

DISSENSION IN THE WILHELMSTRASSE: THREE STUDIES OF RIBBENTROP'S FOREIGN MINISTRY AS REVEALED AT THE NUREMBERG TRIALS

Sherilyn Martin
Georgia State University Graduate Student

The documentary evidence produced at the Nuremberg Trials provides an unusual opportunity for the student of international relations to examine the internal dynamics of Nazi foreign policy. The opportunity is unique because in the Nuremberg papers a country's diplomatic activities are made available without regard to the considerations of state security. An examination of certain aspects of the Nuremberg Trials sheds light upon the dilemmas of career diplomats in a totalitarian government. Specifically, the Nuremberg Trials reveal the pressures imposed on the conservative, professional bureaucrats in Berlin who served the German Foreign Office during an unusually violent and politically radical period.

How did the Nazi state control its firmly established professionals in the Foreign Office during World War II? To what extent did the ministerial officials comply with the Nazi Party? What moral dilemmas were encountered by these professional diplomats working within Hitler's bureaucratic establishment? Who was actually responsible for German foreign policy in Hitler's administration? The answers to these questions can be found by examining three sources of documentary evidence produced at Nuremberg after the war.

The first source of evidence about German diplomatic activities comes from the United States State Department Records of a Special Interrogation Mission to Nuremberg. A small group of American officials, headed by DeWitt C. Poole, conducted private interrogations of over fifty Nazi officials. Some of those interrogated had been at the very top of the Nazi regime, including Herman Göring and Joachim von Ribbentrop. Among those interrogated were military leaders, but the largest group came from the German Foreign Office and Diplomatic Service. These persons were questioned on the diplomatic and political aspects of their activities.

A second source concerning the Nazi foreign service concerns the "Ministries Case" or Case XI presented at the Nuremberg Trials: *The United States v. von Weizsaecker, et al.* This case was broader in scope than any other that was brought before the International Military Tribunal. While not aimed directly at the Wilhelmstrasse, a third of the defendants in this case held prominent positions in the German Foreign Office and the remainder of the defendants came from departments connected to it.

To answer the question of who was responsible for German

foreign policy, a third source must be consulted. This is the documentary evidence presented at the trial of the major war criminals before the International Military Tribunal. The Reich Minister of Foreign Affairs, Joachim von Ribbentrop, was a well-known defendant in this trial. Evidence presented in this trial reveals the workings of the German Foreign Office through the testimony and questioning of Ribbentrop. The decision reached in Ribbentrop's trial established a precedent that was continued later in the so-called "Ministries Case": individual responsibility for crimes against the peace will be upheld. In these cases the court declared that:

those who plan, prepare, initiate, and wage aggressive wars and invasions, and those who knowingly, consciously, and responsibly participate therein violate international law and may be tried, convicted, and punished for their acts.¹

Documentary evidence produced at Nuremberg shows that the ministerial officials *were* held accountable for their activities, but more importantly these documents shed light on the internal dynamics of the Wilhelmstrasse, the personal struggles within its leadership, and the dissension within the high diplomatic circles of the Third Reich.

I. State Department records of the Special Interrogation Mission to Germany

DeWitt C. Poole Mission: August 1945 to November 1945

The National Archives Microfilm Publications have reproduced three rolls of microfilm containing unbound records of interrogations conducted by the Department of State's Special Interrogation Mission to Germany, also known as the DeWitt C. Poole Mission. The mission was in session from August 1945 to November 1946. The interrogations were conducted in private in both German and English. Notes were taken during the interrogations or immediately thereafter and were translated by Harold Vedeler or various interpreters. The American officials were under the leadership of DeWitt C. Poole. Poole had served in the American foreign office in Germany before World War II. He personally knew some of those he interrogated from his service period in the early 1930s. Most of the German diplomats responded openly and candidly to Poole's questions. Each person questioned was allowed to state his case in his own way without interference from the questioner. Over fifty interrogations were conducted, primarily in English. The

questions concerned sensitive material in the area of German foreign relations and communications within the Nazi Party and the Wilhelmstrasse during the period 1939-1945. The State Department Records are organized with a folder for each person and contain interrogation sheets, questionnaires, affidavits or reports, and related materials. The folders are arranged alphabetically by surname.

DeWitt C. Poole and Harold Vedeler were given the opportunity to talk with Herman Göring through arrangements made possible by the courtesy of Colonel John H. Amen, head of the Interrogation Division of the OUSCC.² Both interrogators admitted to Herman Göring that among those close to Hitler, only he had shown independence of thought and action in foreign relations.³

When questioned about the appointment of Ribbentrop as Foreign Minister, Göring recounted that he was astonished that Ribbentrop received the post. Göring believed that Ribbentrop convinced Hitler that he knew influential people in England and France. Göring noted that Ribbentrop was totally unaware of his own ignorance of these countries and their political climates, but he had dealt with many social elites in London and Paris through his family's liquor export business in the early 1930s. Göring quipped that "Ribbentrop knew France only through champagne and England only through whiskey."⁴

Göring was astonished when Ribbentrop first became ambassador to England and noted that he did not do well in the position⁵ for two glaring reasons. First, when Ribbentrop arrived in London in 1938 he gave an interview in which he lectured a large British audience on steps they should take against Bolshevism. This unpleasant barrage received bad press coverage. This lecture from their new German ambassador sounded arrogant to the British government, which was certainly capable of developing its own stance in this regard. Secondly, adding insult to arrogance, Ribbentrop gave the Nazi salute when he presented his credentials to the King.⁶ The faux pas earned him in Britain a reputation for presumption and discourtesy. Ribbentrop's mistakes did not hurt his prestige in Germany, however. Hitler was impressed by his new ambassador and believed that Ribbentrop was the only person giving him a true picture of developments abroad.⁷

Göring noted that Hitler was equally ignorant in the area of foreign affairs. Hitler had been outside of Germany only once before the war when he traveled to Rome in 1934 to sign a pact with Mussolini in Rome. He had little knowledge of the diplomatic circles in foreign countries and little respect for the efforts of the German Foreign Office. According to Göring Hitler "looked upon it as a

grocery shop."⁸

While in England, first as Commissioner for Disarmament Questions and then as Germany's Ambassador to London, Ribbentrop's ambition began to grow. His staff was a reflection of his ego. Although in 1934 Ribbentrop had 30 staff people, by 1938 he had a Bureau Ribbentrop of approximately 300. Funds for his burgeoning staff came from a grant of 20 million Reichmarks from Hitler's private *Spende*. The *Spende* was a fund made up of contributions from German businessmen who thus bought immunity from the interference of lesser Nazi officials.⁹ The functions of the Bureau Ribbentrop were poorly defined and its personnel were inefficient and incapable. Feeble attempts were made to connect German cultural associations with those in Britain and France. The major function of the Bureau Ribbentrop was to make Ribbentrop appear important in the eyes of his peers.

According to Ankor Hencke, Chief of the Political Affairs division in the Foreign Office, of all Reich authorities the Nazi Party viewed the Foreign Office with the greatest mistrust. Hardly a single important Foreign Office official had been a member of the Party before January 1933. According to Hencke, Hitler often spoke in a disapproving manner of the Foreign Office, believing it to be reactionary and defeatist.¹⁰

Baron von Neurath directed the German Foreign Office in 1933 when Hitler came to power. Neurath enjoyed the confidence of Reich President von Hindenburg who wanted no changes in the staff of the Foreign Office without his permission. This reinforced Hitler's dislike of the Foreign Office. Neurath did not represent an ideal National Socialist foreign Minister that Hitler had envisioned.¹¹ When Hitler became Chancellor, Neurath continued to make his own decisions concerning sensitive foreign relations until he "retired" in 1938. Neurath was replaced with Joachim von Ribbentrop, a man Hitler could trust, but a man with no real diplomatic experience. Career diplomats knew Ribbentrop was a political appointee and scorned him. Dissension increased as the "old school" diplomats consolidated their dislike for Ribbentrop's arrogance and ignorance. Unlike Neurath, the inexperienced Ribbentrop followed Hitler's directives, or what he perceived as Hitler's directives, to the letter.

Wilhelm Keppler, Hitler's principal economic advisor and Special Representative in the Foreign Office on Austrian Affairs, confirmed this. Keppler noted that Hitler developed the main lines of Nazi foreign policy, not Ribbentrop. As a political appointee, Ribbentrop merely handled minor details within Hitler's framework. However, Ribbentrop believed that he excelled all others in the

proper conduct of foreign policy. Keppler noted that: "he was extremely authoritarian in handling the Foreign Office; no possibility of working closely with him seemed to exist."¹² Ribbentrop saw the Wilhelmstrasse as simply an agency to aid in his administrative work.

Ribbentrop's attitude toward the functions of the Foreign Office is evidenced by the position of the two Reich Secretaries of State who served under him: Ernst von Weizsaecker and Moyland von Steengracht. Both directed the Foreign Office as an administrative organization, but neither exercised any real influence in the field of policy.¹³ Ribbentrop had no close advisors but surrounded himself with minor officials and became less and less accessible the longer he was in office. Some career diplomats and even a few ambassadors had no contact with him for up to two years. Once Hitler said to Keppler of Ribbentrop, "I have the most stubborn man in Germany as my Foreign Minister which is just what I wanted."¹⁴ Hitler did not want a man with diplomatic talent who might yield to the views of others. Ribbentrop's authoritarian manner might have suited Hitler, but it caused many tensions with his subordinates. The Foreign Minister sometimes listened to advice from his staff, but, regardless of what was said, he acted on his own impressions. Keppler found this "air of finality" extreme; even Hitler did not project it as Ribbentrop did.

Several of those questioned by the Special Interrogation Mission had a definite impression of Ribbentrop's personal relationship with Hitler. Dr. Erich Kordt, Chief of Ribbentrop's Ministerial Bureau, noticed that Ribbentrop spent a considerable amount of time in the ante-chambers of the Chancellery to learn from the "hangers-on" what Hitler might be thinking. When Ribbentrop surmised what a new course of action might be, he came out strongly in favor of that policy as his own. Consequently, Kordt believed that any difference between Ribbentrop and Hitler concerned matters of protocol, but never policy.¹⁵ Kordt had also served Ribbentrop as his First Secretary in the London Embassy so he was in a position to notice that most of Hitler's business with Ribbentrop was through personal conversations. Written memoranda were rare, and those which required a formal written report were presented to Hitler in person.

Ankor Hencke recalled that Hitler appreciated Ribbentrop's services but found his personal ways irritating. Hitler did not care for Ribbentrop's personal visits, since Ribbentrop often complained about his ministerial and party colleagues who had interfered in "specific" Foreign Office activities. Even with his unpleasantness, Hencke notes, that next to Himmler, Ribbentrop was the minister

who had had the most frequent access to Hitler.¹⁶

Ribbentrop often complained that the Foreign Office did not have adequate sources of information. He was very sensitive to the competition of other agencies which were providing Hitler with information from other countries. Himmler in particular had an excellent intelligence operation. Ribbentrop's general discontent and frequent complaints concerning the Foreign Office echoed Hitler's discontent with professional diplomats. Both grew impatient with the old Wilhelmstrasse bureaucrats, especially those who upheld protocol and diplomatic reserve.

One of the most enlightening accounts of the dissension in the Foreign Office came from the former Nazi ambassador to Britain Herbert von Dirksen. Dirksen replaced Ribbentrop in London after he was promoted to Reich Minister for the Foreign Office. As an ambassador, Dirksen naturally wanted to give advice as well as news of developments in Britain to his government. Ribbentrop never allowed this normal exchange of communication. Dirksen noted that Ribbentrop degraded the office of ambassador to that of a "mere messenger boy" by allowing only the reporting of facts and figures with no political comment. Ribbentrop also decreed that each report to the Reichminister should not exceed two pages! Under such circumstances it was impossible to give appropriate comments on developing political tension abroad. Dirksen revealed that there was no genuine communication between Ribbentrop and the heads of the various German embassies. Consequently, the German embassies before the war were not informed from Berlin as to the general trend of policy toward their respective countries.¹⁷

Dirksen also mentioned another problem of Nazi foreign policy: Nazi political emissaries to foreign capitals would often start negotiations or sensitive conversations without informing the ambassadors present. Ribbentrop was especially keen on sending members of his personal staff to begin delicate negotiations or to collect information in an attempt to compete with other information networks such as Herman Göring's or Joseph Goebbels'. The competition between rivals eliminated comprehensible communication between foreign capitals and the Wilhelmstrasse.

One of the most wanton acts of diplomatic insensitivity took place during the spring and summer of 1939. After Hitler broke his Munich pledge, the British House of Commons was prepared to put pressure on the Conservative Party for a more aggressive stand toward Germany. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's speeches of that spring and summer became increasingly more aggressive as the attitudes of the voters became known. The public now favored a

strong policy of confrontation with Hitler. The British government then took a definite stand and offered Poland, Rumania, Turkey and all of Germany's neighbors the protection of British military forces. Dirksen noted that this move came as a complete shock to Hitler and Ribbentrop. Dirksen recalled that Ribbentrop did exercise a great influence on Hitler on British affairs, but he was not a great influence otherwise.¹⁸ Ribbentrop firmly believed that Britain would not fight, whatever happened in Eastern Europe. Hitler *wanted* to believe this as well, so he considered Ribbentrop's experience with the British valid and his advice, sound.

Presumptions which are ill-founded can lead to disaster. A conference among Ribbentrop, Hitler, and Count Ciano, on August 13, 1939, began rumors in the higher diplomatic circles that Hitler would strike Poland in the last days of August. Ambassador Dirksen recalled that he made an immediate effort to see Ribbentrop to relate the latest British alarm. But Ribbentrop refused to see Dirksen at this critical time, even though he waited at Ribbentrop's office for five days. Dirksen felt that Ribbentrop knew that his London ambassador was back in Berlin; yet he would not see anyone who would disturb his own convictions about Britain,¹⁹ especially with the confrontation in the east imminent. Further questioning on this matter during the DeWitt Poole interrogation revealed that Ribbentrop ignored his British ambassador for a period of sixteen months.²⁰ Neurath saw Hitler as obsessed with the idea that England would never make war. Hitler held to this conviction even in August 1939. By refusing to make any information to the contrary available, Ribbentrop could steadfastly support Hitler in his misconception.²¹

Dissension from the outer circles of the Wilhelmstrasse paralleled dissension between the Foreign Office and the other ministries of the Reich. Ernst Bohle noted that when Neurath was Foreign Minister there was harmony between the AO, or Auslandorganization (Nazi Party officials who served outside of Germany) and the Foreign Office. Ribbentrop's appointment, however, produced bitter conflicts. As Chief of the AO, Bohle was subject to orders from the state foreign ministry and was to coordinate all activities with it. Thus, he was supposed to know and participate in foreign policy discussions at some level within the Foreign Office. Ribbentrop never allowed him to do this. Bohle declared that from December 1941 to the end of the war, he did not have a single conversation with Ribbentrop.²² Bohle claimed that few were taken into Ribbentrop's confidence, that he did not trust anyone, and, that almost everyone in the Foreign Office disliked Ribbentrop's policies. Professional diplomats also disliked him

personally. Ribbentrop retaliated by detesting the 'old crowd' at the Foreign Office even though they were in the majority among the staff. Bohle claimed that these men were never Party men in any real sense of the term. Ribbentrop would have liked to replace them but the Nazi Party had very few persons who could qualify for diplomatic service.²³ Thus Ribbentrop was dependent upon the career diplomats and their 'suspicious loyalties' while they despised him.

Friction was frequent between Party officials and Wilhelmstrasse staff diplomats. High-ranking party members were above reproach, so the greater difficulties generally had to be borne by the Foreign Office officials. The AO had strong influence in the Foreign Office because it controlled personnel matters, especially those officials serving abroad. The Party induced the Foreign Office to take a number of members from its affiliated organizations, such as the Party Chancery, the SS, as well as the AO. The career diplomats disliked the invasion of outsiders, but their influence seemed minimal. Herman Göring noted that in spite of the numerous Party members, the conservative character of the Foreign Office did not change much. Ankör Hencke supported this view:

It is my personal impression that in most cases, the Foreign Office came out on top . . . As far as I know, only two AO members obtained a post as chief of missions abroad.²⁴

Party officials in the foreign organization of the Nazi Party and officials in the Foreign Office continued to remain in their separate spheres despite overlapping functions and responsibilities. This was because AO officials and Foreign Office officials lived in different worlds. The privileged position of a diplomat, his social opportunities and his high standard of living were unattainable for many Party officials. Friction and jealousy were often the result. Party officials were critical of diplomats and suspected them of becoming tainted with the trappings of their host country. Diplomats were always in danger of becoming more international than German.²⁵ The State Department's interrogation of Ribbentrop proved to be disappointing for the interrogators as well as for subsequent researchers. Ribbentrop's answers to questions were obviously self-protecting and vague. Unlike the other respondents, Ribbentrop was still loyal to Hitler and spoke of him as some mysterious compelling force: 'It was impossible to explain what Hitler was like . . . He told you what to do, and you did it . . . I was not Hitler's Minister of Foreign Affairs, I was just Hitler's diplomat.'²⁶

Ribbentrop minimized his importance for the Nuremberg trials, but other defendants were much more candid.

If Ribbentrop blindly followed orders from Hitler, he also issued orders which he expected others to obey blindly. Diplomats in the Wilhelmstrasse were to follow Ribbentrop's directives without question. However, Ribbentrop did not have the presence or the authority of Hitler, so his demeanor was taken for arrogance. The Foreign Office, then, was often on the point of rebellion. Would it be correct to interpret Nazi foreign policy in terms of Ribbentrop's desires? It seems feasible with a man of so little perception and so much presumption. But Ribbentrop sought only to please Hitler and keep his political domain intact. Ribbentrop avoided or ignored all information that conflicted with Hitler's aims. What Hitler received was an insular picture of European politics, one that conformed to Ribbentrop's and to Hitler's own expectations.

II. UNITED STATES OF AMERICA V.

ERNST VON WEIZSAECKER ET AL.

(CASE XI) DECEMBER 20, 1947 - APRIL 14, 1949

The Ministries Case at the Nuremberg Trials is sometimes known as the Wilhelmstrasse Case because most of the acts that form the basis of the indictments were directed from ministries on or near the Wilhelmstrasse in Berlin. Of the 21 defendants, Ernst von Weizsaecker was the first to be arraigned so the case bears his name. The records for this case were reproduced on 173 rolls of microfilm and consist of official transcripts of court proceedings, prosecution and defense briefs, and the final pleas of the defendants and the final statements of the prosecution. Prosecution exhibits are primarily records from the various offices investigated. These include orders, reports, correspondence, telegrams, memorandums, charts, texts of speeches, minutes of meetings, and treaties. This case was by far the broadest in scope of any brought before the U. S. military tribunals with over 4,000 documents assembled for possible use in the prosecution, and even more documents assembled for the defense.

Defendants were drawn from varied spheres of Reich activities, not all were connected with the Foreign Office, but most were involved with the central political and economic administrations in Berlin. Of the 21 persons charged there were some Reich Cabinet Ministers, chiefs of various administrative ministries, and ministers affiliated with SS activities, financial matters, or armaments production. Defendants directly involved in the German Foreign Office included the two State Secretaries, Ernst von Weizsaecker

(1938-1943), Moyland von Steengracht (1943-1945), and five ministers of its internal divisions.

All of the defendants pleaded not guilty to the charge of Crimes Against Humanity, War Crimes, Crimes of Conspiracy, and Crimes Against the Peace. In the Ministries Case these general charges were subdivided into a more specific eight-count indictment. One defendant pleaded not guilty to the lesser charge of membership in a criminal organization (count eight). Two of the 21 defendants were acquitted of all charges. Prison terms were given to all of the other defendants. Their terms varied according to the defendant's participation in certain organizations. The most severe sentences went to SS members and those involved in armament production or ministries directly supporting the war effort. Most defendants in the Foreign Office received from four to seven years imprisonment. This includes Ernst von Weizsaecker (seven years reduced to five) and Moyland von Steengracht (seven years reduced to five). The least amount of prison time was given to the acting Minister of the Interior in the so-called Doenitz Cabinet of May 1945 (three years, ten months, and twenty days); the longest sentence was given to the minister for the Eastern Occupied Territories and acting Military Commander in Czechoslovakia (twenty-five years reduced to ten years).

The documents in the Ministries Case dealing with the indictment, arraignment, defense, and prosecution of Ernst von Weizsaecker are a good example of the trial proceedings inherent in many of the cases dealing with the Wilhelmstrasse. A general line of defense for those involved in the Wilhelmstrasse was that it concerned diplomatic, rather than military activities, and was thus distanced from the criminal aspects of Hitler's plans. When certain areas of the Wilhelmstrasse *were* implicated in aggressive warfare, Secretary Weizsaecker created a line of defense that other defendants in the Ministries Case later imitated. Weizsaecker's guideline of defense was that while he disapproved of the morally reprehensible activities of some of the departments which he technically supervised, his moral duty was to *remain* in office in order to do what he could to serve as a moderating influence. The rationale for this defense originated from an affidavit written by Lord Hallifax, the former British Foreign Minister to Germany:

Baron von Weizsaecker was frequently reported to me by my advisors at the Foreign Office . . . as being a convinced opponent of Nazi ideals and policies, and as using his official position in the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs in Berlin to hinder, so far as lay in his power, the execution of the policy of Mr. Ribbentrop.²⁷

Weizsaecker continued this line of defense by stating:

I had to put up with whatever a State Secretary had to do in this position and to keep within the framework I tried to mitigate these bad things from case to case

...²⁸

This line of reasoning ignores the fact that Weizsaecker's resignation would have perhaps brought more attention to the outrageous crimes being committed, and would have hurt the Foreign Ministry as a whole. There were few capable candidates who could have filled Weizsaecker's position.

As State Secretary, Weizsaecker reported directly to Ribbentrop but did not always agree with his directives. In 1938 when Ribbentrop was promoted from British Ambassador to chief of the Foreign Office, Weizsaecker was quickly promoted from head of the Political Affairs Division to State Secretary by Ribbentrop. Ribbentrop expected loyalty and obedience from his subordinates. For example, in 1938 before the Munich Conference, Weizsaecker sought to advise Ribbentrop that an attempt to solve the Czechoslovakian problem by force of arms would lead to war. The new Foreign Minister told Weizsaecker that it was not his duty to advise or to make comments of this nature. Weizsaecker often commented to associates that he was not to have a voice in policy matters or very extensive responsibility in the new Foreign Office: "I was responsible to him [Ribbentrop] alone and he to the Führer alone."²⁹

Much evidence in the Ministries Case supported Ribbentrop's overbearing actions, but this does not excuse Weizsaecker from all responsibility in the execution of his duties. The most sensitive evidence brought forth in the course of the Ministries Case concerned the Foreign Office's jurisdiction over anti-Jewish actions. Policies for the deportation and containment of Jews were conducted by the Foreign Office through the *Department Germany*, led by a man with close connections to Himmler: Martin Luther. Luther was responsible for the deportation of Jews in the eastern occupied zones. His *Department Germany* was housed in the building of the Wilhelmstrasse. During the trial of the Ministries Case the prosecution revealed that State Secretary Weizsaecker had signed many documents originating from Luther's department as proof of his

"official approval." In defense Weizsaecker claimed that Luther's position was secured by Ribbentrop, the SD, and the Gestapo which made it impossible for him to undermine Luther's influence.³⁰ When the prosecution produced evidence that Weizsaecker was well-informed concerning the plan to exterminate Jews in the Eastern occupied territories,³¹ the defense produced a note from Weizsaecker to Luther stating that from a "foreign political point of view, a more lenient solution [to the Jewish problem] should be preferred . . ."³² It is certain that Weizsaecker and others in the Foreign Office knew of the Jewish deportations, and they may have had personal reservations about the policy, but they did nothing professionally to thwart these actions.

Other charges brought against the Foreign Office through Weizsaecker's actions dealt with similar war crimes. Weizsaecker signed his approval for measures designed to put pressure on the occupied Hungarian Ministry to carry out anti-Jewish measures in Hungary.³³ In 1942 Hitler issued a decree which stated that all members of Allied Commando units be "slaughtered to the last man even if they attempted to surrender."³⁴ Weizsaecker had full knowledge of these killings, but he let it be known through his office that these troops were killed in combat.³⁵ Offenses were also committed on German nationals on political or religious grounds. Persecution of Christian churches and prominent church leaders began immediately after the Nazi Party assumed power. International Christian organizations would lodge protests against these persecutions with the Foreign Office, but Weizsaecker and others denied them and concealed the protests from the public.³⁶

What Weizsaecker's true sentiments were concerning Hitler's policies, one can only guess but there is no evidence to support the claim that his position in the Foreign Office served as a moderating influence to hinder Nazi goals. Instead, Weizsaecker and other officials in the Wilhelmstrasse served as examples for their subordinates to imitate by remaining silent and following through with measures that they knew to be morally reprehensible.

II. TRIAL OF THE MAJOR WAR CRIMINALS BEFORE THE INTERNATIONAL MILITARY TRIBUNAL: THE CASE OF JOACHIM VON RIBBENTROP

Before the Nuremberg Trials began, Joachim von Ribbentrop was on every western Allied war criminal list, beginning with two British lists prepared as early as April 1944.³⁷ At the Nuremberg Trials the United States prosecution placed emphasis on the

instigation of aggressive war, making Ribbentrop an important defendant. After his capture, the United States Prosecution Office asked the State Department to remember Ribbentrop's central position in the war criminals case and to keep him in mind when doing research and collecting documents.³⁸

Documentary evidence revealed that Ribbentrop authorized most aggressive actions conducted by the German Wilhelmstrasse. For example, prior knowledge of the invasion of the Soviet Union was known by the Foreign Office and revealed during the proceedings of the International Military Tribunal in Document 1039-PS dated April 1941. This evidence was presented by Sir David Maxwell Fyfe, Deputy Prosecutor for the United Kingdom on January 9, 1946:

The Foreign Office has prepared for the use on "Barbarossa" the attached draft of a declaration of operational zones. The Foreign Office, however, has reserved the decision as to the date when the declaration will be issued as well as the discussion of particulars.³⁹

Ribbentrop's files contained detailed information of how and when the Foreign Office was to administer the Soviet "operational zones" once the German attack was carried out.

Ribbentrop's office had issued orders for negotiations and certain ultimata in the diplomatic offices in all of the German occupied territories. In September of 1942 Ribbentrop ordered German diplomatic representatives accredited to Axis satellites to "hasten the deportation of Jews to the East"⁴⁰ in order to carry out Hitler's plans for their extermination. In June 1942 Vichy French Prime Minister Pierre Laval was requested to surrender over 50,000 Jews to the German Ambassador for their deportation to eastern concentration camps. The Foreign Office continued to issue these directives throughout the war. In February 1945, Mussolini was pressured by Ribbentrop's office to speed up the deportation of Jews from the Italian zone of occupation in southern France.⁴¹ Through the diplomatic offices of the German occupied territories, the Foreign Office issued directives for the implementation of Hitler's "Final Solution."

Not only Jews but also most civilians in some occupied territories received harsh treatment under Ribbentrop's directives. Sir David Maxwell Fyfe produced Document D-740 during the Nuremberg Trials which was a memorandum of a conversation between Ribbentrop and the Secretary of State for Greece, Mr.

Bastianini, on April 8, 1943:

Only merciless action would be any good. In Norway brutal measures had been taken. In Greece too, brutal action would have to be taken if the Greeks should sense a change for the better . . . the demobilized Greek army should be deported from Greece with lightning speed, and the Greeks [civilians] should be shown in an iron manner who is master in the country.⁴²

At the Nuremberg Trials a large volume of evidence was brought to bear on the waging of aggressive diplomatic war by the Foreign Office. Ribbentrop's defense counsel, led by the competent attorney, Dr. Horn, began the defense by arguing that the roots of German diplomatic aggression lay in the Treaty of Versailles. The authorities at Nuremberg would not allow this line of reasoning to be continued for Ribbentrop or any other defendant at the trial. Dr. Horn then refuted all charges against his client by stating that "the Reich Foreign Minister was not only not competent (in his current status as Reich Foreign Minister) for the conduct of the war but had in fact not the slightest possibility of influencing military measures."⁴³ He counter-charged the War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity indictments by stating that a "Foreign Minister could not issue directives of any sort to a military agency."⁴⁴ Ribbentrop's general defense to all charges brought him was that Hitler made all of the important decisions; he was only Hitler's "great admirer and faithful follower"⁴⁵ who never questioned Hitler's actions. The defense concluded by stating that Ribbentrop and his Foreign Office had nothing to do with the military conduct of the war.

The International Military Tribunal produced conclusive evidence which illustrated that Ribbentrop had "participated in all Nazi aggressions from the occupation of Austria to the invasion of the U.S.S.R."⁴⁶ Reich Minister Ribbentrop was convicted on all counts of criminal activity at Nuremberg. In Count One it was stated that Ribbentrop promoted a common plan or conspiracy for war through his position in the Reich government. Count Two, dealing with crimes against the peace, stated that Ribbentrop promoted the preparations for war. Counts Three and Four, concerning war crimes and crimes against humanity, stated that Ribbentrop authorized, directed, and participated in these crimes, especially in the German occupied territories. The diplomatic and bureaucratic character of the Wilhelmstrasse did not excuse its executives from guilt in their

compliance with the grand designs of the Nazi Party.

The International Military Tribunal found Ribbentrop guilty on all four counts and sentenced him to death by hanging. The sentence was carried out quickly and without any serious disagreement from the judges.

In the closing arguments at Nuremberg, the prosecution stated that Ribbentrop was "in sympathy with the main tenets of National Socialism"⁴⁷ and that his support of Hitler was "whole-hearted."⁴⁸ Ribbentrop's personal aspirations enabled him to use the Wilhelmstrasse to carry out Hitler's desires so loyally to the end.

NOTES

¹Robert K. Woetzel, *The Nuremberg Trials in International Law* (London: Stevens and Sons Limited, 1960), 223, as cited from *Trials of the Major War Criminals Before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals Under Control Council Law No. 10 - The Ministries Case* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1952), 33: 321-322.

²United States Records of the Department of State - Special Interrogation Mission to Germany 1945-1946 (National Archives Microfilm Publications), Record Group 59, Microcopy 679, Roll 1, Herman Göring Folder, 3.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., 4.

⁵Ibid., 6.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., Erich Kordt Folder, 7-8.

⁸Ibid., Herman Göring Folder, 6.

⁹Ibid., Erich Kordt Folder, 8.

¹⁰Ibid., Ankor Hencke Folder, 2.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., William Keppler Folder, 24.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., Dr. Erich Kordt Folder, 9.

¹⁶Ibid., Hencke Folder, 4.

¹⁷Ibid., Ambassador Herbert von Dirksen Folder, 2.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., 8-9.

²⁰Ibid., Joachim von Ribbentrop Folder, 19.

²¹Ibid., Constantin von Neurath Folder, 4.

²²Ibid., Ernst Bohle folder, 5.

- ²³Ibid.
- ²⁴Ibid., Hencke Folder, 8.
- ²⁵Ibid.
- ²⁶DeWitt C. Poole, "Light on Nazi Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, (October, 1946): 132.
- ²⁷*Trials of the Major War Criminals Before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals Under Control Council Law No. 10 - The Ministries Case* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1952), 14: 112.
- ²⁸Ibid., 14: 456.
- ²⁹Gordon Craig and Felix Gilbert, *The Diplomats: 1919-1939* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 434-435.
- ³⁰*Ministries Case*, 13: 442.
- ³¹Ibid., 13: 437.
- ³²Ibid., 438.
- ³³Ibid., 451.
- ³⁴Ibid., 12: 36.
- ³⁵Ibid.
- ³⁶Ibid., 40.
- ³⁷Bradley Smith, *Reaching Judgment at Nuremberg* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 183-184.
- ³⁸Ibid., 184.
- ³⁹*Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal* (Nuremberg: International Military Tribunal, 1947-1949, 5: 5).
- ⁴⁰Ibid., 1: 287.
- ⁴¹Ibid.
- ⁴²Ibid., 10: 392.
- ⁴³Ibid., 17: 590.
- ⁴⁴Ibid.
- ⁴⁵Ibid., 1: 287.
- ⁴⁶Ibid.
- ⁴⁷Ibid., 288.
- ⁴⁸Ibid.