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978-0-521-76847-4 - Operation Barbarossa and Germany's Defeat in the East

David Stahel

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Introduction

On 3 February 1941 Hitler hosted an important military conference in preparation for Operation Barbarossa – Nazi Germany's upcoming invasion of the Soviet Union. Although Hitler was determined to crush the Soviet Union in a short summer campaign, this was destined to become a titanic clash between two ruthless empires, leading to the largest and most costly war in human history. Hitler was sufficiently aware of the profound scale of the conflict and the momentous consequences it would induce, even in the shortened form that he conceived for it that by the end of the conference he ominously pronounced: 'When Barbarossa begins the world will hold its breath.'¹ Nor was this just another bombastic outburst, typical of Hitler's unrestrained hubris. In a radio address on the day of the invasion (22 June 1941) the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, told his people:

So now this bloodthirsty guttersnipe must launch his mechanized armies upon new fields of slaughter, pillage and devastation . . . And even the carnage and ruin which his victory, should he gain it – though he's not gained it yet – will bring upon the Russian people, will itself be only a stepping stone to the attempt to plunge four or five hundred millions who live in China and the 350,000,000 who live in India into that bottomless pit of human degradation over which the diabolic emblem of the swastika flaunts itself. It is not too much to say here this pleasant summer evening that the lives and happiness of a thousand million additional human beings are now menaced with brutal Nazi violence. That is enough to make us hold our breath.²

If the spectre of an expanding Nazi empire caused the world a sudden collective gasp, Churchill's words of defiance signalled Britain's

¹ Hans-Adolf Jacobsen (ed), *Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht (Wehrmachtführungsstab)*, Band I/1: 1. August 1940–31. Dezember 1941 (Munich, 1982), p. 300 (3 February 1941). Hereafter cited as KTB OKW, Volume I.

² Max Domarus, *Hitler. Speeches and Proclamations 1932–1945. The Chronicle of a Dictatorship*, Volume IV: *The Years 1941 to 1945* (Wauconda, 2004), p. 2458; Winston S. Churchill, *Never Give In: The Best of Winston Churchill's Speeches* (New York, 2003), pp. 289–293. Also available online: www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/ww2/churchill062241.html

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determination to go on opposing Nazism and at the same time offered an open-ended alliance to the Soviet Union. It was an alliance born more of necessity than of pre-existing goodwill, for these were the darkest days of World War II. Nazi Germany had amassed the greatest invasion force in history. In the string of preceding campaigns the opposing nations of Europe had fallen in short order to German aggression, leaving the Soviet Union as the sole remaining continental power. With the planned conquest of Soviet territories, Hitler stood to gain immeasurable raw materials, freeing him forever from Britain's continental blockade and providing him with the strategic freedom to wage truly global warfare.

Yet the Soviet Union was a very different adversary from any of Germany's previous opponents and Hitler was well enough aware that Germany's internal constraints, most notably on the economic front, necessitated a short, victorious war. Thus Operation Barbarossa was designed to defeat the Soviet Union decisively in the summer of 1941.

The importance of Hitler's new war in the east was understood by all sides at the time as the definitive moment in the future fortunes of the expanding world war. Either Hitler would soon stand almost untouchable at the head of an enormous empire, or his greatest campaign would falter (something no government at the time believed to be likely) resulting in the dangerous Allied encirclement Hitler was aiming to eliminate forever. It is therefore not an overstatement to say that the German invasion of the Soviet Union represents an extraordinary turning point in world affairs, central not only in our understanding of World War II, but indeed as one of the most profound events in modern history.

Many histories have sought to understand the failure of Operation Barbarossa by tracing the movement of armies through to the great battle of Moscow in the winter of 1941/42. The central importance of this climactic battle in studies on Operation Barbarossa is effectively explained by its common acceptance as Germany's first major defeat in the war against the Soviet Union. Germany's sequence of unprecedented battlefield victories, ending in the ill-fated drive on Moscow, has sufficed to persuade many historians of its fundamental significance and fixated their attention on the winter battle as Operation Barbarossa's crucial point of demise. Long before the first snows of winter began to fall, however, and even before the first autumn rains brought most movement to a halt, in fact as early as the summer of 1941, it was evident that Barbarossa was a spent exercise, unavoidably doomed to failure.

Germany's failure in the early weeks of the campaign is perhaps not immediately apparent because it does not include the conventional historical benchmark of a great battlefield defeat. Indeed, according to most histories, the period is characterised by apparently extraordinary successes for the German armies. Encirclements at Belostok–Minsk,

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Smolensk and Uman are often framed by emphatic references to the impending collapse of the Soviet Union. Accordingly, it is with a measure of scepticism that some readers may first judge the paradoxical claim that it was in fact Germany whose demise was being assured in the summer of 1941. A short explanation of Germany's defeat in this period might best be provided by a simple theoretical concept devised by the renowned German strategist and historian Carl von Clausewitz. Based in large part on his first-hand observations of the Napoleonic wars, Clausewitz's timeless study *Vom Kriege* (*On War*) established numerous maxims of war, which in many cases are still upheld today. Clausewitz's theory of the culminating point of the attack provides a useful intellectual framework through which to view Operation Barbarossa. Put simply, Clausewitz established that most attacks diminish in strength the longer they continue, whereupon a critical point is eventually reached at which the power of the attack is superseded by the strength of the defence. This he determined to be the culminating point or climax of the attack, which he then added was usually, but not always, followed by an extremely powerful enemy counter-blow.³ This basic hypothesis formed an intriguing theoretical starting point for my own questioning of the literature concerning Operation Barbarossa and posed the problem of whether it was possible to pre-date the German military failure in 1941. As a result, Clausewitz's culminating point formed a conceptual beginning to what I believe subsequent research has confirmed – that German operations in the east had failed by the middle of August 1941.

Attempting any manageable re-examination of the Barbarossa campaign requires both a clear sense of purpose and a certain limitation of scope. Confronting the immense scale of Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union has been made somewhat easier by the relatively small number of motorised divisions which made up the German Army in 1941. These were concentrated into four 'panzer groups' upon which the success of the Barbarossa blitzkrieg was made dependent. This study focuses mainly on the two largest panzer groups (Panzer Groups 2 and 3) assigned to Army Group Centre in the middle of the German front. The study seeks to use these vital formations as a test case through which one can understand the overall success of German offensive operations in the earliest period of the war.

The bulk of the research was conducted in Germany at the German Military Archive (Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv) in Freiburg im Breisgau, with additional resources provided by the Military History Research Institute (Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt) in Potsdam

³ Michael Howard and Peter Paret (eds.), Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (New York, 1993), p. 639.

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and the Humboldt University in Berlin. The study is divided into two parts. In the first, there is a broad assessment of the conceptual planning for the campaign, as a basis for what would need to be achieved in the war itself. The second part, and the main body of the work, deals with the first two months of the war and follows the progress of the panzer groups towards their respective goals.

Research was concentrated on the four highest tiers of the army's field commands; Army Group Centre, the subordinate two panzer groups, the five corps making up the panzer groups and their constituent sixteen divisions. The wartime records for these various commands are not always complete with valuable elements sometimes unavailable. This either means the documents were destroyed in the war, have simply not been found and remain 'missing', or that they were captured and remain in Russian custody (where access for scholars has sometimes been limited or withheld). Nevertheless, the period covering Barbarossa is well served for detailed primary research on the motorised elements of Army Group Centre.

Once located the files reveal themselves to be something of a mixed bag. From the army group down to individual divisions all command structures were required to keep a daily war diary, but oddly there appears to have been little standardisation in content or style. Most of the war diaries were typed, but in some cases, as for example with XXIV Panzer Corps, the whole diary was recorded in a barely legible handwritten script. In many diaries entries were made continually throughout the day with the exact time of each entry recorded in the margin; in some cases, however, a single entry was recorded summarising the whole day. The content of the diaries also varied greatly. Some diarists limited themselves to recording strictly factual details (often only an updated positioning of the various units) without any other commentary. Others offered a more general coverage of the situation and even on occasion gave tactical details on the battles themselves. The diversity between the various war diaries suggests that there was no standard format for record keeping beyond what the diarist saw fit to include. A guideline was reported in the war diary of the 3rd Panzer Division, but more than likely it applied only to this division (perhaps because more than one man was charged with making entries or to ensure conformity with the express wishes of the commanding officer). At the top of specially printed pages for the war diary was the heading: 'Descriptions of the events (Important: Assessment of the situation (enemy and own) times of incoming and outgoing reports and orders)'.⁴ Even so, and atypically of the normal rigidity of

⁴ 'KTB 3rd Pz. Div. vom 16.8.40 bis 18.9.41' BA-MA RH 27-3/14.

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German military bureaucracy, widespread discrepancies remain between the war diaries, making a large sampling essential to an accurate overview.

Beyond the war diaries themselves, there was also much to be gained from files containing numerous appendices, often only discussed in brief in the war diaries. Yielding further value were the files filled with incoming and outgoing daily orders (*Tagesmeldungen*).

Supplementing the archival research, there are a number of published primary materials that proved invaluable to this study. Among the most useful were the assembled collection of documents edited by Erhard Moritz in *Fall Barbarossa*, and Hugh Trevor-Roper's edited English translation of *Hitler's War Directives 1939–1945*. The OKW war diaries and the three volumes of Halder's own war diary are standard works, but indispensable to any comprehensive study. The published version of Bock's diary is a trustworthy translation and another vital primary reference.

A selection of post-war memoirs have also been used, but it is important to add that a distinction was made between those sources produced at the time of the war (i.e. diaries, military reports/orders, speeches etc.) and those published after the war, usually by former German generals. These men generally sought to cast themselves in a more favourable light, either with full prescience of political and military events or as innocent functionaries subject to the baneful effects of Hitler's military interference. Accordingly, these post-war accounts are in many cases tainted, distorting their historical objectivity. Nevertheless, as problematic as they are, World War II memoirs cannot be entirely excluded as source material because the authors sometimes provide the only existing record of certain historical events. When used, they have been considered critically and backed, whenever possible, with collaborating evidence.⁵

Although this study is essentially a 'top-down' history focusing on events at the highest level, the 'bottom-up' perspective of individual soldiers has also been included. Using a wide selection of letters, war diaries and memoirs, the soldier's view is interspersed throughout the discussion of the military campaign.

As a matter of orientation for the reader it should be noted that some place names in the Soviet Union appear throughout the documents and

⁵ See comments on these sources in Gerhard Weinberg, 'Some Thoughts on World War II', *The Journal of Military History*, 56(4) (October, 1992), 659–660; Gerhard Weinberg, *Germany, Hitler, and World War II – Essays in Modern German and World History* (New York, 1995), pp. 307–308; Wolfram Wette, *Die Wehrmacht. Feindbilder, Vernichtungskrieg, Legenden* (Frankfurt am Main, 2002), Teil V: 'Die Legende von der "sauberen" Wehrmacht', pp. 197–244; English translation: *The Wehrmacht. History, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, 2006), Chapter 5, 'The Legend of the Wehrmacht's "Clean Hands"', pp. 195–250.

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published literature with certain variations in spelling. To avoid confusion and assist readability these have been standardised in my text, even sometimes in direct quotations. As a matter of principle I have rejected the all too common inaccuracy of referring to 'the Russians' as if the Soviet Union consisted of a generic, singular national group. Exceptions have only been made when the point in discussion does refer to an individual national group. Direct quotations from German documents, which almost always refer to all members of the Soviet Union as 'the Russians', have not been changed.

It is sometimes suggested that histories written solely from the German perspective, or vice versa, are somehow one-sided and thereby unable to render as accurate a judgement as those studies which claim a duality of source material. This could be the case depending on the exact subject under examination but, on the whole, the mistrust of studies focusing exclusively on one aspect or participant is unwarranted. To argue otherwise shows no understanding of the fact that almost all good studies are built on the back of countless specialised works which illuminate specific aspects of the conflict from one side or the other. Furthermore, one must appreciate the enormity of the war in the east, which makes mastery of the mammoth stock of Soviet or German archival material, on any subject or period, an ambitious claim. It is certainly possible to combine the two successfully, but this should not be mistaken for the benchmark of good research. Specialised studies not only have a legitimate place in the discourse; they tell us a great deal that more general accounts cannot. Nor is it always necessary, or advantageous, to make comparisons between Soviet and Nazi views or methods, which often differed radically. In the English language the eastern front of World War II is already under-represented given its overall importance to the war, and asserting that researchers can only make a useful contribution if they possess a working knowledge of Russian and German is ridiculous. If the counter-claim is that it is only possible to understand the war by looking at it from the point of view of all participants then we will need to look far beyond just German and Russian sources. In many ways the eastern front is a smaller-scale world war in itself. A glance at a contemporary map of Europe, to identify where the many battles took place, reveals that more than a dozen countries hosted this war at various points between 1941 and 1945. Their people and their soldiers, who often worked and fought for one side or the other – or both – have their own stories to tell. Moreover, when one looks at the constituent countries which made up the Soviet Union one can count fifteen successor states whose people fought in the Red Army. Yet not all the conscripts plucked

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from Central Asia, the Trans Caucasus, the Baltic region or the Far East spoke Russian, nor did the countless ethnic minorities such as Tatars, Bashkirs, Chechens, Chukchis and many others who were drafted into army service. Germany's war was also shared by significant forces from Finland, Romania, Hungary, Italy, Slovakia and even a division from Spain. Additionally, thousands of volunteers from Norway, Denmark, France, Holland, Belgium, Croatia and Bosnia served in Hitler's Waffen SS. Although the war was dominated by forces using the Russian or German language, it was not exclusively so. Thus, charting the complexities of the war will require specialised studies on all participants and only through these can we gain a comprehensive overview of the war in the east.

Given the overall importance of Operation Barbarossa to the development of World War II it is surprising how limited the research has been. The planning phase of this enormous operation is a good example. Only a handful of specialised works exist and none is recent. The most comprehensive are those by Ernst Klink⁶ and Barry Leach,⁷ appearing in 1983 and 1973 respectively. Leach's work takes in more than simple military planning and therefore does not have the detail of Klink's study, but, building on the work of Andreas Hillgruber,⁸ Leach clearly sets out the startling over-confidence of the Army High Command in 1940–41. Robert Cecil's 1975 study⁹ backed this conclusion, but discussed the military planning in even less detail, which left Ernst Klink fertile ground to produce a definitive work and his endeavours remain until now unsurpassed. Klink was the first to identify the army's own independent planning for the invasion of the Soviet Union even before Hitler's order. He also explored in detail the emergent split between Hitler and the OKH over the strategic direction of the campaign, as well as detailing the concerns Hitler held in the region of the Pripet marshes. As groundbreaking as Klink's research was, Operation Barbarossa remains the largest military operation in history, and accordingly, more attention needs to be devoted to its origins.

Beyond simple military considerations, attempting any analysis of Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union inevitably brings one into contact with some of the most fervently contested debates of World War II.

⁶ Ernst Klink, 'Die militärische Konzeption des Krieges gegen die Sowjetunion', in Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (ed.), *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, Band 4: *Der Angriff auf die Sowjetunion* (Stuttgart, 1983).

⁷ Barry Leach, *German Strategy Against Russia 1939–1941* (Oxford, 1973).

⁸ Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitlers Strategie. Politik und Kriegführung 1940–1941* (Bonn, 1965).

⁹ Robert Cecil, *Hitler's Decision to Invade Russia 1941* (London, 1975).

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Central among these is Hitler's rationale for turning against his Soviet 'ally' and the struggle between those who see the decision on purely pragmatic grounds and those who see it as the fruition of a long-espoused 'programme' for eastern expansion. This debate opens a wide-ranging discussion that is beyond the current scope of this study. However, the underlying assumptions and prejudices through which Hitler and his army commanders viewed their war against the Soviet Union up until the end of August 1941 are important for my purposes. For this reason, some discussion of the debate and its historical context is required.

With deserved moral authority and for the benefits of political necessity, the immediate post-war period encompassing the Nuremberg trials was largely devoid of serious debate surrounding the origins of the German–Soviet war. Instead, Germany's lone responsibility and guilt for having waged an aggressive war was judged both deliberate and absolute. The harmony did not last long, however, as Cold War rivalry, mixed with some honest quests for historical truth, prompted the US State Department to publish a volume of captured German documents¹⁰ dealing with the Nazi–Soviet pre-war relationship, and indicating a degree of blame for Stalin's commitment to the secret protocols contained within the 1939 Molotov–Ribbentrop pact. The Soviets responded with their own publication entitled *The Falsifiers of History*¹¹ contesting the authenticity of the American evidence and asserting their own Marxist–Leninist interpretation which emphasised the role of monopoly capitalists in rearming Germany and later channelling German aggression eastward.

The first concerted scholarly study into the period immediately preceding the outbreak of war came from Swiss historian Walter Hofer and demonstrated an intentional, premeditated policy on the part of Germany for further expansion through war.¹² This was contested in the 1961 thesis by A. J. P. Taylor, *The Origins of The Second World War*,¹³ which caused considerable controversy and began years of debate over whether there was an established, planned programme for eastern expansion, as outlined in *Mein Kampf*, or whether, as Taylor argued, Hitler was a simple opportunist seizing his chances as they arose. Notwithstanding some of the more radical arguments forwarded by Taylor, his main

¹⁰ Raymond James Sontag and James Stuart Beddie (eds.), *Nazi–Soviet Relations, 1939–1941. Documents from the Archives of the German Foreign Office* (Washington DC, 1948).

¹¹ Soviet Information Bureau, *The Falsifiers of History* (Moscow and London, 1948).

¹² Walter Hofer, *War Premeditated, 1939* (London, 1955).

¹³ A. J. P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* (London, 1961).

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line of reasoning found its supporters,¹⁴ as well as a significant body of detractors.¹⁵ The debate extended to Germany where Taylor's 'revisionist' argument was largely rejected.

Shortly thereafter a landmark work by Andreas Hillgruber¹⁶ appeared that contributed more than any other to the achievement of a factually based middle road between the competing extremes of communist and German apologist interpretations.¹⁷ The latter, sponsored largely by former generals, suggested that Hitler alone dominated the decision-making process but that he was mentally too erratic to follow a detailed plan. Moreover, the generals asserted that Hitler's constant interference in military operations was solely responsible for most of the major military defeats. Many even subscribed to the preventive war theory which centred on an unproven assumption equating Soviet expansionism in eastern Europe with a determination to attack Germany.¹⁸ Communist theories took the diametrically opposed view, blaming Hitler and his 'fascist cohorts' for unleashing a war of unsurpassed aggression, supported all

¹⁴ Gerald Reitlinger, *The House Built on Sand. The Conflicts of German Policy in Russia 1939–45* (London, 1960), p. 10. E. M. Robertson stated that: 'Hitler seldom looked more than one move ahead; and the view that he had tried to put into operation a programme, carefully formulated in advance, is quite untenable.' E. M. Robertson, *Hitler's Pre-War Policy and Military Plans: 1933–1939* (London, 1963), p. 1. Even recent works have continued to reflect Taylor's thesis. Heinz Magenheimer considers the idea of Hitler harbouring preconceived plans as 'endeavours to explain a casual chain of incidents that extend over a long period and culminate in a multiple, complex combination of events, simply by pointing to statements made by one of the protagonists in the distant past'. Heinz Magenheimer, *Hitler's War. Germany's Key Strategic Decisions 1940–1945* (London, 1999), p. 42.

¹⁵ Hugh Trevor-Roper, 'A. J. P. Taylor, Hitler and the War' in *Outbreak of the Second World War: Design or Blunder?* (Boston, 1962), pp. 88–97. See also Hugh Trevor-Roper (ed.), *Hitler's War Directives 1939–1945* (London, 1964), pp. 13–14; Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1936–1945. Nemesis* (London, 2001), p. 336; Alan Bullock, *Hitler. A Study in Tyranny* (London, 1962), p. 594; Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews 1933–45* (London, 1987), p. 157; William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York, 1960), pp. 122–123, 1044.

¹⁶ Hillgruber, *Hitlers Strategie*.

¹⁷ See comments by Rolf-Dieter Müller in Rolf-Dieter Müller and Gerd R. Ueberschär, *Hitler's War in the East 1941–1945. A Critical Assessment* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 10–15.

¹⁸ Erich von Manstein, *Lost Victories* (Novato, 1958), pp. 154, 169–171, 181–182; Franz Halder, *Hitler as Warlord* (London, 1950), pp. 17, 22–23; Albrecht Kesselring, *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal Kesselring* (London, 1953), pp. 86–87; Walter Görlitz (ed.), *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal Keitel. Chief of the German High Command, 1938–1945* (New York, 1966), pp. 124 and 243. In counterpoint to these assertions see the helpful essay by Manfred Messerschmidt, 'June 1941 Seen Through German Memoirs and Diaries' in Joseph Wiczyński (ed.), *Operation Barbarossa. The German Attack on the Soviet Union June 22, 1941* (Salt Lake City, 1993), pp. 214–227.

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the while by western capitalist powers who accordingly were not seriously interested in containing Germany during the summer of 1939.¹⁹ Similarly, the post-war contributions of the German generals were depicted to be those of a self-serving clique, aimed at absolving their caste of guilt and restoring militarism to western Germany.²⁰

Hillgruber's study rejected both of these views in favour of a meticulous review of the available evidence which highlighted the dominance of an ideologically driven quest for 'living space' (*Lebensraum*) as the guiding principal of Nazi foreign policy. This set the tone for many instructive future studies, with the concept of an ideological interpretation interwoven with pragmatic considerations of the political and strategic kind,²¹ as Hillgruber himself had emphasised.

The acceptance among many historians of ideology as a fundamental component of Hitler's strategic outlook did not exclude occasional challenges from new revisionists, nor alter the unrelenting attitude of Soviet and East German historians more interested in the ardent adherence to entrenched dogma than historical truth.²² Debate also resurfaced with

¹⁹ Lev Besymenski, *Sonderakte Barbarossa. Dokumentarbericht zur Vorgeschichte des deutschen Überfalls auf die Sowjetunion – aus sowjetischer Sicht* (Reinbek, 1973); Hans Höhn (ed.), *Auf antisowjetischem Kriegskurs. Studien zur militärischen Vorbereitung des deutschen Imperialismus auf die Aggression gegen die UdSSR (1933–1941)* (Berlin, 1970); A. A. Gretschko (ed.), *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges 1939–1945, Volume II: Am Vorabend des Krieges* (East Berlin, 1975); P. A. Shilin, *Der Grosse Vaterländische Krieg der Sowjetunion, Volume I* (Berlin, 1975).

²⁰ Leach, *German Strategy Against Russia*, p. 2.

²¹ Gerd R. Ueberschär, 'Hitlers Entschluß zum "Lebensraum" – Krieg im Osten. Programmatisches Ziel oder militärstrategisches Kalkül?' in Gerd Ueberschär and Wolfram Wette (eds.), *Unternehmen Barbarossa. Der deutsche Überfall auf die Sowjetunion 1941* (Paderborn, 1984), pp. 83–110; Klaus Hildebrand, 'Hitlers "Programm" und seine Realisierung 1939–1942' in Manfred Funke (ed.), *Hitler, Deutschland und die Mächte. Materialien zur Außenpolitik des Dritten Reiches* (Düsseldorf, 1976), pp. 63–93; Klaus Hildebrand, *Deutsche Außenpolitik, 1933–1945. Kalkül oder Dogma?* 4th edn (Stuttgart, 1980); Gerhard Schreiber, 'Deutsche Politik und Kriegführung 1939 bis 1945' in Karl Dietrich Bracher, Manfred Funke and Hans-Adolf Jacobsen (eds.), *In Deutschland 1933–1945. Neue Studien zur nationalsozialistischen Herrschaft* (Bonn, 1992), pp. 333–356; Eberhard Jächel, *Hitlers Weltanschauung. Entwurf einer Herrschaft* (Stuttgart, 1991), Chapter 2, 'Die Eroberung von Raum'. In English the most valuable studies are those by Norman Rich, *Hitler's War Aims. Ideology, the Nazi State, and the Course of Expansion* (New York, 1972); Cecil, *Hitler's Decision to Invade Russia 1941*; Leach, *German Strategy Against Russia*; Gerhard Weinberg, *A World At Arms. A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge, 1994).

²² These views persisted in the Soviet Union up until its final years when Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika* decreed a new openness allowing fundamental change in the discourse of Soviet history. Central among these was the recognition of the secret protocols agreed to by Stalin in the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact. Curiously, the East German state opted not to partake in this new discussion choosing instead to hold doggedly to the long since discredited denial. Müller and Ueberschär, *Hitler's War in the East*, pp. 28, 31.