

## **"Anatomy of Evil". Plans, directives, orders of the military-political leadership of Nazi Germany for the occupation of the USSR**

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During the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945, peaceful Soviet citizens who found themselves in the hands of the occupiers became victims of the most terrible and widespread type of crime that did not yet have a name at the time (the term “genocide” itself only appeared in 1943). Nazi Germany and its satellites set themselves the task of not only the military defeat of the Soviet Union and the destruction of its state system, but also the “cleansing of the colonized territories” from the majority of the local population, while simultaneously enslaving the remaining residents. An unprecedented tragedy unfolded in the occupied Soviet territories: acts of monstrous terror and violence were committed on a massive scale. At the same time, the actions of the German occupation authorities were not random excesses of wartime, but the result of a systematic and planned state policy.

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The ideology on which the German occupation regime in the USSR was built is rooted in the theory and practice of European colonialism, and in the most cynical and inhumane interpretation. In essence, Nazi Germany was a natural result of the crystallization of the main features of the European colonial tradition, which was based on the concept of racial superiority, the thirst for conquest and genocide. The Nazi leadership professed a "racial theory" that divided humanity into a master race and a slave race and presented the entire world history as a struggle of races for survival.<sup>[1]</sup> These ideas were superimposed on the slogan of the German elites of the late 19th and first third of the 20th century about “living space” (German: *Lebensraum*) for the “territorially deprived” German people. The concept

of “living space” included the justification for conquests, economic exploitation of peoples and territories, the liberation of the best part of the conquered lands from the local population and their colonization by the Germans. An important role in these plans was played by the idea of a “push to the East”, characteristic of Germany, which was viewed as the barbaric Slavic periphery of Europe. It was there that the ideologists of German imperialism saw the opportunity to conquer their “German America/India”. To justify their aspirations, the Nazis promoted the idea that the Bolsheviks’ seizure of power in Russia was God’s indication of the direction of future conquests.<sup>[2]</sup>

At the same time, anti-communism was combined with anti-Semitism in Nazi propaganda, which gave rise to the image of a “Bolshevik Jew” who had seized power over the Slavic “subhumans,” and who became a symbol of the main threat to European civilization.

Germany’s mission was seen as protecting the Aryan (white) race from “subhumans”; and Europe from “Asian hordes” (Russians were presented as the heirs of the Huns and Mongols). The Wehrmacht was supposed to protect Europe from another invasion of barbarians from the East. As German propaganda minister J. Goebbels put it, “Russians are not people, but a bunch of animals... Bolshevism simply emphasized this racial peculiarity of the Russian people.”<sup>[3]</sup> At the same time, the campaign to the East was supposed to lead to the conquest of “living space,” as A. Hitler formulated it in *Mein Kampf*.

During the Second World War, the German leadership intended to achieve its long-term goals in the East by establishing military dominance up to the borders of Asia (up to the Ural meridian), plundering and large-scale colonization of the captured territories. This implied the destruction of the so-called “Jewish Bolshevism” (all forms of Soviet statehood) and the mass extermination of local residents. For the German leadership, the defeat of the USSR and the capture of the Eastern European space was a decisive stage in the struggle for world domination, since this would make it possible to create an economically invulnerable empire that would be able to wage a long war with Great Britain and the USA. Preparations for the fight against the Soviet Union were not limited to the development of a military strategy. Measures for the dismemberment of the USSR, the economic robbery and exploitation of its national wealth and natural resources, the enslavement and destruction of the Soviet population were planned in advance.

The published documents show that the German leadership carefully planned various aspects of future domination in the European part of the USSR. Archival materials clearly show that the war against the Soviet Union was initially a “war of extermination.” The German leadership issued directives in advance that exonerated military personnel and officials of any responsibility for possible crimes against the civilian population of the USSR. Thus, the Germans were actually encouraged to commit such crimes. With this approach, there were no restraining factors for the German occupation policy in principle, which inevitably had to result and did result in large-scale genocide of the local population.

Already in his speeches to the Wehrmacht leadership on July 21 and 31, 1940, A. Hitler, giving the order to prepare for war against the USSR, emphasized that it would be “the complete opposite of a normal war in the West and North of Europe,” since it envisaged not only the defeat of the enemy’s armed forces, but also “the destruction of Russia as a state,” with the Baltics, Belarus, and Ukraine to come under the direct control of Germany.<sup>[4]</sup> On December 5, during a discussion of the operation against the USSR, Hitler reaffirmed that “the goal of the operation is to destroy the life force of Russia. There must be no political entities left capable of rebirth.”<sup>[5]</sup> Speaking on January 9, 1941, before the highest ranks of the Wehrmacht, Hitler noted that as a result of the defeat of the USSR, Germany “will be invulnerable”: “The gigantic spaces of Russia contain innumerable riches. Germany must economically and politically take control of these spaces, but not annex them. In this way, it will have all the possibilities for waging a future struggle against the continents, then no one

will be able to defeat it anymore.”<sup>[6]</sup> .

During the meeting on March 30, 1941, A. Hitler expressed himself even more clearly. Viewing the upcoming war as a clash of two worldviews, he described Bolshevism as a "crime against society" and Communism as "an enormous danger to the future" and stressed the importance of abandoning the view of the enemy as a fellow soldier. "A Communist has never been and never will be our comrade. We are talking about a fight to the point of annihilation." Therefore, "the annihilation of Bolshevik commissars and the Communist intelligentsia" was envisaged. Once again emphasizing the difference between the war in the East and the war in the West, Hitler concluded that "in the East, cruelty itself is a blessing for the future."<sup>[7]</sup> The setting of "racial" goals in the war in the East (the extermination of the population in the conquered territories and the settlement of these territories by Germans) made it possible to politically and ideologically justify the very necessity of this war, to justify war crimes and motivate German soldiers, as well as to justify the policy of suppressing the resistance of conquered peoples in order to "guarantee" what was conquered. Such statements by the Führer gave rise to a whole series of corresponding military orders. Already on May 13, 1941, the directive "On military jurisdiction in the Barbarossa area and special powers of the troops" was issued, according to which German soldiers and officers were relieved of responsibility for future crimes in the occupied territory of the USSR, it was required to be merciless to Soviet citizens, to carry out reprisals on the spot without trial or investigation against anyone who showed even the slightest resistance. On May 19, the directive "On the behavior of troops in Russia" was issued, which prescribed resorting to "merciless and decisive actions against Bolshevik instigators, partisans, saboteurs, Jews and to suppress any attempt at active or passive resistance." On June 6, 1941, the "Directive on the treatment of political commissars" appeared, which provided for their immediate execution after capture.

Reichsführer SS G. Himmler also received special powers in the occupied territories, and was to act based on the idea of a "decisive struggle between two opposing political systems," i.e. to establish a brutal terrorist regime in the occupied territories. "Special tasks," the implementation of which was entirely transferred to the SS, and the "right" to act "independently and on its own responsibility" meant large-scale terror, robbery, violence, and the murder of prisoners of war and civilians. At the same time, a number of documents provided for close cooperation between the Wehrmacht and the SS. As early as April 28, 1941, the Commander-in-Chief of the Ground Forces, Field Marshal General W. Brauchitsch, issued an order on the "Procedure for the Use of the Security Police and SD in Ground Forces Units", which provided for the interaction of the command of the troops operating on the territory of the USSR with four specially formed Einsatzgruppen of the SD (A, B, C, D), which were entrusted with the implementation of terror against the population in the rear of the army. According to the German leadership, the Wehrmacht troops and the Einsatzgruppen were to intimidate and subjugate the population of the occupied regions by mercilessly exterminating its most active part - communists, Komsomol members, members of local councils, the intelligentsia, as well as Jews. Thus, the organizational foundations were laid for the implementation of the racist strategy of the systematic extermination of the population of the USSR.<sup>[8]</sup> .

In fact, such goals were not hidden. All these orders were communicated to the personnel of the troops intended for the war with the Soviet Union. Thus, in the issue of "Messages for the Troops", published by the military propaganda department of the OKW (Supreme Command of the Wehrmacht) in June 1941, the meaning of the war that had begun was quite openly stated: "The issue is to liquidate the red subhumanity embodied in the Moscow rulers. The German people are facing the greatest task of their history. The whole world will see that this task will be finally solved."<sup>[9]</sup> As a result, "every participant in the Wehrmacht's Eastern

Campaign knew that he was allowed to do anything and would not be brought before a military tribunal.”<sup>[10]</sup> .

Along with military plans, plans for the economic exploitation of Soviet territory were developed, which provided for “the adoption of all measures that were necessary for the immediate and best possible use of the occupied areas in the interests of Germany.” On April 28, 1941, under the leadership of G. Goering, the Main Economic Headquarters “East” was created, designed to ensure “unified management of the economy in the theater of military operations, as well as in the administrative areas that will be created later.”<sup>[11]</sup> . For the direct management of issues of economic use of the occupied regions of the USSR, the Wehrmacht's Directorate of Military Economy and Armaments, headed by Infantry General G. Thomas, created the special-purpose economic headquarters "Oldenburg" (renamed on June 25, 1941 as the economic headquarters "East"). The military economic services of the Wehrmacht were subordinate to this headquarters: economic inspectorates established under the rear command of army groups, economic teams under the security rear divisions, and economic groups under field commandant's offices.

As a result, a complex system of military-economic and state-monopoly bodies was created, aimed at robbing and using the economy of the occupied Soviet territories in the interests of Germany. The framework of this system was the military-economic bodies of the Wehrmacht, along with which prominent officials of German state institutions were active. This activity was guided by the "Directives for the management of the economy in the occupied eastern regions" (called "Goering's Green Folder" due to the color of the cover), developed by the Main Economic Staff "East". It was planned to organize on the territory of the USSR the extraction and import to Germany of those types of raw materials that were important for the functioning of the German military economy, primarily oil and food; to restore a number of factories for the purpose of repairing Wehrmacht equipment and producing certain types of weapons. Most of the Soviet industrial enterprises that produced peaceful products were supposed to be destroyed.<sup>[12]</sup> Plans for the economic exploitation of the territory of the USSR were linked to the need to continue the war with Great Britain and provided for the large-scale extraction of resources, which inevitably led to famine and an increase in the mortality rate of the Soviet population.

An important economic problem of the military campaign against the USSR was the issue of supplying the population of Germany with food<sup>[13]</sup> . As early as May 23, 1941, the general instructions of the Main Economic Staff "East" on agricultural policy indicated that the goal was "to supply the German armed forces, as well as to provide the German civilian population with food for many years." This was planned to be achieved by "reducing Russia's own consumption by cutting off any deliveries of surplus products from the southern black earth regions to the northern non-black earth zone," including Moscow and Leningrad. The developers of the document understood perfectly well that this would lead to the death of millions of people by starvation, but they did not intend to save the population from starvation "at the expense of supplying Europe." Moreover, it was proposed that after the Wehrmacht entered the northern non-black earth zone of Russia, a "one-time action to seize" the peasants' harvest and livestock, so that "it would not go to the Russian population."

Such plans fit well with the main goal of the German occupation policy – the liberation of the captured territory for German colonists. It was assumed that in the near future it would be possible to destroy about 30 million citizens of the USSR. For the long term, under the auspices of the Reichsfuehrer SS G. Himmler, who was also the Reich Commissioner for the Consolidation of the German People, the General Plan Ost was developed, which envisaged the resettlement of the population of all Eastern Europe to Western Siberia and the settlement of the liberated territory with a German-speaking population. It is possible that the word “resettlement” was a euphemism concealing the planned genocide. One of the original

versions of this plan, dated July 15, 1941, called for the removal of 80 to 85% of Poles and Lithuanians, 75% of Belarusians, 65% of the population of Western Ukraine, 50% of Estonians, Latvians, and Czechs from Eastern Europe over the course of 25 to 30 years – a total of 31 to 45 million people. Then, in April 1942, these figures were increased to 46–51 million. The territory of the RSFSR was to be turned into a colony of Germany, and its population “eradicated” or deported beyond the Urals. In the “shortest possible time,” it was intended to populate the Leningrad, Kherson, and Belostok regions, Crimea, and western Lithuania with Germans. Himmler approved this plan in principle, but demanded that it provide for the “total Germanization of Estonia, Latvia, and the General Government in Poland.”

These misanthropic plans paid special attention to the problem of the Russian people. In a document prepared on April 27, 1942 by one of the developers of the General Plan "Ost" E. Wetzel for G. Himmler, it was stated that without "complete destruction" or without weakening in various ways "the biological strength of the Russian people" it would not be possible to establish "German domination in Europe". "It is not only a question of defeating the state with its center in Moscow," he wrote. "Achieving this historical goal would never mean a complete solution to the problem. The point is most likely to defeat the Russians as a people, to disunite them."

Being confident of the rapid defeat of the Red Army, the German leadership decided in advance on the form of government in the occupied territories of the USSR. It was supposed to divide the Soviet territory into a number of so-called imperial commissariats (Reichskommissariats), the leaders of which (imperial commissars appointed from Berlin) were endowed with the powers of supreme authority with unlimited rights in relation to the civilian population. It was envisaged to pursue a policy aimed at the maximum isolation of the local population in each of these possessions from the inhabitants of other Reichskommissariats with the aim of inciting peoples against each other and splitting the Russian people into a number of separate ethnic groups. Such plans were based on the idea expressed by A. Hitler on March 17, 1941, that "the intelligentsia nurtured by Stalin must be destroyed. The administrative apparatus of the Russian state must be destroyed. The use of the most brutal violence is necessary on the territory of Great Russia. Ideological ties do not yet unite the Russian people strongly enough. They will be broken with the liquidation of the functionaries"<sup>[14]</sup>.

Initially, the territory of the USSR occupied by the Wehrmacht was to be controlled by the military command. The approximately fifty-kilometer frontline zone was divided into a combat zone (a twenty-kilometer strip from the front line) and an army rear area. Even further from the front line, at a depth of 360 to 500 km, rear operational areas of army groups were created. All power in these territories was in the hands of the military command, which was required to suppress any hint of resistance from the local population. For example, on March 5, 1942, the commander of the 1st Army Corps, General of the Cavalry F. Kleffel, issued an order according to which "any activity by civilians that benefits the enemy, and any type of activity that can harm the Wehrmacht (for example, storing enemy leaflets), must be punished by death. Given the special circumstances of this war, in many cases suspicion alone is enough for this."<sup>[15]</sup> The main organs of the Wehrmacht for carrying out terror against the local population and fighting the partisan movement were the Secret Field Police and the Abwehrkommandos operating in the rear areas.<sup>[16]</sup>

Having captured the Baltics, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, part of the Karelo-Finnish Republic, and a number of regions and territories of the RSFSR, the German authorities divided the occupied territory of the USSR into several parts. The entire occupied territory of the RSFSR was under the control of the military command of the Wehrmacht. In the areas of the Karelo-Finnish SSR, the occupation regime was carried out by the "Military Administration of



Eastern Karelia" created by the Finnish government. On August 1, 1941, part of Western Ukraine - the Lvov, Drohobych, Stanislaw and Ternopil regions - were included in the Polish "General Government", and the Bialystok region - in Germany. On August 30, 1941, the Chernivtsi region together with Bessarabia and the territory west of the Southern Bug River (the so-called "Transnistria") were transferred to Romania.

For the political administration of the western regions of the USSR, the Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories was created in Berlin on July 17, 1941, headed by A. Rosenberg. It had under its control the Reichskommissariats "Ostland" and "Ukraine", created on September 1, 1941. The first was created on the territory of the Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian SSRs and part of the Byelorussian SSR with the residence of Reich Commissioner Gauleiter G. Lohse in Riga. The second included part of the Byelorussian and Ukrainian SSRs with the residence of Reich Commissioner Gauleiter E. Koch in Rovno. Each Reichskommissariat had four main departments in charge of national and racial policy, religion, law, finances and taxes, industry, agriculture, transport and other issues. The Reichskommissariat Ostland was divided into four general commissariats – Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Belarus – headed by general commissars.

The occupation authorities destroyed all Soviet elected bodies of state power. Districts (gebiets) headed by gebietskommissars were introduced, who were mainly located in regional centers. In district centers, councils headed by burgomasters were appointed, in other populated areas - elders and headmen. The occupiers tried to create the appearance that power was in the hands of local civil administration bodies, but in fact all power belonged to the military field commandant's offices, which had military garrisons, punitive organs, and the police at their disposal; all burgomasters, elders, and headmen were subordinated to them. The occupation regime, the main method of which was crude and open violence, put Soviet people in a position of no rights. Executions, robbery, arson, rape, forced use of civilians during military operations, hostage taking and executions, forced mobilization into anti-Soviet formations, mass repressions against the population in the partisan zone – all this became everyday occurrences. Moreover, the perpetrators of crimes were not only the occupation authorities, but also individual military personnel and officials who acted on their own initiative and were confident that such actions would not be considered crimes by their superiors.

In order to organize control over the population and suppress its possible resistance, Reichsfuehrer SS G. Himmler divided the entire occupied territory of the USSR into 3 zones, which were headed by the highest leaders of the SS and police appointed by him, who coordinated the activities of the Gestapo, criminal police and SD<sup>[17]</sup>. In the northern zone, this position was occupied by SS-Gruppenführer G.-A. Prützmann, in the central zone by SS-Obergruppenführer E. von dem Bach (Zelewski), and in the southern zone by SS-Obergruppenführer F. Jeckeln. In October 1941, Prützmann and Jeckeln swapped places. SS structures operated throughout the occupied territory, regardless of whether these areas were under military or civilian control. Himmler's attitude toward the role of the SS in the USSR is clearly evident from his speech on 13 July 1941 to a group of SS men who were being sent as reinforcements to the SS Battle Group Nord in Finland: "This is a war of ideologies and a struggle of races. On one side stands National Socialism: an ideology based on the values of our German, Nordic blood. "There stands the world as we wish it to be: a beautiful, orderly, socially just world, a world which may still suffer from some shortcomings, but on the whole a happy, beautiful world, filled with culture, as Germany is. On the other side stands a people of 180 million, a mixture of races and peoples, whose names are unpronounceable and whose physical essence is such that the only thing that can be done with them is to shoot them without any pity or mercy."<sup>[18]</sup> . The most famous instrument for mass murder of the local population in the first year and a half of the war were the 4 Einsatzgruppen of the SD, which

destroyed at least 700 thousand to 1 million people. However, as research by modern German historians has shown, the German troops operating on the territory of the USSR carried out the criminal orders of their command en masse. In this sense, there was no fundamental difference between the actions of the Wehrmacht or the SS, as was often claimed in German historiography during the Cold War.<sup>[19]</sup> In general, the military, civil and police occupation authorities were inextricably linked parts of a single terrorist apparatus.

In order to break the resistance of the Soviet population, the German leadership relied on large-scale terror, which was supposed to intimidate local residents and lead to the physical destruction of large masses of people. In the war against the USSR, the German leadership did not take into account any norms of international law or the demands of human morality. So-called Sonderkommandos operated throughout the occupied territory, carrying out mass executions of Soviet citizens. The leaders of the teams were given the right to decide for themselves whether to burn villages, destroy or deport their inhabitants.

A widespread method of exterminating the Soviet population was the organization of famine in the occupied territories by confiscating food in order to establish supplies to Germany. The following means were used for this:

1. elimination of "excess" eaters (Jews, the population of large cities, who often did not receive food at all);
2. extreme reduction of food rations provided to the population of other cities;
3. reduction in consumption among the peasant population<sup>[20]</sup>.

The occupiers were interested in preserving the lives of the Soviet population only in the sense of using it to meet the needs of the war and to implement subsequent colonization plans. As a result, already in the late autumn of 1941, famine began in a significant part of the occupied regions. It particularly affected the population of large cities and regions consuming agricultural products, since the occupation authorities prohibited any kind of delivery from the supplier regions and deprived the population of the opportunity to use the railways, as well as other important means of transport. On November 13, 1941, the Quartermaster General (Chief of Logistics) of the Ground Forces, Major General E. Wagner, during a meeting with the Chief of the General Staff of the Ground Forces, Colonel General F. Halder in Orsha, stated that "the issue of supplying the civilian population with food is catastrophic... The population can only receive a pitiful minimum to maintain existence. At the same time, the situation in rural areas is more or less bearable. In contrast to this, the question of supplying food to large cities is completely insoluble."<sup>[21]</sup>

On November 25, 1941, Reichsmarschall G. Goering openly stated in a conversation with the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs G. Ciano that "this year, 20 to 30 million people will die of hunger in Russia. Perhaps this is even good, since the number of certain peoples must be reduced."<sup>[22]</sup> At the beginning of March 1942, J. Goebbels wrote in his diary: "The food situation in the occupied eastern regions is extremely difficult. Thousands and tens of thousands of people are dying of hunger there, which is of absolutely no interest to anyone."<sup>[23]</sup>

The catastrophic food supply situation was used by the occupation authorities as an additional means of forcing the population to work for the invaders for starvation rations. On August 5, 1941, labor service was introduced in the occupied territory of the USSR for all residents aged 18 to 45, and on August 16 - for the Jewish population aged 14 to 60. For this purpose, "labor detachments" were organized, and persons evading labor service were subject to severe punishment. Concentration camps created by the occupiers, where hundreds of thousands of arrested Soviet citizens were sent, also became a weapon of mass extermination of people. The prisoners were forced to work with such intensity and in such inhumane conditions that they soon died. In the captured areas, people were deprived of medical care, which contributed to the spread of various diseases.

The failure of the plan for a lightning war in the autumn of 1941 and the defeat of the Wehrmacht near Moscow led to the German leadership being faced with the problem of a shortage of labor in the economy and trying to solve it by forcibly deporting Soviet people to forced labor in Germany.<sup>[24]</sup> At the same time, this measure was to become another tool for weakening the biological potential of the Soviet people. Already in early November 1941, G. Goering gave the order to expand the use of the Soviet population for work in Germany. According to Goering's order of January 10, 1942, this policy took on a mass character. At first, Soviet prisoners of war were used for work, and then the civilian population of the occupied territories. To resolve the issue of attracting foreign workers to Germany, the Office of the General Plenipotentiary for the Use of Labor was created on March 21, 1942, headed by F. Sauckel. Already on April 20, he developed the first program for the recruitment of slaves, which assumed the import of 1.6 million people from the USSR through both voluntary recruitment and forced deportation. However, it turned out that the Soviet population was trying to avoid this misfortune. Under these conditions, the German authorities began to tighten measures for the deportation of the population and lower the age limit for potential workers. In total, 5,270 thousand people of the Soviet civilian population were taken to work in Germany in 1941-1944. At the same time, along with obtaining additional labor for military production, the German leadership received the opportunity to use forced labor to create conditions for the extinction of Soviet people. In total, 2,164 thousand people of those taken to work in Germany died.<sup>[25]</sup>

The failures of the Wehrmacht, the atrocities of the occupiers, hunger and deprivation contributed to the growth of the partisan movement. From the very beginning of the war, German troops, conducting military operations against the partisans, whom they officially called bandits, widely used mass terror. As a rule, in cases of actions by resistance fighters, all those suspected of sympathizing with the partisans and the entire male population of the area were shot. From the end of 1942, the local population captured during anti-partisan operations began to be sent to labor concentration camps. Thousands of villages were destroyed, their population was exterminated, driven into forced labor. From the beginning of 1943, labor camps for children were established, who were used for agricultural work. In the anti-partisan war, the Wehrmacht and SS troops closely interacted, which was regulated by relevant orders. The occupiers widely involved various collaborationist formations in the fight against the partisans, while at the same time trying to set the different peoples of the USSR against each other.<sup>[26]</sup>

At the beginning of 1943, the German leadership attempted to achieve increased support from the local population by making some changes to propaganda in the occupied Soviet territories<sup>[27]</sup> According to J. Goebbels's order, it was necessary to refrain from openly colonialist and exploitative statements, and to emphasize the "liberation mission" of the Wehrmacht in the fight against Bolshevism. In this situation, the occupation authorities began to practice secret arrests at night. During mass raids and searches, they tried to emphasize that they were arresting only communists, and that citizens who were not involved in politics were supposedly not being touched. The occupiers began to hold meetings of residents, at which Nazi propagandists declared that the German authorities strictly prohibited the robbery and murder of civilians. However, the actual practice of the occupation authorities was too noticeably at odds with such statements...

After the defeat of the German troops at Stalingrad, the occupation authorities received orders to implement a "scorched earth" policy during the retreat - targeted measures to weaken the USSR military and economically. The German command had first taken such measures during the retreat near Moscow. Thus, on December 21, 1941, the OKW issued an order which, in particular, prescribed:

“4. Rear detachments and rearguards are to carry out (under the strictest guidance from the



relevant commanders!):

- a) destruction (arson) of all populated areas. Use special teams to set fire to villages located away from the escape routes;
- b) destruction of available means of transport and livestock;
- c) destruction or rendering unusable all available products"<sup>[28]</sup>.

At the end of 1942, the headquarters of the economic leadership "East" developed evacuation instructions, which prescribed the removal in advance from the threatened areas of everything that could be useful to the German economy and the complete destruction of everything that could not be removed, primarily various structures and communication routes.<sup>[29]</sup> Based on A. Hitler's order No. 4 of February 14, 1943, the occupation authorities began a mass expulsion of the population along with the retreating troops, seeking to deprive the USSR of human resources.<sup>[30]</sup> Speaking to the command staff of the SS units on April 24, 1943, H. Himmler openly explained to them the meaning of the "scorched earth" policy. The Reichsführer SS shamelessly shared with his comrades what fate awaited the "Russian people": "Either they must be taken to Germany and become its labor force, or perish in battle. And to leave people to the enemy so that he would again have labor and military force, this would, I believe, be, by and large, absolutely wrong. This should not be allowed under any circumstances. And if this line of extermination of people is consistently carried out in the war, which I am convinced of, then the Russians will lose their strength and bleed to death already during this year and next winter."<sup>[31]</sup>

The deported population was used both for work in Germany and for defensive work in the occupied areas of the USSR. They, including women and children, were assigned to perform all kinds of work to serve the retreating German troops, including clearing roads, delivering food to dugouts and trenches under fire. On February 6, 1943, the OKH (High Command of the Ground Forces) published an order on labor service and the involvement of the population in military work in the frontline zone. For this purpose, work camps and work companies were created under German protection. They were assigned to collect trophies, load and unload work, clear the territory of mines, repair roads, and build military fortifications. In the summer of 1944, the German authorities decided to deport children from Soviet territory to Germany from 10 to 14 years old.<sup>[32]</sup> In addition, the Nazis practiced hijacking 15-year-old teenagers, who were used to work in industry and as auxiliary personnel in the Air Force. In this way, it was planned to reduce the military power of the enemy, undermine its biological resources for the future, and also put pressure on adults, forcing them to voluntarily evacuate along with the retreating Wehrmacht troops. Naturally, such measures only increased the resistance of the Soviet population. In response, the German occupation authorities in 1943-1944 further expanded the use of the death penalty. A widespread repressive measure was the burning of settlements, often along with residents who did not want to evacuate.<sup>[33]</sup> Many of the concentration camps for the population driven from their homes were located in the frontline zone in order to hinder the offensive operations of the Red Army. In these camps, mostly disabled women, children and old people were kept in inhumane conditions. Various epidemics often broke out in them, leading to the death of prisoners and posing a threat to the residents of the surrounding area.

The events of the Great Patriotic War cannot be fully understood without taking into account the Nazis' extermination policy against the multinational people of the USSR and the prospects they were preparing for the Soviet people. It is still not known exactly how many civilians were killed in various ways in the occupied territories. Estimates of the total number of victims of the Nazi genocide in the works of modern researchers are in the range of 15.9–17.4 million Soviet citizens.<sup>[34]</sup> Thus, the majority of war victims were people deliberately destroyed during the implementation of the pre-planned occupation policy of Nazi Germany and its satellites.

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