

## Week Four—Justice and Accountability

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The reason the world knows so much about the Holocaust is due to the meticulous records preserved by the Nazi bureaucracy. Everyone involved in the Holocaust system of systems was proud of his and her contribution so secrecy was not a factor. The average German could claim ignorance of the crimes, but it was willful ignorance—they were content not to speculate about what went on in the camps. Nonetheless, the evidence collected for the International Military Tribunal was vast and damning for the Nazi hierarchy.

Chief among the various war crime trials, the Nuremberg Trials attended to the crimes perpetrated by the principal Nazi leaders. Presiding over the trials from 1945 to 1946, American, British, French, and Soviet judges tried 22 war criminals, sentencing twelve to death and seven defendants to various terms in prison (three were acquitted). Of course, Adolf Hitler, Heinrich Himmler, and Josef Goebbels committed suicide in the closing days of the war, escaping the hangman's noose, but justice had been served nonetheless. The host of the Wannsee Conference, Reinhardt Heydrich was assassinated during the war, so he too met justice. Sentenced to death, Hermann Goering committed suicide the night before his execution but his fellow conspirators were hanged promptly on 16 October 1946.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> According to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, the following officials were executed: “Joachim von Ribbentrop (foreign minister), Wilhelm Keitel (head of the armed forces), Wilhelm Frick (minister of the interior), Ernst Kaltenbrunner (head of security forces), Hans Frank (governor-general of occupied Poland), Alfred Jodl (armed forces command), Alfred Rosenberg (minister for occupied eastern territories), Julius Streicher (radical Nazi antisemitic publisher), Fritz Sauckel (head of forced-labor allocation), and Arthur Seyss-Inquart (commissioner for the occupied Netherlands). Martin Bormann (Hitler's adjutant) was tried in absentia (Germany declared him legally dead after the war). The following received life sentences: Rudolf Hess (deputy leader of the Nazi party), Erich Raeder (head of the navy), and Walther Funk (minister of economics). The following received 10 to 20 years: Karl

The eponymous concentration camp trials (i.e., Dachau, Buchenwald, Mauthausen, Flossenbuerg, Muehldorf, and Dora-Nordhausen) focused on the war crimes of camp officials, with a couple of hundred tried and sentenced. However, in view of the vast numbers involved in implementing the Final Solution, the numbers indicted, not to mention convicted, were small. As the Cold War began to consume the attention of policy makers, many guilty parties faded back into society and others emigrated to North America and South America, among other places of refuge. The most famous fugitive, Major Adolf Eichmann, a participant at the Wannsee Conference and tasked with organizing the rail deportation plan, was located in Argentina, kidnapped by Israeli agents, and tried, sentenced and executed in Israel in 1962. The pursuit of Nazi criminals has never really ended. Over the ensuing decades, several former camp guards have been identified and brought to trial, though prosecution has proven difficult in light of the passage of time and fading memories.

The term “genocide” is relatively new in international affairs. According to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Before 1944, no word existed to describe the coordinated destruction of civilian populations on the basis of race, ethnicity, or religion. Polish Jewish legal scholar Raphael Lemkin introduced the word ‘genocide’ to give the crime a name.” Thus, “on December 9, 1948, the United Nations unanimously adopted the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which came into effect in 1951.” Henceforth, the most enduring legacy of the Holocaust is the International Community’s intolerance for genocide.

Despite the international “awakening” as a result of the Holocaust, bringing war criminals to justice is an exacting process. The military occupation of criminal regimes is extremely rare, so access to evidence, witnesses, and often the criminals themselves remains problematic. Still, international and national tribunals have established their authority over such crimes, so alleged war criminals are brought under international scrutiny and held accountable.

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Doenitz (Raeder's successor), Albert Speer (armaments minister), Baldur von Schirach (head of the Hitler Youth), and Konstantin von Neurath (governor of Bohemia and Moravia).