed in the Terror, although the true number may be somewhat higher. These people were disproportionately agricultural laborers and Soviet Poles.

In 1939, the Soviets and the Germans invaded Poland together, and carried out a policy of *de-Enlightenment*. Reasoning from different ideologies, but drawing similar conclusions, the Germans and Soviets killed some two hundred thousand Polish citizens between 1939 and 1941, disproportionately the educated people who represented European culture and who might have led resistance. When the Soviets executed the 21,892 Polish officers and others at Katyn and four other sites in spring 1940, they were mirroring a German killing campaign that was going on at the same time. The Soviets and Germans also deported about a million Polish citizens at this time, swelling the Soviet and the German camp systems. The Germans put Polish Jews in ghettos, in the anticipation that they would all be deported. Tens of thousands of Jews died of hunger and disease as the ghettos become improvised labor camps.

After the Germans broke the alliance and invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, the two enemies killed civilians in a pattern of *belligerent complicity*. In German-occupied Soviet Belarus the Soviets encouraged partisan activity, and the Germans executed more than three hundred thousand people in return. These mass killings had little to do with reprisals in any conventional sense. By the end the Germans were

shooting Belarusian women and children as an encumbrance, and taking the men as slave laborers. In Warsaw, Soviet forces first encouraged a Polish uprising and then watched, without involving themselves, as the Germans killed more than one hundred thousand Poles and then destroyed the city itself.

Hitler imagined a *colonial demodernization* of the Soviet Union and Poland that would take tens of millions of lives. The Nazi leadership envisioned an eastern frontier to be depopulated and deindustrialized, and then remade as the agrarian domain of German masters. This vision had four parts. First, the Soviet state was to collapse after a *lightning victory* in summer 1941, just as the Polish state had in summer 1939, leaving the Germans with complete control over Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, western Russia, and the Caucasus. Second, a *Hunger Plan* would starve to death some thirty million inhabitants of these lands in winter 1941–1942, as food was diverted to Germany and western Europe. Third, the Jews of the Soviet Union who survived the starvation, along with Polish Jews and other Jews under German control, were to be eliminated from Europe in a *Final Solution*. Fourth, a *Generalplan Ost* foresaw the deportation, murder, enslavement, or assimilation of remaining populations, and the resettlement of eastern Europe by German colonists in the years after the victory. Living space for Germans was to be dying space for others.

When the Soviet Union defended itself and no lightning victory could be won, Hitler and the German leadership adapted the three remaining plans to the new situation, killing about ten million people, which was fewer than originally planned. The *Hunger Plan* was abandoned in its original conception, and applied only to areas under total German control. Thus a million people were purposefully starved in besieged Leningrad and more than three million Soviet prisoners of war died of starvation and neglect. As the war continued, the Germans began to use prisoners as forced laborers, rather than allowing most of them to starve. The grand colonial scheme of *Generalplan Ost* could not be implemented without a total victory, which was not forthcoming. It was tried in areas of occupied Poland, where Poles were deported to create space for German racial colonies. Its essential concept was also visible in the German decision to destroy the city of Warsaw physically in response to the uprising of summer 1944. In the cases of both the *Hunger Plan* and *Generalplan Ost*, plans for mass killing had to be scaled back and delayed. The general goal of colonization was never abandoned.

The *Final Solution*, by contrast, was implemented as fully as possible. It was originally to take place after the war. As it became clear in the second half of 1941 that the war was not going according to plan, Hitler made clear that he wanted a *Final Solution* to be effected immediately. By then, four versions of a *Final Solution* by deportation had been proposed and found to be impracticable. The invasion of the Soviet Union, and its failure, demonstrated how the Jews could be removed from Europe: by mass murder. Einsatzgruppen originally tasked with eliminating political enemies were used to shoot Jews. Battalions of German Order Police originally tasked with patrolling the conquered Soviet Union were used in massive killing actions. By December 1941,

when Hitler made clear that he expected all of the Jews under German control to be exterminated, a new technique of mass murder was available. Asphyxiation by carbon monoxide, used first in a "euthanasia" program, was adapted for use in gas vans in the occupied Soviet Union, and then in permanent gassing facilities in occupied Poland. To the labor camp at Auschwitz was added a death factory, where hydrogen cyanide rather than carbon monoxide was used as the agent of killing. The Jews of occupied Poland, already gathered into ghettos for deportation, were instead sent to Bełżec, Sobibor, Chelmno, Treblinka, Auschwitz, and Majdanek, and gassed.