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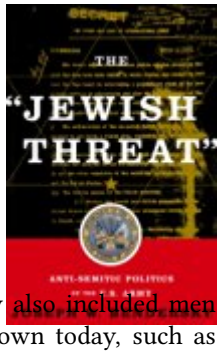
Joseph W. Bendersky. *The "Jewish Threat:" Anti-Semitic Politics of the U.S. Army.* New York: Basic Books, 2000. 560 pp. $30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-465-00617-5.



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"For years we have been breeding and accumulating a mass of inferior people, still in the minority it is true, but tools ready at hand for those seeking to strike at the very vitals of our institutions. Liberty is a sacred thing, but…it ceases to be liberty when under its banner minorities force their will on the majority." – General George Van Horn Moseley (West Point 1899; War College 1911), 1932

During World War II, I began my basic training while the Battle of the Bulge raged. Men who had just completed their training at Florida's Camp Blanding, where I was stationed, got brief delays-in-route to go home, traveled to the Ardennes as infantry replacements, and were dead within days. Reports about Jewish troops always being among the first sent up front drifted back. I never learned the truth of this, but I did learn that that part of the Army I experienced resembled the overall population in its attitudes toward Jews. In the mid-1930s, *Fortune* had said that a third of Americans were anti-Semitic, a third were pro-Semitic, and a third couldn't care less. Blanding's officers came out of the National Guard and officer candidate schools and, like the majority of trainees, were from farm or working class families. Anti-Semitic incidents occurred, but the major concern of people in the camp, both officers and men, was how to survive the war. It was not how much to hate Jews.

Except for a section of one chapter, the United States Army that Joseph W. Bendersky describes before, during, and just after World War II consisted of senior commanders with whom Blanding's officers and trainees would never have had personal contact. They included elite West Point graduates, many of whom also attended the prestigious War College, and such superstars as Mark Clark, Dwight Eisenhower, Douglas MacArthur, George Marshall, and George Patton. They also included men whose names are not generally known today, such as Moseley, who counseled this elite corps of officers.

Nearly all had lower middle-class Anglo-Saxon Protestant backgrounds and grew up in small towns. In their youth, the Army, like the Navy, had offered them what few other institutions had offered, a free education. In peacetime, promotion was slow and pay was minimal. During World War II, rapid advancement depended on plum assignments, which in turn depended on whether or not the chief of staff, Marshall, had noticed them in peacetime. Competition in both peacetime and wartime was bitter, especially for a general's stars, and it was essential to be considered a true believer in whatever senior commanders thought right and reasonable.

What does Bendersky tell us was "thought right and reasonable"?

SCIENTIFIC RACISM

From the turn of the twentieth century, attitudes toward immigrant groups in general and blacks and Jews, in particular, were exacerbated by the "scientific racism" promoted by Social Darwinists. The essential understandings of this philosophy were that various races had evolved through natural selection into distinct groupings, like plants and animal species. Differences between races in physique and appearance were outward manifestations of inherited and unalterable characteristics. Neither education nor improved social circumstances could significantly alter these characteristics.

Before World War I, West Point cadets had direct exposure to Social Darwinian theories through assigned readings. They discovered that a "harsh and cruel" strug-

gle for survival had to be waged to preserve the Aryan branch of the "dominant" white race. Jews had contributed the "true religion" of monotheism, but unlike Aryans, Jews had not "been the planters of new nations; and they have never attained a high intellectual development, or that progress in political freedom, in science, art, and literature, which is the glory of the Aryan Nations."

Given such intellectual baggage, it will come as no surprise to Bendersky's readers that a particular problem that exercised cadets and the officers who instructed them was Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe between the 1880s and the 1920s. The Jews, it was feared, carried seeds of radical subversion. They had an "unscrupulous ambition for leadership" and their group included an inordinate number of "the born talker, writer, and agitator," who fomented revolution.

In the way of solutions to the problem, assimilation was not seen as evena dim possibility. "Our democratic institutions and ideals meant little" to newcomers, wrote Isaiah Bowman in *New World Problems in Geography* (1924). Loyalties went to the old country, to which immigrants retained ties by deliberately segregating themselves in congregated ethnic slums of great cities.

Briefly put, Eastern European immigrants had transplanted age-old political and ethnic strife to America, besides fostering degrees of divisiveness and radicalism that endangered democracy itself.

COMMUNISM MUST NOT TRIUMPH

Bendersky explains that matters came to a head in 1917, when revolution in Russia, the collapse of the czarist regime, and Lenin's assumption of power confirmed for the officer corps not only the immediacy of the radical threat but the incredible power of Jews: They might appear poverty-stricken but they could bring down governments by inciting the masses. Jewish commitment to the United States, even among members of the long-established American Jewish community, was considered superficial at best. Whether a Jew was nonpolitical, Socialist, Bolshevik, or Zionist made no difference. Officers believed that "this thing we term Christian civilization is something alien to [the Jew]. He would readily welcome a new social order with enthusiasm and erect a new altar to an unknown God," as Philip Brown wrote in the pages of the January 1919 issue of the *North American Review*.

Alarmists pointed not only to a supposed connection between Jews and Bolshevism, but to a connection between international Jewish solidarity and Zionism, which was also perceived as a threat to American values. In late 1918, delegations of prominent American Jews had gone to the Paris Peace Conference to promote fulfillment of the Balfour Declaration's promise of a Jewish homeland in Palestine and had sought treaty guarantees of minority rights (especially for Jews) in the newly created states in Central and Eastern Europe. In testimony before the Senate Overman Committee on Bolshevism on February 12, 1919, the Reverend George Simons held Lower East Side Jews responsible for the Bolshevik Revolution. By the fall of 1918, Colonel John M. Dunn, chief of the Military Intelligence Department's Positive Branch, had read *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Dunn flatly refused to accept the document at face value, but he felt that it suggested some kind of authentic conspiratorial scheme.

Dunn's incipient paranoia was one example of the anti-Semitic panic that swept the War Department when it contemplated the specter of "International Jewry". Everything possible had to be done to prevent Jews and Bolsheviks from a final triumph – the overthrow of capitalism throughout the world. Preventing Soviet forces from breaking through Poland into Central Europe was left to French generals and Polish levies, but Washington sent observers. American officers personally saw pogroms, then tried to downplay or deny their occurrence for the reason that democracies must concentrate on winning a holy war against communism and not confuse the faithful with stories about gratuitous brutality and murder.

The advent of the Third Reich presented new problems in the war against Soviets. On the one hand, there was contempt for Nazis who had taken power. The officer corps had admired its German counterpart in the Second Reich, but it did not admire thugs who wore brown SA or black SS uniforms. On the other hand, there was Berlin's determination to crush the Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy mixed with alarm that persecution of German Jews might become a factor in American foreign policy.

Bendersky argues persuasively that this last concern blended with serious reservations about Franklin D. Roosevelt. Albeit Roosevelt had his defenders among officers, opinions generally ranged from aversion to disdain and loathing for him, especially on the part of the older generation of officers. The New Deal was seen to bring various anti-American tendencies into the political mainstream, and, indeed, to the seat of government. Reds and Pinks favored allowing refugees to enter the United States. As if the possibility of floods of refugees were not

bad enough, the Army resented massive funding of New Deal social programs. How strongly it felt about matters can be judged by the wife of Colonel Truman Smith, who years later recounted in a published diary the "exultation" and "fierce delight" in her husband's social circle upon hearing news of Roosevelt's death.

PRESERVING THE WAR EFFORT

Many of the topics that Bendersky covers next, Army anti-Semitic biases during World War II, have been written about from the perspectives of Jewish organizations such as the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). That is, we know how Washington's policies first baffled and then, as the truth gradually became known, angered Christians as well as Jews interested in learning what was happening because they wanted to address developments. What we didn't know until this book was how the officer corps interpreted and reacted to policies intended to deal with genocide.

Tragically, fifth-column hysteria conjured up by Roosevelt and others to bolster the case for American intervention in Europe had long since become a major obstacle in efforts to assist refugees. J. Edgar Hoover pushed the idea of German-Jewish agents infiltrating refugee ranks, an idea that caused confusion at relief agencies. The Director of Naval Intelligence thought there existed "convincing proof" that the JDC served as a vehicle for infiltrating those engaged in "espionage and sabotage for the Axis powers." The War Refugee Board later estimated that in 1943 only 11,737 refugees were admitted, while 142,142 quota slots went unfilled.

Paranoia in Washington increased when by the winter of 1943 it became impossible not to know that Hitler intended to destroy every Jew in Europe. Thousands of American Jews and sympathetic Christians demanded action to rescue those people not yet in death camps.

Their outlook greatly disturbed General George V. Strong, an ex-cavalryman and G-2 (Intelligence) chief from 1942 to 1944. The general feared that political activities by New York Jews might determine post-war American policy on Palestine. He wrote Marshall on March 4, 1943, regarding the "paramount…political and military repercussions" of a recent demonstration that he attributed to "an increasing amount of political agitation by highly organized militant minorities both in England and the United States."

Three days earlier, 75,000 Christians and Jews had crowded into and around Madison Square Garden for a "Stop Hitler Now" rally. They demanded action to "halt the liquidation of Europe's Jews." Strong was determined to prevent another rally the following week. "If allowed to take place [it] will blow the lid on the Jewish-Arab question and align the Arabs in North Africa and the Middle East against us, possibly under the guise of a holy war." Nonethless, the event took place on March 9, and 40,000 people gathered in Madison Square Garden for a dramatic pageant, a "mass memorial to the two million Jews killed in Europe." But it did not lead to demands by Washington to stop the slaughter.

Meanwhile, the slaughter might have been diminished had rail lines to Auschwitz or the death camp itself been bombed. In 1944, the first arguments for such actions coincided with the Normandy invasion, and it was understandable that America's senior commanders pleaded preoccupation with current and future battles in France. But given these circumstances, the Army was less than candid. The Eighth Air Force in England was fully committed, but the Fifteenth Air Force in Italy, which could also reach Auschwitz, was not committed to operations in Northern Europe.

With the successful completion of the Normandy campaign, by August 1944, 127 flying fortresses, escorted by 100 Mustang fighters, bombed thefactory areas of Auschwitz, less than five miles to the east of the gas chambers. Nonetheless, the Army continued to advise it wasimpractical to bomb the death camp, adding a new twist to the story: bombings would inflict more suffering on camp inmates. Finally, the only reason offered up with a straight face not to bomb was that all military forces – including bombers – must be used to defeat Germany as quickly as possible. This reason did not ring responsive bells everywhere, given that as German might diminished there were fewer and fewer targets left within the Reich to bomb.

In theory, FDR's January 1944 issuance of Executive Order 9417, creating a War Refugee Board, should have forced the Army to at least attempt to rescue prospective victims from danger zones. Yet, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr.'s, attempts to involve the army in rescue efforts met with instant obstruction. Through indifference, evasion, and inaction, senior commanders defied the spirit as well as the letter of presidential directives. The Army had earlier consistently maintained that it lacked sufficient transport. In the spring of 1944, it finally conceded that it had "ample shipping" available for evacuating refugees. It now justified its opposition to rescue attempts on grounds that no havens existed to

resettle refugees.

POST-WAR EUROPE

Bendersky relates the story of an American major serving in Austria who never could grasp why Jewish displaced persons might loot surrounding areas. "These people," he concluded, "think that once they have been in a concentration camp they are eligible for all good things in life." A Jewish officer elsewhere began to feel and see a change in attitudes in the American military towards refugees and displaced persons, especially Jews, as early as a month after the war. Even United Nations personnel described displaced persons, and especially Jews, as "scum, dirty, filthy people...."

The quintessential post-war officer trying to set the tone for officer corps outlooks policies was none other than George Patton who sported pearl-handled .45 automatics, liked to present himself as a sophisticated man of action (he considered himself an authority on wines), greatly admired Germans, and thought Soviets posed an immediate racial threat to white Western civilization. Patton characterized Russians as a Mongolian race of savages and completely discounted the explanation that many Jewish survivors had taken on certain patterns of behavior to stay alive; for them, recovery from unspeakable trauma and dehumanization would be long and difficult. Equally bad, thought Patton, "practically all of [the Jews] had the flat brownish gray eye common among the Hawaiians which, to my mind, indicates very low intelligence."

Patton became indignant over Washington's economic plans for postwar Germany "promulgated by Morgenthau," which were "unrealistic" "undemocratic" and "practically Gestapo methods". He also wrote repeatedly about the plot by "Jews and Communists" to remove him and any other officer who stood in the way of their destructive plans for Germany. On the other hand, why let Jews in on what he suspected? To an admiring letter from a Roosevelt adviser, Bernard Baruch, Patton replied, "I cannot understand who had the presumption to attribute to me anti-Semitic ideas which I certainly do not possess."

CAN ANTI-SEMITISM IN THE AMERICAN ARMY DURING WORLD WAR II EVER BE FULLY COVERED?

Bendersky offers a well-written and thorough study of the outlooks of the Regular Army on Jews during most of the 20th century. For the overwhelming majority of officers and men who served in the Army of the United States between 1941 and 1945, however, these commanders were so remote that they may as well have directed operations from Mars. From a military perspective, they were responsible for strategic and not for tactical decisions. From a political perspective, they had sworn loyalty to the Constitution and theoretically could not engage in statecraft.

So far as we know today from official histories, involvement by Jewish soldiers never figured in senior commanders' planning of campaigns. The Pentagon ordered divisions into combat based on readiness to fight and proximity to fronts, not on how many Jews or gentiles might be involved. Replacements went to units that required them, regardless of their religious beliefs.

At tactical levels, especially at company level, things could be very different. Who got to be the point man in a patrol or a probing attack was usually a matter of taking turns, but it could also be a matter of choice by a non-com or junior officer who decided on the spot which man was or was not essential. We will never learn how often and by whom Jews (or gentiles, for that matter) might have been singled out for near-certain death. World War II veterans are now said to be dying at the rate of a thousand a day, and faulty memories are not unusual among those of us still alive. So far as I know (or, evidently, Bendersky knows), the Pentagon conducted no studies of this issue.

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