

HITLER SPEAKS — MAYBE

Hitler's Second Book

Edited by Gerhard L. Weinberg; Translated by Krista Smith

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Reviewed by Jerry Woodruff

There are plenty of reasons to approach *Hitler's Second Book* with some trepidation, not the least of which is that the author didn't intend for the manuscript, which is about National Socialist foreign policy, to see the light of day.

Dictated in 1928 when Hitler was thirty-nine and the struggling National Socialist German Workers' Party held only 12 of the Reichstag's 401 seats, the untitled manuscript apparently never underwent any editing, corrections, or revisions. During the war, it was locked away in a safe in Obersalzberg until conquering American troops seized it in 1945 and spirited it away along with millions of pages of other captured German documents to be archived in Alexandria, Virginia.

The book is therefore obviously unfinished. Some passages are only incomplete phrases such as "In the" or "For it," while throughout the text, references to population figures are left blank, apparently to be filled in after research. Even the chapter numbers and headings that appear in the published version are those of the editor, Gerhard L. Weinberg.

In the absence of Hitler's editing and approval, we cannot really be sure the raw text accurately reflects his intended meaning at the time it was dictated, much less that it conveys his views after he became chancellor five years later. Weinberg says there is evidence that it was dictated directly to the typist because a comma or period frequently occurs after a space at the end of a word, as if the typist were waiting for the next word before realizing the sentence or phrase was complete. Because the manuscript contains no editing marks by Hitler, it is not known whether the typist might have inadvertently recorded some words inaccurately, or if Hitler ever read the typed manuscript at all.

TRoublesome Translation

Equally troublesome is the translation itself, by Krista Smith, who is given no identification beyond her name. Many sentences and phrases are presented so awkwardly

one gets the feeling that the translation is designed to present Hitler's words—and thus, their author—in the most unflattering light possible.

At one point, even an obvious typing error is left standing in the English translation. On page 101, we are expected to believe that Hitler referred to "Bolshevikists," which the editor follows with the bracketed notation [sic], to let you know that's how the word appears in the original manuscript. It is simply inconceivable that Hitler, the practiced orator who frequently referred to "bolshevists," could have not known the proper political label. A more sensible editor or translator would have simply corrected the typist's error.

The translator seems to prefer the longest or most unusual English words or construction wherever possible. For example, Miss Smith has Hitler telling the reader that self-preservation and continuity are the major human drives as long as the body "can lay claim to healthiness," instead of "can claim to be healthy." Another unusual rendering is the phrase translated as "the self-preservation drive." The more conventional construction in English would be "survival instinct" or "instinct (or drive) for self-preservation." The positioning of "self-preservation" as a modifier for "drive" sounds irregular in common English usage.

Those examples are not just the quibbles of a fussy reviewer but details of what seems to be a larger plan. In her "translator's note," Miss Smith explains that she is pursuing a goal different from what one might expect from a good-faith translation effort. The intent in publishing the manuscript, she says, "is not simply to communicate the content in a concise and accurate manner, but to help illuminate the character and ideas of a significant twentieth-century figure." (She adds that her translation was checked against the original text by editor Weinberg, a native of Germany.)

Thus, to "illuminate the character" of the author, Miss Smith avoids smoothing out the German language's typically more complex syntax, or correcting routine grammatical errors that would naturally occur during oral dictation, or using a normal English construction for German phrases.

"Thus, to maintain a reasonable degree of authenticity..." she insists, "it was essential to preserve as much as possible of the original style—including excessive wordiness, ambiguous pronoun references, mid-sentence changes in verb tense, and the occasional barely intelligible fragment." (People who complain of "excessive wordiness" rather than mere wordiness may have their own issues of verbosity to resolve.)

Miss. Smith says that "Hitler could certainly be eloquent at times," but that eloquence has escaped her cumbersome translation. Her version does, however, seem to provide the support needed for Weinberg to engage in the usual puerile sneering that mars so many other works about Hitler. In his introduction, he calls the manuscript "rambling" and "repetitive." But Weinberg's obligatory sneer isn't justified. On the contrary, for a book of over two hundred pages derived from an author's dictation—over three weeks at the average rate of some 10 pages per day "as if he were making a speech," says Weinberg—it is remarkably coherent and well-organized.

That digressions and repetitions occur in an unedited, dictated draft should surprise no one.

GERMAN VOLK AND THE ETHNIC STATE

More disturbing than those annoyances, however, is the occasional — and perhaps deliberate — mistranslation. In Hitler's preface, Miss Smith has him using the word "racist," although it is almost certain that the word actually used was "völkisch." Like "sexist," the word "racist" was invented in the postwar era as a term of opprobrium by the left in an effort to discredit and categorize political opponents. The German word *rassist* was probably unknown to Hitler (or any other political activist in 1928) and has quite a different meaning from völkisch. Used throughout *Mein Kampf*, völkisch refers to the advocacy of the interests of German ethnicity, whose identity includes racial characteristics, but which is not exclusively defined by them. Völkisch carries connotations of a common language, culture, soul, and rootedness-in-nature that the word "racist" alone does not. As Hitler makes clear in this book, he believed the English and the Americans, for example, possessed some of the same type of Nordic racial elements as the Germans, but he did not regard them as part of the German *Volk*.

Miss Smith's aversion to völkisch appears in other forms as well. In her hands, Hitler often refers to an "ethnic viewpoint" or to an "ethnic community" where völkisch or Volk seems to have been the more likely usage. In chapter six, for example, where Hitler discusses problems associated with the diplomatic successes of Bismarck, he questions the wisdom of incorporating non-Germans from Alsace-Lorraine and Poland into the Reich. Comparing his own views with the policies of what he calls the "bourgeois nationalists," Hitler is translated by Miss Smith as follows: "The ethnic state, in contrast, could under absolutely no circumstances annex Poles with the intention of turning them into Germans one day."

From the translation alone, it is not clear why an "ethnic state" could not Germanize Poles. But had Miss Smith rendered the translation as "völkisch state," the idea is clearer. The notion of a German völkisch state was, of course, the very core of National Socialist politics, and the whole reason for Hitler's political life. The Weinberg-Smith translation seems to show no understanding of the völkisch philosophy Hitler advocated.

But that's not terribly surprising given Weinberg's penchant for regurgitating the silly wartime propaganda that prevents a more intelligent understanding of his subject. A common theme of that propaganda was that Hitler aimed to "conquer the world." Reinforcing that theme, Weinberg claims that in this book, Hitler asserts "a Nazi government of Germany would have as one of its major responsibilities the preparation of the country for war with the United States." This belief, Weinberg says, explains Hitler's orders in 1937 for the construction of long-range bombers and "super battleships" he considered "necessary for war against the United States."

But the suggestion that Hitler was plotting war against the U.S. in 1937 is posterous. German troops had no way of getting here. Weinberg apparently believes Germany's troops were going to swim the Atlantic for their invasion. No serious

historian has ever maintained such a wild charge. Moreover, the Luftwaffe never produced any long-range bombers. It did not occur to German war planners to bomb the enemy's civilian populations just to kill them. That was a strategy hatched by American and British leaders who had been building long-range bombers for precisely that purpose long before the outbreak of hostilities.

Weinberg bases his wild claim on a section of chapter nine in which Hitler questions whether a pan-European union would in the future be able to resist a "menacing American hegemonic position" in the world. Hitler expressed concern that over the course of history, "the danger arises that the significance of racially inferior Europe will gradually lead to a new determination of the fate of the world by the people of the North American continent." Hitler, who speaks admiringly of America's restrictive immigration laws of the 1920s, argues that it is the high racial "quality of the American people" that forms America's strength, and that its foreseeable "hegemony will not be eliminated by a purely formal numerical merger of European peoples, if their intrinsic worth is not higher than that of the American union." He accuses pan-European advocates of confusing numerical superiority with quality.

In the future, the only state that will be able to stand up to North America will be the state that has understood how – through the character of its internal life as well as through the substance of its external policy – to raise the racial value of its people and bring it into the most practical national form for this purpose.... It is, again, the duty of the National Socialist movement to strengthen and prepare our own fatherland to the greatest degree possible for this task.

Obviously, Hitler is talking about a process that will take generations. Nonetheless, that passage is footnoted by Weinberg as showing Hitler's alleged hostile intent toward the U.S., and it provides the basis for Weinberg's claim that this thinking led to Hitler's alleged orders to build long-range bombers!

Weinberg's failure to learn anything about history from Hitler's manuscript need not deter us from doing so, however. Even though much of the content is devoted to discussing what are now mostly obscure and long-dead European geopolitical issues, the book could be described as a philosophy of foreign policy, or more precisely, a philosophy of National Socialist foreign policy.

In stark contrast to the abstract and morality-laden aims that other heads of state voiced as the aim of their policies, Hitler asserted that his aim would be simply the preservation and promotion of the interests of the German people. Where Roosevelt, Wilson, and Churchill advocated policies – or perhaps more accurately, crusaded for ideals – like "world peace" or to "make the world safe for democracy" and Stalin pursued the overthrow of international capitalism, Hitler had no interest in exporting National Socialism. The *völkisch* nature of National Socialism would not permit it.

"The National Socialist movement... will always allow its foreign policy to be determined by the need to secure the necessary space for our people," he said.

It knows no Germanization. . . . The movement will never see subjugated, so-called Germanized Czechs or Poles as a strengthening of the nation or of the people; rather this represents a racial weakening of our people. The national conception will not be determined by previous patriotic notions of state, but rather by ethnic and racial perceptions. Thus, the starting point of the movement's ideas is completely different from that of the bourgeois world.

(That policy is the background of the famous complaint by Louis-Ferdinand Céline in Paris during the occupation that the Germans failed to bring a National Socialist revolution to France.)

The National Socialist movement, Hitler said, must "from within its ideological philosophy, place foreign policy at the service of the reorganization of our people. Here as well, it must instill the basic principle that one does not fight for systems, but for a living people—flesh and blood—which must be preserved. . . ."

FOREIGN THREATS AND GERMAN NATIONALISM

In the aftermath of World War I, Hitler saw defeated Germany as surrounded by the armed, hostile forces of Russia, France, and England, with the Czechs and Poles providing a springboard to Germany's interior. "And the power of France appears to be strengthened by a system of European alliances that reaches from Paris to Warsaw and from Prague to Belgrade," he said. "Germany lies wedged between these states, with completely open borders." He notes that "[t]he Reich capital, Berlin, is barely 175 kilometers from the Polish border. It is barely 190 kilometers from the closest Czech border. . . . That means, therefore, that with modern aircraft Berlin can be reached from these borders in less than an hour." At the same time, millions of ethnic Germans remained forcibly separated from the homeland, scattered throughout eastern and central Europe. For Hitler, reuniting them through a bloody war would be a waste:

I protest most solemnly against the idea that there could be a duty to national honor that forces one to allow two million men to bleed to death on the battlefield in order to gain, at best, a quarter million men, women, and children altogether. That is not national honor appearing here, but unscrupulousness or insanity.

Hitler argued the need for a politically potent state to rearm to be able to defend itself, and to furnish the diplomatic strength needed to restore lost populations to Germany:

But with regard to the fate of those Germans who were forcibly cut off from the German body politic through the Great War and the peace treaties, it must be said that their fate and their future is a question of politically regaining the power of the motherland.¹

He did not renounce force, but he frequently chastised those he called "bourgeois nationalists" (i.e., the "conservatives," as distinct from the völkisch nationalists of the NSDAP) for their oft-repeated desire to "punish" England militarily for the harm done to Germany, and to restore Germany's pre-1914 borders. Hitler thought those aims foolhardy.

The Germany of today must under no circumstances see its foreign policy task in a formal border policy. As soon as a restoration of the 1914 borders is established as the foreign policy objective, Germany will confront a cohesive phalanx of its former enemies. ... [T]he foreign policy rallying cry, 'restoration of the borders' becomes nothing more than empty words, because without the necessary strength it can never be realized.... [The bourgeois nationalists] know that Germany is powerless They also know that quite apart from our internal decay, means of exercising military power would be necessary to restore our borders; they also know that because of the peace treaty we do not possess these means and that due to our opponents' cohesive front we cannot obtain them....

For Hitler, European borders seen in an historical perspective are unfinished business.

The division of territory on the earth is always the momentary result of a struggle and an evolution that is in no way finished, but that naturally continues to progress. It is dumb to simply take the border from any given year in the history of a people and establish it as a political goal. Instead of establishing the border of 1914, one could just as well take the one from 1648 or 1312 and so on, and so on. Especially because the 1914 border was not at all satisfactory from a national, military, or territorial perspective. It was just the momentary situation at that point in our people's struggle for survival, which has been rolling on for millennia and which would not have had its ending in 1914 even if the Great War had not come.

As he mentioned in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler believed it was in Germany's geopolitical interests to make an ally of England, not to get revenge on it. Hitler repeatedly expressed some admiration for the British Empire, and thought it reflected favorably on the racial qualities of England's people. He thought England saw its interests not in continental Europe, but in its maritime and colonial affairs. Therefore, he believed, there was no intrinsic obstacle to a German-English understanding.

In Germany... a very erroneous idea is widespread, namely that England would immediately fight any dominant European power. This is actually not correct. England has actually not concerned itself greatly with European affairs, as long as no threatening competitor arose from among the European powers; and it always saw the threat only in terms of a development that was certain one day to impede its maritime and colonial dominance.

Hitler believed England, as a sea-based power, would not necessarily oppose a resurgent Germany that did not threaten it commercially, as Germany did, he believed, prior to the Great War. After all, the Empire had not militarily opposed Prussia during the reign of Frederick the Great: "England does not fundamentally oppose a European great power of preeminent military significance, as long as the foreign policy aims of this power are obviously of a strictly continental nature..." he said. These views explain, at least in part, why Hitler believed — erroneously — that England would not fight to protect Poland in 1939, despite its guarantee to defend Poland's borders from German — but not Russian — military action.²

But because Hitler never reviewed the typed manuscript, we can't know for sure to what extent the text accurately conveys his views of England. Nor do we know if those views changed some time after he became chancellor. Hitler was certainly not

as optimistic about England as those cited passages make him appear. In the same chapter, for example, he warned that “another important factor for England’s attitude toward Germany appeared (sic) as well: world Jewry, which also exerts a controlling influence in England. Although the English people itself will certainly be able to overcome the war psychosis vis-à-vis Germany, it is just as certain that world Jewry will leave nothing undone to keep the old enmities to prevent” a peaceful Europe.

One important insight for modern readers that emerges from the book is the extent to which Hitler saw himself not exclusively as a racist, but as a nationalist and advocate for one country within the Aryan group. Obviously, Hitler believed in the racial basis of human history and culture; but as a political leader, his efforts were devoted to the German Volk, not to some pan-Aryan or universal “pro-white” cause.

“I am a German nationalist,” he declares in the opening sentence of chapter five.

That means I am openly committed to my *Volkstum*. All of my thoughts and actions belong to it. I am a socialist. I see before me no class or rank, but rather a community of people who are connected by blood, united by language, and subject to the same collective fate.

That sentiment clearly undercuts those white activists today who seek to defend their race and Euro-American civilization by adopting the swastika as their own. Hitler made it quite clear that the movement he led was German exclusively.

The National Socialist movement, which I lead today, sees as its goal the internal and external liberation of our people. Internally, the movement wishes to provide our people with those ways of life that seem adapted to the people’s essence, and which, in turn, benefit the people as an expression of this essence. It wishes to preserve the essence of this people and, through the systematic support of its best individuals and best virtues, raise it to a higher level. It advocates the external freedom of the people, because only under such conditions can this life be organized in a way that is most beneficial. . . . It fights for the daily bread of this people, because it advocates this people’s right to life. It fights for the necessary space, because it represents this people’s right to exist. . . .

He meant, of course, only Germans; not Aryans or whites the world over.

The National Socialist movement differentiates itself from the previous bourgeois parties more or less as follows: The foreign policy of the bourgeois world is in truth always focused on borders, whereas the National Socialist movement, in contrast, will pursue a policy focused on space. The German bourgeoisie will, with its boldest plans, perhaps attain unification of the German nation, but in reality it usually ends in bungling border adjustments.

The National Socialist movement, in contrast, will always allow its foreign policy to be determined by the need to secure the necessary space for our people. It knows no Germanization [of neighboring peoples such as Czechs, Poles, etc.], as the national bourgeoisie does, but only the expansion of our own people.

Hitler embraced not a racial vision for the survival of the white world — which, at the time, did not appear threatened by nonwhite populations — but a national and

geopolitical vision for Germans. The attempt by some who see themselves as defenders of the West to link Hitler and the swastika to “white nationalism,” as distinct from German nationalism, is without ideological or historical foundation. That’s probably not the lesson editor Weinberg hoped publication of this manuscript would teach, but it’s one that today’s activists should take seriously.

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ENDNOTES

1. An English version of the book (translator unidentified) appearing on the Internet renders this passage somewhat differently: “Insofar, however, as it is a matter of the fate of those Germans who were broken off from the German nation by the events of the World War and the peace treaty, it must be said that their fate and future is a question of regaining the motherland’s political power.” Chapter 9, seventh paragraph. <http://www.adolfhitler.ws/lib/books/zweites/zweites.htm>
2. David Irving, *The War Path* (New York: Viking, 1978), p. 231, quotes Hitler as saying, “The Polish conflict will never, never, never result in a European war.”