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**The Triumph of Ideology over Intelligence**

In the twelve years of Nazi Germany’s existence, various entities jockeyed for power, from the initially more conservative bastions of the army and foreign ministry to the increasingly radical Nazi Party and the SS. Driving the latter—and initiating the mass murder of European Jewry—was the Reichssicherheitsamt, or RHSA. Names such as Heinrich Himmler, Reinhard Heydrich, or Ernst Kaltenbrunner evoke images of true ideological warriors, determined to destroy root and branch Germany’s alleged “racial” enemies in various genocidal campaigns. One high-ranking RSHA leader, however, emerged from the war with a reputation as a pragmatic leader, working to dull the violent initiatives of his superiors. SS-Brigadeführer Walter Schellenberg, head of Office IV, the political foreign intelligence service of the RSHA, crafted his own narrative of his war time experiences, one that emphasized his work as mere expressions of a patriotic desire to serve and protect Germany. In her meticulous study of Schellenberg and Office IV, Katrin Paehler, however, explores this narrative. Exploiting newly uncovered and declassified documents in Russia and the United States respectively, Paehler provides a compelling reading of Schellenberg’s career, one in which “careerism, opportunism, [and] ambition” combined with an ideological commitment to the Nazi worldview, allowed him to reach the heights of power (p. 345). By analyzing both Schellenberg and Office IV in a book she describes “as a braid of two strands—one biographical and the other institutional,” Paehler presents an interpretation of the shadowy Schellenberg that restores the primacy of ideology to his career (p. 18).

Several primary themes thread their way throughout the book. First, Schellenberg’s rapid rise to a commanding position within the SS in his early thirties reflected his skill at making himself indispensable to its highest echelons. His first powerful patron was Heydrich, head of the SD (Sicherheitsdienst, or the intelligence branch of
Paehler provides a detailed discussion of the struggle between Heydrich and Werner Best over the type of leadership desired for the Nazi state. While Schellenberg instinctually leaned towards Best’s belief in the necessity of jurists for bureaucratic positions of power, he eventually swung behind Heydrich’s vigorous advocacy for political soldiers. As Paehler notes, the episode displayed one of Schellenberg’s most prominent attributes: an ability to recognize who would be more likely to assist his career. Following Heydrich’s assassination in 1942, he gravitated to Himmler, becoming his “golden boy” (p. 156), and it was with the Reichsführer’s support that he reached the pinnacle of his power. Schellenberg proved to be a skilled bureaucratic operator.

Second, the institutional in-fighting that characterized the Third Reich’s domestic politics also marked that of the SD. Vague mandates, personal rivalries, duplication of effort, and contradictory policies all hamstrung both Office IV and the ability of the Nazi state to generate useful intelligence. Office IV appears especially amateurish due to its focus on ideological matters. In a chapter on SD intelligence operations in Italy, Paehler details a series of errors, missteps, and self-inflicted wounds that resulted in a “resounding failure” (p. 217). The clashes between various German intelligence agencies in the Axis ally was one problem; the largest one, however, centered on Office IV’s inability to recruit useful assets on the ground. Relying almost exclusively on German nationals or ethnic Germans, the SD never penetrated the Italian government or society. Locked into a political-ideological worldview that corresponded to their status as Germans, these “homogenous provincials” merely reinforced the ideological beliefs of the leadership in their reports (p. 21). In other words, Office IV “always found what [it] came looking for: explanations in sync with basic Nazi ideology” (p. 260).

This leads to Paehler’s third and most important theme: the importance of ideology. She argues that “ideology was the prism through which the personnel of the service conceived, executed, and evaluated their work, and this ideological prism seriously—and on every level—fractured and distorted their view of the world and its realities” (p. 20). Though Schellenberg himself did not appear to be a raving ideological warrior, he nonetheless felt more than comfortable in the Nazi milieu and understood the importance of ideology in forging ahead. In the conflict between Best and Heydrich, for example, Schellenberg became the latter’s point man, sketching out an ideological vision for the state. In his war of memorandums with Best, Schellenberg outlined what served as the foundation for the creation of the RSHA in 1939. Heydrich’s vision of “an unambiguously National Socialist policing and surveillance entity that understood its tasks political, fought the ideologically and racially defined enemy, and was unimpeded by any judicial norms” was realized, and Schellenberg played a key role in articulating this vision (p. 74).

Schellenberg also proved pivotal to the deployment of the Einsatzgruppen, the shock troops of Hitler’s genocidal war. Alongside Adolf Eichmann, Schellenberg entered Austria on the day of the Anschluß with a list of potential opponents to be neutralized, establishing the model for future Einsatzgruppen activities. He was deeply involved in preparations for the SS units’ activities in Czechoslovakia and participated in a meeting in July 1939 that delineated the more murderous goals for the Einsatzgruppen in the upcoming Polish campaign. Most damningly, he was the RSHA negotiator with the army in preparation for the invasion of the Soviet Union, and it was his draft that served as the basis for the final agreement between the two institutions. In his memoirs, Schellenberg claimed that he left the room before a secret Führer order was discussed; this order clearly called for the murder of adult male Jews from the opening days of the campaign. Paehler’s discussion of this event—and Schellenberg’s post-
war claims—lays bare his complicity in Germany's genocidal war.

Paehler's most intriguing arguments concerns Schellenberg's hopes for Office IV. Underfunded, poorly led and staffed, and with no specific mission, Office IV (and its predecessors) failed their assigned task of foreign intelligence. When Schellenberg assumed control of the department in June 1941, he immediately began working toward the creation of a “new, integrated approach to counterintelligence and intelligence” (p. 84) that would be “all-encompassing and able to go beyond anything any other state authority could accomplish” (p. 174). As Paehler makes clear, Schellenberg looked to turn Office IV into a clearinghouse that would move well past traditional intelligence activities with hopes of transforming it into a foreign service appropriate for the Third Reich. Once again, ideology served both as the means to curry favor with the highest levels of the SS leadership and as an organizing principle. Under Schellenberg's direction, Office IV began a turf war with first the Abwehr, the military's intelligence service, and then the Foreign Ministry. In both cases, Schellenberg's goal was to consume his rival and create a “total political intelligence service” that would conduct a more Nazified policy than the traditional institutions (p. 353). While Schellenberg successfully defeated the Abwehr, the Foreign Ministry proved a much tougher nut to crack, due to Hitler's support of Ribbentrop.

Perhaps the most striking example of Schellenberg's ideological worldview centered on the frantic negotiations that began in late 1943 but culminated in spring 1945 to end the war. Not only did these clandestine machinations demonstrate his desire to control German foreign policy, but his belief that Jews held the key to ending the war highlighted his acceptance of Nazi antisemitism. In his negotiations with representatives from the United States or other countries, Schellenberg used the lives of Jewish concentration camp inmates as bait for his ultimate goal of ending the war. As Paehler adroitly notes, his “plan to use Jews to gain the goodwill of the Western Allies—and Washington in particular—sits at the center of anti-Semitic beliefs in the existence of a Jewish World Conspiracy” (p. 349). So even in the phase of his career when his actions seem very pragmatic, they were grounded in a Nazi worldview.

Paehler’s portrayal of Schellenberg fits into recent historiographical trends that have examined both the Third Reich within the context of ideology's primacy and the careers of second-rank leaders. Her discussion of the SD's labyrinth organization is generally clear, though this reader would have found useful several more charts like that in the appendix peppered throughout the book to help clarify its evolving structure. Despite this quibble, Paehler’s book provides an excellent corrective to the myth of Schellenberg that emerged after the war, as well as offering a detailed look at why German intelligence repeatedly failed both before and during the war.
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