
Hitler's Pre-War Assessment of the United States and Japan

1.1 United States¹

The deterioration in US–German relations from the mid-1930s onwards forced Hitler to indulge in considerable spin whenever the subject of the USA had to be addressed in a public forum.² Long before that, however, he had given a great deal of thought to the future role of the United States (or, as he preferred to call it, the *Amerikanische Union*) in world affairs. Most of these musings are to be found in public speeches and the records of private conversations as well as in the draft of his unpublished *Second Book*, a follow-up volume to *Mein Kampf* with a clear emphasis on foreign affairs. Unlike *Mein Kampf*, no part of the *Second Book* was ever redacted for publication.

It is important to realise that Hitler completed the *Second Book* at a time (June–July 1928) when the USA barely featured in German politics in general or those of the NSDAP in particular. The election of the Republican Warren Harding to the presidency (November 1920) and the death of Woodrow Wilson (February 1924) had removed the latter as a figure of hatred for the German Right; the Young Plan still lay a year in the future. Moreover, Enrico Syring has made a convincing case that no source from that period offers so much as a hint that Hitler expected to find himself as German chancellor in the foreseeable future; instead, he was resigned to doing little more than prepare the ground for a successor by political agitation.³ Thus, these reflections offer a unique insight into what a Hitler unaffected by the pressures of real political

¹ For a more comprehensive analysis of the evolution of Hitler's view of the United States than is possible here, the reader is referred to the important new work by Brendan Simms: *Hitler: Only the World Was Enough* (London: Allen Lane 2019).

² The speeches he gave on 28 April 1939 and 30 January 1941 are cases in point. Max Domarus (ed.), *Hitler. Reden und Proklamationen, 1932–1945*, Bd. II (Wiesbaden: R. Löwit 1973), pp 1148–78; 1657–64.

³ Enrico Syring, *Hitler. Seine politische Utopie* (Berlin: Propyläen Verlag 1994), pp 241–76. An assessment supported by a number of statements Hitler himself made during the period in question. See, for instance, 'Handschriftlicher Brief Rudolf Heß an Gret Georg, Schweinfurt (27.11.1924)'; in: Wolf-Rüdiger Heß and Dirk Bavendamm (eds.), *Rudolf Heß. Briefe 1908–1933* (München: Langen Müller 1987), pp 355–6. According to Ian Kershaw, Hitler likely as not made the mental transition from agitator to future leader

power thought of the USA. How exactly he arrived at this assessment is to some extent subject to conjecture. It is, however, possible to single out a few influencing factors.

1.1.1 *First Impressions (1918–1923)*

Thanks to recent research by Brendan Simms we are in a position to put a date on the first contact between *Gefreiter* Hitler and representatives of the American nation: after his regiment's first brush with a US Army unit near Rheims on 17 July 1918, he was detailed to drop off two POWs at the field headquarters of the Twelfth Royal Bavarian Infantry Brigade.⁴ We do not know what (if anything) transpired between them along the way, but a reference made in a public speech nine years later as likely as not refers to this encounter.⁵ Hitler alleged that those captured Americans – most probably because one or both of them still spoke German – served as a powerful reminder to him of the net loss which foreign migration to America had meant for pre-war Germany. Whether coincidentally or not, one of the very first public speeches he had given while still employed as a political agitator by the Reichswehr in post-revolutionary Munich also appears to have addressed this issue⁶ – the net loss which pre-war Germany had sustained through migration.⁷ By December 1919, he was quoting the United States in one breath with Britain whenever he lashed out at the enemy alliance that kept defeated Germany pinned to the ground. This is not altogether surprising since these

during his imprisonment in Landsberg. Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889–1936: Hubris* (London: Allen Lane 1998), pp 218–19.

⁴ Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Abt. IV, Kriegsarchiv, 16. RIR, Nr. 10 ('Stab Juli 1918') as quoted by Brendan Simms, "'Against a World of Enemies': the Impact of the First World War on the Development of Hitler's Ideology"; in: *International Affairs* 90:2 (2014), pp 317–36, esp. p 324.

⁵ '20 Millionen Deutsche zuviel Rede auf NSDAP-Versammlung in Ansbach (26.3.1927)'; in: Bäbel Dusik (ed.), *Hitler. Reden, Schriften, Anordnungen. Band II: Juli 1926–Juli 1927* (München et al: K. G. Saur 1992), pp 193–219, esp. p 202. This multi-volume edition of Hitler's early speeches and proclamations will henceforth be quoted as RSA.

⁶ On this phase of Hitler's life, see Othmar Plöckinger, *Unter Soldaten und Agitatoren. Hitlers prägende Jahre im deutschen Militär 1918–1920* (Paderborn et al: Ferdinand Schöningh 2013).

⁷ Simms, 'World of Enemies', p 329. The speech took place on 24 August 1919 and carried the title 'Auswanderung' (emigration). The text does not survive. See also 'Rede auf einer NSDAP-Versammlung (München, 6. Juli 1920)' as well as 'Der deutsche Arbeiter und die Friedensverträge. Rede auf einer NSDAP-Versammlung (München, 31. Mai 1921)'; in: Eberhard Jäckel and Axel Kuhn (eds.), *Hitler. Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen 1905–1924* (Stuttgart: DVA 1980). A small number of documents included in this edition were later found to be forgeries. They are listed in Jäckel/Kuhn, 'Neue Erkenntnisse zur Fälschung von Hitler-Dokumenten'; in: *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* Bd. 32 (1984), Nr. 1, pp 163–9.

early speeches – not all of which survive – still often fit the mould of orthodox right-wing German opinion in 1919–21 on the USA and President Wilson in particular. According to this discourse, the US President had entered the war in 1917 to save the Allies from an increasingly likely defeat and, by extension, American banks from financial ruin.⁸ Wilson then mischievously ‘tricked’ the Germans into opening armistice talks by the apparent generosity of the Fourteen Points peace offer he put forward in January 1918, thus leaving Germany prostrate before the victors at Versailles.⁹

While it is true that these broadsides against the victors of 1918 were sometimes accompanied by harsh personal expletive, Hitler saved most of his venom for the German politicians who, according to him, had done the Allies’ dirty work for them.¹⁰ The US President, on the other hand, he sometimes granted a degree of grudging respect, for pulling off such a feat.¹¹ The fact that the US Senate had refused to approve the country’s membership of the League of Nations was also something Hitler felt stood in contrast to the undignified behaviour of the German political class in trying to be accepted into that august body.¹² American legislation aimed at keeping Native Americans and African Americans in a state of segregation and at stemming the influx of non-white immigrants into the country was another thing Hitler could approve of.¹³

⁸ For good examples of this, see ‘Deutschland vor seiner tiefsten Erniedrigung (München, 10. Dezember 1919)’; ‘Friede der Versöhnung oder der Gewalt. Rede auf einer NSDAP-Versammlung (München, 22. September 1920)’; ‘Der Weltkrieg und seine Macher. Rede auf einer NSDAP-Versammlung (Landshut, 28. Februar 1921)’ all in: Jäckel/Kuhn (eds.), *Aufzeichnungen*, pp 96–9, 233–7, 327–9.

⁹ For a good example of this, ‘Der Daitsche Staatsmann. Aufsatz (München, 28. April 1921)’; in: Jäckel/Kuhn (eds.), *Aufzeichnungen*, pp 371–3. It goes without saying that this train of thought conveniently overlooked the fact that Germany had chosen to avail herself of this offer only in October 1918 and after having brought the Allies to the brink of defeat in March–April 1918.

¹⁰ In the case of President Wilson, a sarcastic *Friedensapostel* (peace prophet) was the one most commonly used. ‘Moral and physical syphilitic American’ (*moralischen und physischen amerikanischen Syphilitikers*) constituted an – admittedly unique – all-time low. See ‘Der Daitsche Staatsmann. Aufsatz (München, 28. April 1921)’; in: Jäckel/Kuhn (eds.), *Aufzeichnungen*, pp 371–3.

¹¹ In: ‘Gegen den Völkerbund. Rede auf einer NSDAP-Versammlung’ (München 5. November 1920). Also ‘Versailles, Deutschlands Vernichtung (München, 24. November 1920)’. Both in: Jäckel/Kuhn (eds.), *Aufzeichnungen*, pp 257–8, 265–9.

¹² ‘Gegen den Völkerbund. Rede auf einer NSDAP-Versammlung (5. November 1920)’; in: Jäckel/Kuhn (eds.), *Aufzeichnungen*, pp 257–8.

¹³ ‘Politik und Rasse. Warum sind wir Antisemiten? Rede auf einer NSDAP-Versammlung (München, 20. April 1923)’; in: Jäckel/Kuhn (eds.), *Aufzeichnungen*, pp 906–10. A manifestation of approval that is of more than academic interest. New scholarship has revealed that the debate among Nazi jurists which would precede the proclamation of the Nürnberg laws of 1935 was informed to a considerable degree by American racist

It needs to be stressed, however, that these judgements, while noteworthy, did not stand at the heart of Hitler's image of the USA in the early 1920s. Even at this early stage of his career, the one thing he was most consistent about was his anti-Semitism. Even though to him the United States was a country run on material greed, he appeared willing to discriminate between ordinary Americans and the Jewish money-lending class which supposedly was in the process of usurping that country's government.¹⁴ The America of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries he described as 'an evolving civilisation', which was now being progressively corrupted by the 'Jews of Wall Street'.¹⁵ Even the country's entry into World War I was something he was willing to put down to the influences of British propaganda and 'the Jewish media of America', which had, after all, pulled off 'a real masterpiece: to goad a people both numerous and peaceful which cared as much about the struggle in Europe as it did about the North Pole, to join the most cruel war ever for the sake of "culture"'.¹⁶

It is difficult to ascertain whether this set of prejudices already amounted to a sort of programme that included the blueprint for a future American–German confrontation. Some recent research points to the possibility that Hitler's anti-Semitism may in fact have originated from the perceived need to remove an imagined Jewish barrier standing between a resurgent German Right and a no-holds-barred struggle against Anglo–American capitalism.¹⁷ There is some support for this, especially a 1919 speech where the United States is described as an 'absolute adversary' and thus placed ahead even of the hereditary enemy, France;¹⁸ in a similar address from May 1920 the future dictator makes a point of discriminating between those foreign powers whose enmity is incidental and arguably a consequence of foolish pre-1914 policies (Russia is mentioned in this context) and those which have to be seen as sworn enemies of the German Reich (France, Great Britain and the USA).¹⁹ Over and above this, both a draft and a manuscript from 1923, point to a reason for this

legislation. See James Q. Whitman, *Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Racial Law* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP 2017).

¹⁴ 'Deutschland vor seiner tiefsten Erniedrigung. Rede auf einer DAP-Versammlung (München, 10. Dezember 1919)'; in: Jäckel/Kuhn (eds.), *Aufzeichnungen*, pp 96–9.

¹⁵ 'Positiver Antisemitismus der Bayerischen Volkspartei. Rede auf einer NSDAP-Versammlung (München, 2. November 1922)'; in: Jäckel/Kuhn (eds.), *Aufzeichnungen*, pp 717–21.

¹⁶ 'Weltjude und Weltbörse, die Urschuldigen am Weltkrieg. Rede auf einer NSDAP-Versammlung (München, 13. April 1923)'; in: Jäckel/Kuhn (eds.), *Aufzeichnungen*, p 891.

¹⁷ Simms, 'World of Enemies', pp 330–1.

¹⁸ 'Deutschland vor seiner tiefsten Erniedrigung. Rede auf einer DAP-Versammlung (München, 10. Dezember 1919)'; in: Jäckel/Kuhn (eds.), *Aufzeichnungen*, pp 96–9.

¹⁹ 'Die Macher am Weltkrieg. Rede auf einer Versammlung des Deutschvölkischen Schutz- und Trutzbundes (Stuttgart, 26. Mai 1920)'; in: Jäckel/Kuhn (eds.), *Aufzeichnungen*, pp 135–6.

ranking that might go beyond raving anti-Semitism. According to these, Hitler had taken careful note of the failure – unique among the great powers of the time – of any kind of socialist party to establish a major foothold within the body politic of the United States.²⁰ To him, this was a crucial issue, because this was arguably the only political force that had had the power to stop war in 1914 and, in the German case, actually did so in 1918, with consequences that led directly to Versailles. The Americans' apparent immunity to this kind of threat was something that left him deeply impressed.²¹

1.1.2 Reading Matter

Hitler read voraciously, albeit in an unsystematic fashion that tended to favour biographies and military history. Unlike Stalin, he would only occasionally jot down marginal notes in the pages of books, making it difficult for the latter-day researcher to discriminate among the books which he read, just skimmed over or merely owned.²² The ranks of the third category were swollen by numerous gifts from admirers, which in many cases went straight onto the shelves of his main libraries in Berlin, Munich and Berchtesgaden, never to be touched again by the recipient's hand.²³ As a rule of thumb, the likelihood of Hitler devoting serious time to a book must have decreased considerably with every year he spent in power. The 1920s, on the other hand, have to be seen as a key period in two senses. First, his mind was still open to some new ideas and his view of the world had not yet hardened into a set of prejudices.²⁴ Second, the leisure enforced on him by his prison sentence (November 1923–December 1924) and

²⁰ A fact he highlighted in a brief article written for the Hearst papers more than eight years later. While on this occasion he may have been playing to American expectations, it's still obvious that the point had rankled with him, if nothing else. 'Rundfunkrede-New York American vom 13.12.1931 (11. Dezember 1931)'; in: RSA, Bd. IV.2, pp 256–9.

²¹ 'Börsendiktatur, Ursachen des Weltkrieges, das Los der Beamten, Bolschewismus. Stichworte zu Reden (o.O., post- April 1923)'; 'Weltjude und Weltbörse, die Urschuldigen am Weltkriege. Rede auf einer NSDAP-Versammlung (München, 13. April 1923)'; both in: Jäckel/Kuhn (eds.), *Aufzeichnungen*, pp 856–62.

²² Stalin consumed both books and files at a prodigious rate never matched by his arch-enemy. On his reading habits, see Zhores Medvedev and Roy Medvedev, 'Stalin's Personal Archive: Hidden or Destroyed? Facts and Theories'; in: Zhores A. Medvedev and Roy A. Medvedev, *The Unknown Stalin* (London: I.B. Tauris 2003), pp 57–94, esp. pp 88–91.

²³ In a recent examination of Hitler's reading habits, Timothy Ryback estimated that approximately two-thirds of Hitler's 16,000 volumes fell into this category. Timothy Ryback, *Hitler's Bücher. Seine Bibliothek. Sein Denken* (Köln: Fackelträger 2010), p 22.

²⁴ Albert Speer, in an early statement to Allied interrogators, claimed that Hitler had repeatedly admitted to him that everything he was trying to achieve was an outflow of ideas he had formed between his thirtieth and fortieth birthdays (1919–1929). Ulrich Schlie (ed.), *Albert Speer. Die Kransberg-Protokolle 1945. Seine ersten Aussagen und Aufzeichnungen* (München: Herbig 2003), p 98 (1.8.1945).

the following period of languishing political fortunes meant that, by force of circumstance, he had plenty of time on his hands.²⁵

Erwin Rosen's *Amerikaner* is a ninety-page booklet issued by a popular German publisher in 1920;²⁶ its author – a well-travelled German who had lived in the USA in the 1890s – sought to explain to his readers the mentality of the average American citizen and how this had contributed to making the USA both a land of plenty and an economic superpower. We are lucky in having a source which confirms that Hitler read this book while serving his sentence in Landsberg prison. In a letter by Rudolf Heß to his family dated 19 May 1924, he refers to Hitler 'devouring' Rosen's book.²⁷ Since our image of Hitler is that of a man notorious for taking on board other views only if they tended to reinforce his own prejudices, the obvious expectation is for *Amerikaner* to be a rabidly anti-American diatribe peppered with racist and anti-Semitic slurs. Closer examination reveals it to be an account that is not just completely devoid of the obligatory rants against President Wilson so prevalent among German political publications of the time, but also characterised by a surprisingly friendly attitude towards American society. The average American is described as having a healthy zest for life and hard work. Americans' constant proclamations of their country's greatness, while grating to European ears, are increasingly being borne out by reality, the author asserts. Their almost childlike naivete coexists side by side with a 'zeal for action' passed down from one generation to the next, which manifests itself in snappy decision-making and a 'violent passion for competition'.²⁸ Where politics are concerned, two points stand out, which Hitler undoubtedly would have agreed with. Rosen stresses that irrespective of flowery rhetoric, American politicians will never hesitate to put the interests of their country before those of the League of Nations. Second – especially in the context of worldwide events at the time that Hitler was reading the book²⁹ – working-

²⁵ Of this period in particular Hitler admitted to Heß in 1928 that the failure of the 1923 coup had been a blessing in disguise. Among other things, the time he was forced to spend in gaol 'had given him the time to reassess his situation and acquire fundamentally new insights'. See 'Handschriftlicher Brief Rudolf Heß an Ilse Heß (8.3.1928)'; in: Heß/Bavendamm (eds.), *Briefe*, pp 390–1. The timing of this statement is crucial: at the time, nothing indicated an imminent upswing in the NSDAP's fortunes, which would have allowed Hitler to put a positive gloss on past misfortunes.

²⁶ Erwin Rosen, *Amerikaner* (Leipzig: Dürr & Weber 1920). Rosen, who also served in the French Foreign Legion in 1905–6, is better known as the author of the memoir *In the Foreign Legion* (1910).

²⁷ 'Handschriftlicher Brief Rudolf Heß an Ilse Pröhl (18.5.1924)'; in: Heß/Bavendamm (eds.), *Briefe*, pp 326–39, esp. p 328.

²⁸ Rosen, *Amerikaner*, p 37.

²⁹ 1919–20 saw a rash of revolutionary uprisings in central and eastern Europe as well as civil war in Russia and the Soviet invasion of Poland. In the USA, a number of terrorist acts and widespread industrial action led to the Great Red Scare. There is a whole library of scholarly

class Americans, who are constantly seeking to improve their lot by making the most of the opportunities available to them, have proven completely immune to the temptations of communist ideology.³⁰

A year or two after reading Rosen, Hitler settled down to a book of a completely different ilk. Madison Grant (1865–1937) was a well-connected eugenicist from an old New York family, who agitated throughout the early 1900s against mixed marriages and for a limitation of immigration quotas. This effort peaked with his role in collecting the data that underpinned the 1924 Federal Immigration Act. This law fixed quotas that all but ruled out East Asian immigration, sharply reduced the numbers allowed to East European Jews and Italians, while favouring others (like Germans) seen as more desirable. A prolific writer, Grant's most influential work by far was *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916), which was translated into a number of languages, with the German edition coming out in early 1925. Grant essentially stood Darwinist theory on its head by insisting that throughout history the 'Nordic' race, while consistently victorious in its march of conquest through most of Europe and the Middle East, had invariably succumbed to its inferior, but more numerous subject peoples. In recent centuries, conflagrations like the Thirty Years War and the Great War had meant that the Nordic countries involved had suffered demographic setbacks they could ill afford. As a result, Germany could no longer be counted in the front ranks of the purely Nordic nations: only between 9 and 19 million of its people were, according to Grant, still worthy of the label 'Nordic'. The United States, he insisted, was still reasonably safe by virtue of the fact that the state rested on solid racial foundations put down in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when the first substantial waves of migrants to cross the Atlantic were composed of individuals from northern European countries. Even so, the aforementioned historical pattern would assert itself, without protection from new legislation that saw to both the limitation of immigration and the sterilisation of the unfit.

The extent of Grant's influence on Hitler's thinking is difficult to assess because broadly similar ideas were being put forward at the time by other commentators.³¹ However, we do know that Hitler referred to Grant and his

works on these events; for a succinct summary, see Anthony Read, *The World on Fire: 1919 and the Battle with Bolshevism* (New York and London: W. W. Norton 2008).

³⁰ Rosen, *Amerikaner*, pp 41–57, esp. p 53.

³¹ A paragraph in the first volume of *Mein Kampf* appears to indicate considerable familiarity with Grant's theories; this is rendered problematic, however, by the fact that the first volume of *Mein Kampf* was published in July 1925 and so a few weeks before the publication of the German language translation of Grant's book. Hence, an article espousing similar theories in the *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik* of January 1924 by the academic Franz Termerit appears to be the more likely source, especially since we know that Hitler had access to back issues of this journal through Professor Haushofer.

thinking on at least one occasion in a major speech and even bowed to the harsh judgement Grant had made about Germany's deteriorating Nordic status.³² In a key paragraph in the unpublished *Second Book* Hitler fully integrated into his ideology the notion of the constantly victorious, yet equally constantly threatened Nordic race on its march through history.³³ In further speeches he fully echoed Grant's thinking about the wasteful losses endured by both countries on the battlefields of World War I and even adopted an unflattering (and to a German public of the time, probably strangely unintelligible) comparison between the USA and Mexico that Grant had used to illustrate the baleful consequences of racial intermarriage. Finally, he wrote Grant a letter in which he thanked him effusively and described *The Passing of the Great Race* as his bible.³⁴ While Grant's influence on Hitler is key in the sense that his theory probably encouraged Hitler to transfer his racial ideology to a continental scale, he also nurtured in him a view of the United States which broadly speaking took into account the fact that it was a country of considerable demographic and economic potential. That Hitler should have arrived at this conclusion at least in part by the roundabout route of his racial pseudoscience did not make this assessment any less accurate.

1.1.3 *Public and Private Statements, Mein Kampf and the Second Book, 1924–1933*

Of all the value judgements that Hitler ever made about the USA, those that have endured the longest have been the anti-Semitic and racist diatribes of the wartime years. They are confirmed by the impressions of a few of his fellow travellers, such as Fritz Wiedemann and Ernst Hanfstaengl. The latter wrote in 1970 that 'to Hitler the US apparently was nothing more than a country ruled by gangsters, corrupt politicians and Jews and where public order – such as it was – was determined by the rate of kidnappings, stock exchange crashes and millions of unemployed'.³⁵ This chapter will attempt to explore why these statements stand in such contrast to other, much less well-publicised ones.

See Christian Hartmann, Thomas Vordermayer, Othmar Plöckinger and Roman Töppel (eds.), *Hitler, Mein Kampf. Eine kritische Edition* (München: Institut für Zeitgeschichte 2016), p 745.

³² 'Warum sind wir Nationalisten? Rede auf NSDAP-Versammlung in München (6.4.1927)'; in: RSA, Bd. II.1, pp 235–41, esp. p 236. Grant had calculated that Germany's purely 'Nordic' population currently stood at a mere '9 or 10 million inhabitants', figures Hitler repeated in his address.

³³ Gerhard L. Weinberg, Christian Hartmann, Klaus Lankheit (eds.), *Hitler. Reden. Schriften. Anordnungen (Februar 1925 bis Januar 1933). Band II A. Aussenpolitische Standortbestimmung nach der Reichstagswahl* (München: K. G. Saur 1995), p 87.

³⁴ Grant kept the letter carefully filed away and developed the habit of sharing its contents with fellow travellers sympathetic to his cause. Ryback, *Bücher*, p 149.

³⁵ Ernst Hanfstaengl, *Zwischen Weißem und Braunem Haus* (München: Piper 1970), p 280.

At no other time since joining the Bavarian Army in 1914 was Hitler better able to make the most of (admittedly enforced) leisure than during the incarceration after the failed coup attempt of November 1923. He greatly benefitted from the fact that existing legislation allowed him to serve his time under a privileged regime of *Festungshaft* reserved to political detainees.³⁶ Especially after he and a number of accomplices were moved to the fortress of Landsberg, treatment can only be described as a pale reflection of what awaited ordinary inmates of the German prison system of the time. This was compounded by the obvious sympathy with which the warden of the institution and the guards treated their famous charges; they were allowed regular visits from the outside, unlimited access to books and newspapers and showered with culinary gifts from admirers all over Germany. Cells were not locked in daytime and the inmates were allowed to wander around their wing and even the prison gardens at will. Hitler put on weight and began work on the manuscript that would become *Mein Kampf*.³⁷ Of the seven co-conspirators who had been sent to Landsberg at the same time as Hitler, the one closest to him was probably Rudolf Heß. Destined to become world-famous by his flight to Scotland in May 1941 and forty-year-long post-war imprisonment in Spandau, he had joined the newly founded NSDAP in July 1920 and soon turned into one of its most zealous agitators. By 1922–3, he had become one of the individuals closest to Hitler. After spending a few months on the run from the authorities, he turned himself in and joined his beloved *Tribun* in Landsberg, where he was delighted to find him in excellent shape.³⁸ The extent to which the much better educated Heß played a marginal or major role in the writing of *Mein Kampf* is irrelevant in this context;³⁹ what is important is that the two grew even closer than they had been before the coup, thus laying the foundation for Heß's being made Deputy Führer after he left Landsberg. Together with the hotel-like, but still somewhat cramped living conditions at Landsberg, this would give Heß a unique glimpse into Hitler's reflections on the world around him. In a draft letter dated 9 April 1924, Heß

³⁶ For an excellent analysis of the historical and legal context of *Festungshaft*, see Peter Fleischmann, *Hitler als Häftling in Landsberg am Lech* (Neustadt an der Aisch: P.H.C.W. Schmidt 2015), pp 20–33.

³⁷ On living conditions in Landsberg, see Holger Herwig, *The Demon of Geopolitics. How Karl Haushofer 'Educated' Hitler and Hess* (New York and London: Rowman & Littlefield 2016), pp 90–4, and David King, *The Trial of Adolf Hitler* (London: Macmillan 2017), pp 303–23.

³⁸ 'Handschriftlicher Brief Rudolf Heß an Ilse Pröhl (18.5.1924)'; in: Heß/Bavendamm (eds.), *Briefe*, pp 326–9, esp. p 326. As Heß put it to his fiancée: 'the period of enforced leisure is beneficial to him.'

³⁹ The extent to which early drafts of *Mein Kampf* benefitted from Heß's input is still contentious. For more detailed views on this see Kershaw, *Hitler I*, pp 241–50, as well as Othmar Plöckinger, *Geschichte eines Buches: Adolf Hitler's Mein Kampf 1922–1945* (München: Oldenbourg Verlag 2006), pp 146–9.

reflected on Hitler's broad range of interests, including technical processes aimed at facilitating human progress. In a recent conversation, the future Führer had dwelt at length on the successes which the Ford Motor Company had achieved in the mass production of cars.⁴⁰ In view of Henry Ford's by then well-known anti-Semitism, the historian would be justified in assuming that it was the US magnate's prejudices, rather than his latest industrial achievements, that had attracted Hitler's attention. In the following weeks and months, however, Hitler would return to the subject of the American way of life time and again. On 16 May, Heß again summarised many of Hitler's musings, this time for the benefit of his mother. Among the subjects singled out for special attention was the future of the motor car as the main means of transport for the working class 'as in America', Germany still being many years away from such a state of affairs.⁴¹ On 27 May, Heß reported a conversation where Hitler had dwelt in considerable detail on the latest rage from America as far as architecture was concerned – skyscrapers. Hitler even expressed a desire to have the NSDAP's new party headquarters installed in such a building, as a deliberate snub to the *Theutschvölkischen* within the movement, as he put it.⁴² On 16 June 1924, Heß – apparently for the first time – appended to one of the letters he sent his fiancée a virtual word-by-word record of a monologue by Hitler. Again, the subject was the need to make wider use of available technology to ease the travails of day-to-day life, a task Hitler saw as the defining challenge for his generation. He went so far as to state that it was necessary to treat the United States as an example to be followed (*Man soll sich ein Beispiel an Amerika nehmen*).⁴³ German car manufacturers demanding a rise in tariffs in order to gain some protection from US competitors should be told to work harder and achieve similar results. In a different context, even the American Yellowstone Park was praised as a model institution which Germany would do well to emulate.⁴⁴

Otto Wagener was a relative newcomer to Hitler's court.⁴⁵ A veteran of World War I and the post-war Freikorps, he came from a well-off background and supported various far-right causes in the 1920s. Starting in 1927, some of

⁴⁰ 'Maschinenschriftliche Ausarbeitung von Rudolf Heß (9.4.1924)'; in: Heß/Bavendamm (eds.), *Briefe*, pp 317–21, esp. p 319.

⁴¹ 'Handschriftlicher Brief Rudolf Heß an Klara Heß, Reichsoldsgrün (16.5.1924)'; in: Heß/Bavendamm (eds.), *Briefe*, pp 322–5, esp. p 324.

⁴² A reference to representatives of the far Right both within and outside the NSDAP who sought a return to old 'Germanic' values of pre-modern times. 'Handschriftlicher Brief Rudolf Heß an Ilse Pröhl (27.5.1924)'; in: Heß/Bavendamm (eds.), *Briefe*, pp 329–31.

⁴³ 'Anlage zu Dokument 342: Handschriftliche Aufzeichnung Rudolf Heß von einem Gespräch mit Adolf Hitler (16.6.1924)'; in: Heß/Bavendamm (eds.), *Briefe*, pp 339–40.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ The following is mostly a summary of Henry Ashby Turner, 'Otto Wagener, Der vergessene Vertraute Hitlers'; in: Ronald Smelser et al (eds.), *Die braune Elite II. 21 weitere biographische Skizzen* (Darmstadt: WBG 1993), pp 243–53.

his wartime comrades who had joined the Nazi cause encouraged him to attend speeches and rallies. Finally, during the August 1929 rally of the NSDAP in Nürnberg, the head of the SA, Oskar Pfeffer von Salomon, a good friend from his Freikorps days, introduced him to Hitler. It appears that he was made the offer to join the party and become Pfeffer von Salomon's chief of staff more or less on the spot. When a year later Hitler and Pfeffer had a massive falling out, which led to the latter tendering his resignation, Wagener decided to stay. In early 1931 he made room for a new appointee as SA chief of staff: Ernst Röhm, a member of the NSDAP's old guard, who had just returned from a stint in Bolivia as a soldier of fortune. A move that appeared to relegate Wagener to the sidelines actually brought him closer to Hitler. He volunteered to set up a cell within the NSDAP's leadership that would have as its sole remit the study of the problems afflicting the German economy. His experience as a manager of several companies before 1929 gave him a modicum of expert knowledge in the subject. As luck would have it, the NSDAP's central offices were just in the process of moving house to the newly built Braunes Haus in Munich and, whether by chance or by design, Wagener ended up in an office next door to Hitler's. The latter took a liking to his fellow southerner, included him in his retinue and repeatedly asked him to accompany him on the numerous trips he made all over Germany.

By the spring of 1932, Wagener had developed a political theory based on the progressive evolution of private companies into entities collectively owned by their most productive workers. Sketchy at best (and in all likelihood, completely impractical), this theory soon lost ground to voices within the NSDAP leadership who advocated a close cooperation with private industry, with a view to attaining political power. In September 1932, Wagener resigned his position and for a few months acted as a political lobbyist for the party in Berlin. From April to June 1933, after the NSDAP's seizure of power, he briefly held the ill-defined position of Reich commissioner for the economy until he fell foul of his rival Göring. He lost all power and never returned to politics. His relevance to this account lies in the fact that while a POW in British hands, he spent much of 1945–6 rewriting from memory diaries he had kept throughout much of the 1929–33 period. They consist of a chronologically arranged series of sixty-two anecdotal snapshots, usually revolving around a particular incident or conversation, often (though by no means always) with Hitler at its centre.⁴⁶ Where he describes events subject to verification half a century later, his account is remarkably accurate. The fact that we know for certain that he was part of Hitler's close retinue for most of the January 1931–September 1932 period gives this source additional credibility. Some of the differences of opinion on economics he records between himself and the future

⁴⁶ Henry Ashby Turner Jr. (ed.), *Hitler aus nächster Nähe. Aufzeichnungen eines Vertrauten 1929–1933* (Frankfurt a.M.: Ullstein 1978).

Führer ring true; they tally with what we know about the controversies within the party at the time about what economic policy to espouse – a subject area on which Nazi dogma had so far been vague. As already stated, Wagener had a stake in these discussions, which might make him a less than absolutely faithful chronicler of the exchanges.⁴⁷ However, even though he claims to have made several unsuccessful attempts to steer Hitler away from confrontation with the USSR, he appears to have been non-committal on the subject of the USA. What his record does reflect is that throughout the summer of 1931 and possibly as late as 1933 he and Hitler had several exchanges during which the latter dwelt at some length on the future role of the United States in world politics.⁴⁸ In Hitler's view, the USA was preordained to pursue a policy of expansion in order to meet the problem of industrial overproduction. This issue had if anything been exacerbated and not alleviated by the Great Depression then enveloping the world.⁴⁹ The only way to check this in the long term would be for Europe to form a union under German leadership, after having brought the Ukraine into the fold with a view to acquiring self-sufficiency in raw materials. Should Europe fail to do this, the USA could not fail eventually to establish a global hegemony.⁵⁰ Hitler was willing to concede that President Roosevelt might sincerely be pursuing economic recovery as a means to restore prosperity to the masses hit by the Depression. But he prophesied that the President would fail in this endeavour and would ultimately turn to war in order to vanquish permanently any economic competitors.⁵¹ Nor did the world of racial politics provide any solace for this bleak outlook. Hitler freely acknowledged that the Nordic element predominated in the United States and that there was little doubt that in due course the Americans too would become one people.⁵²

⁴⁷ On the reliability of Wagener's writings in general see Turner (ed.), *Aufzeichnungen*, pp VI–XVI. It is noteworthy that even after 1945, Wagener refused to adopt the posture of a 'prophet without honour'. Instead, he freely conceded that his course might have not have brought victory either.

⁴⁸ Turner (ed.), *Aufzeichnungen*, pp 280–97 (fragments 33, 34 and 35). The chronology at this point is slightly blurry, since there is at least one reference to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who was after all only elected in November 1932 and inaugurated in March 1933. It is likely that Wagener incorporated a later conversation between him and Hitler into the account.

⁴⁹ Turner (ed.), *Aufzeichnungen*, p 280 (fragment 33), p 281 (fragment 34), p 296 (fragment 35).

⁵⁰ Turner (ed.), *Aufzeichnungen*, p 293 (fragment 35).

⁵¹ Turner (ed.), *Aufzeichnungen*, p 296 (fragment 35).

⁵² Turner (ed.), *Aufzeichnungen*, p 288–9 (fragment 35): 'So wird auch Amerika mit der Zeit ein Volk werden.' Statements which he made to Albert Speer in the second half of the war appear to contradict this assessment. It should be borne in mind, however, that by then Germany's deteriorating situation put him in a situation where statements made to his closest collaborators were increasingly marked by wishful thinking, his joyful reaction at

References to the United States and its people are far from infrequent in *Mein Kampf*, the two-volume programmatic diatribe Hitler wrote in Landsberg and in the months after his release.⁵³ However, they are not assembled in a coherent way that might point the reader towards the future shape of US–German relations; instead, they stand on their own. What is important is the fact that nearly all of them express admiration or even awe at American achievements. A case in point is a paragraph in the second volume discussing the proliferation of technical innovations coming out of the USA. According to the future dictator’s interpretation, this had to be seen as the direct result of a culture of social mobility that allowed people of modest means to reap the reward of their labours, thus creating a powerful incentive for individuals from all walks of life to put their minds to work in a manner that would benefit both them and the state.⁵⁴ Other features of the inter-war United States also meet with his approval – its sheer size for one thing. In contrast to the British and French empires, whose size was mostly underpinned by vulnerable overseas territories, the USA boasted an enormous and unmatched continental ‘base’ with just a few overseas possessions.⁵⁵ To Hitler this alone was enough to rule out a future European war against the enemies of 1914, aimed at re-establishing Germany’s borders of 1914. The way he saw it, even a successful conclusion of such a war would leave Germany still struggling to outflank Britain or ‘match the size of the [American] Union’.⁵⁶ It was with some glee, however, that he looked forward to the intensification of US–British rivalries over commerce and naval supremacy, since such a conflict was likely to ‘doom England’ unless backed by a major ally.⁵⁷ Finally, Hitler paid Washington the highest imaginable accolade. The Americans’ long tradition of shunning marriages with ‘lesser races’,⁵⁸ along with the new legislation that all but barred migration by Asians and considerably lowered the quotas for Eastern Europeans,⁵⁹ showed that they were engaged in a serious attempt at preventing ‘the lowering of the quality of their race’.⁶⁰

Hitler continued to observe American affairs carefully from afar. In the original edition of *Mein Kampf* the wording hinted at the likelihood that the Americans’ endeavour to maintain the numerical supremacy of the Nordic

Roosevelt’s death on 16 April 1945 being a case in point. Schlie (ed.), *Kransberg-Protokolle* (7.9.1945), p 231.

⁵³ Volume I appeared in July 1925, Volume II in December 1926. Hartmann et al (eds.), *Mein Kampf*, p 69.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p 1093 f.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p 401.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p 1651.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p 1617.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p 743. Hitler contrasted this tradition with the high levels of racial inter-marriage in many Latin American countries.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p 1117.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p 743.

races in their country would be doomed in the long run. In the 1930 edition, however, a minor but important amendment indicated that the author had reached the conclusion that the struggle for Nordic supremacy in the USA was still open-ended.⁶¹

Hitler developed these ideas over the years, and by the time he sat down to write the *Second Book*,⁶² they formed the groundwork for an entire chapter exclusively dedicated to the USA.⁶³ In it, and in contrast to most other spokesmen for the far Right in Germany at the time, Hitler did not merely bemoan the cultural encroachment symbolised by US feature films and jazz bands, but reflected on the reasons behind this budding hegemony. To him neither mere numbers nor the size of the country could explain this success. Echoing Grant, he stressed that the key factor was the racial homogeneity and hence compatibility of the bulk of the migrants, who in any case constituted the pick of their generation.⁶⁴ This fact was reflected both in the daring they exhibited by the mere decision to migrate and in their emergence at the top of the ensuing Darwinist scramble for resources that the expansion of the white settlers across the continent had entailed. The combination of this quality of *Menschenmaterial* (human resources) with the sheer extent of land capable of development accounted for the country's unique potential. However, Hitler was not carried away by the romantic image of settlers engaged in a perpetual struggle against Native Americans and the untameable wilderness – an image that had in any case belonged to the past for two generations. Instead, and harking back to his reflections on the subject in Landsberg, he singled out the future of the car industry as an image to impress upon his readers the pointlessness of engaging the USA in peaceful competition for markets. To him, the motorisation of modern society was 'an issue of immeasurable importance for the future'.⁶⁵ The 1920s had seen US car production multiply many times over, with European producers struggling to stay in the race. In Hitler's view, this was an exercise in futility, since the size of the US domestic market enabled American car producers to implement economies of scale that would always allow them to out-produce and outbid competitors. The same logic was

⁶¹ Ibid. The first edition spoke of the existing racial supremacy by the Germanic races in the United States which would, however, come to an end when they fell prey to race defilement. This sentence was given a new meaning in 1930 with the omission of 'when' and its substitution by 'if'.

⁶² Weinberg et al, *Aussenpolitische Standortbestimmung*, pp 81–92.

⁶³ It is rather misleadingly titled '*Weder Grenzpolitik noch Wirtschaftspolitik noch Paneuropa*', which may account for the fact why some historians have overlooked it. See Barbara Zehnpfennig, *Adolf Hitler: Mein Kampf. Studienkommentar* (München: Wilhelm Fink 2011), p 216.

⁶⁴ Weinberg et al, *Aussenpolitische Standortbestimmung*, pp 91–2.

⁶⁵ Weinberg et al, *Aussenpolitische Standortbestimmung*, p 84.

applicable to any other industry. Hitler made light of the idea that a long-term European union would be enough to meet the USA on anything like equal terms. This would be possible only under the leadership of a powerful hegemon and after legislation similar to that of the 1924 US Immigration Law had been implemented across the European continent. Failure to bring about such a state of affairs, he stressed in the conclusion of the manuscript, would lead to ‘the overpowering of the world by the American Union’.⁶⁶

The true importance of these private and semi-private musings can only be realised by comparing and contrasting them with the public statements Hitler made around the same time.⁶⁷ The first time he reflected on American affairs after the publication of *Mein Kampf* appears to have been in an article sold as a brochure in February 1926. There he noted that Britain was impaled on the horns of a dilemma: it found itself having to choose between a Japanese and an American alliance; ties of history and kinship suggested the latter, he noted, but it was equally obvious that this would only hurry along the inevitable process whereby the United States would dethrone Britain as the power that still currently ruled the waves – just.⁶⁸ On 4 July 1926, he dwelt at length on the tragedy which the immigration – and hence, loss – of millions of Germans to the Americas constituted for the German nation.⁶⁹ On 26 March 1927 he returned to the same theme, making it more evocative by mentioning the encounter between himself and American POWs being marched to the rear in 1918.⁷⁰ On 6 April 1927 he publicly quoted Grant’s estimate of Germany’s ‘racial deterioration’ and heaped praises upon the new restrictive American Immigration Law, which he compared favourably with the alleged incompetence of the German government in this area.⁷¹ On 26 June 1927, he went much further, describing the USA as ‘a pillar of the white race’.⁷² On 6 August 1927, he returned to the theme of the net loss which generations of

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p 88, 181.

⁶⁷ The first attempt to match the two was undertaken by Jürgen-Peter Schmied. See ‘Hitlers Amerikabild vor der “Machtergreifung”’, in: *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 2002, Nr. 12, pp 714–26. According to Schmied, Hitler simply used the USA as an instrument with which to highlight alleged wrongs in German society in his public speeches. Such an assessment seems questionable in light of both the sheer abundance of such references, but also the way in which they are mirrored by statements he made in private conversation.

⁶⁸ ‘Die Südtiroler Frage und das deutsche Bündnisproblem (12.2.1926)’; in: RSA, Bd. I, pp 291–2.

⁶⁹ ‘Politik, Idee und Organisation. Rede auf NSDAP-Parteitag in Weimar (4. Juli 1926)’; in: RSA, Bd. II.1, pp 17–25.

⁷⁰ ‘20 Millionen Deutsche zuviel ! Rede auf NSDAP-Versammlung in Ansbach (26. März 1927)’; in: *ibid.*, pp 193–219, esp. pp 201–2.

⁷¹ ‘Warum sind wir Nationalisten? Rede auf NSDAP-Versammlung in München (6. April 1927)’; in: *ibid.*, pp 235–41, esp. pp 236–7.

⁷² ‘Freiheit und Brot. Rede auf NSDAP-Versammlung in Dörflas (26. Juni 1927)’; in: *ibid.*, pp 386–403, esp. p 392.

mass migration to the Americas had meant for Germany and again asked his audience to cast their minds back only a few years, to when the German Imperial Army found itself facing more and more former Germans in the ranks of the 1918 American Expeditionary Force (AEF). He also reminded any German toying with the idea of migrating across the Atlantic to escape the spectre of European conflict that the United States was a nation very much born and bred in violence, so much so that he described it as a country conquered according to 'our' principles.⁷³ On 10 October 1928, while making a general point about Europe's alleged dearth of arable land, he dwelt at length on the subject of the standard of living Americans were enjoying at the time, irrespective of their almost complete disregard for the social needs of the working class. What is noteworthy is that he freely conceded that individual for individual, Americans were every bit as hardworking and inventive as Germans – a compliment he almost never paid to the people of other nations.⁷⁴

In November 1928 American affairs featured in both an article and a speech: the former was a review of current affairs written for the *Illustrierter Beobachter*, in which he also analysed the recent outcome of the US presidential elections. He ridiculed those German observers who had seen the race exclusively in terms of the implications it was going to have for the future of Prohibition. In his judgement, the only thing that really mattered was that President-elect Hoover had made it unambiguously clear he was willing to protect US industry with high tariffs. Accordingly, neither American 'economic-imperialist plans' nor 'the attempts by US capital to take over and monopolise foreign industries' was likely to cease.⁷⁵ On 30 November 1928 he returned to his old core theme with regards to the USA: generations spent attracting immigrants from Nordic countries and recent legislation which ruthlessly barred from entry the sick, the weak and the criminally disposed put the USA in a position where 100 million Americans would, according to Hitler, always outweigh 1,000 million Russians. It was this simple fact of life that made the USA such a 'global threat'.⁷⁶ On 17 April 1929 he returned to a favourite theme: the preponderance of the ever-growing US car industry and the well-nigh futility of trying to match its output.⁷⁷ A speech in Nürnberg

⁷³ 'Was ist Nationalsozialismus? Rede auf NSDAP-Versammlung in Heidelberg (6. August 1927)'; in: RSA, Bd. II.2, pp 439–52, esp. p 443 (quote). It is difficult to ascertain with certainty whether 'our principles' alluded to the ways of European history or the Social Darwinist principles of the NSDAP.

⁷⁴ 'Die Panzerkreuzer- Narretei der Kommunisten. Rede auf NSDAP-Versammlung in München (10. Oktober 1928)'; in: RSA, Bd. III.1, pp 121–49, esp. pp 130–1.

⁷⁵ 'Politik der Woche – Artikel (17.11.1928)'; in: RSA, Bd. III.1, pp 240–1.

⁷⁶ 'Freiheit und Brot. Rede auf NSDAP-Versammlung in Hersbruck (30. November 1928)'; in: RSA, Bd. III.1, pp 261–87, esp. p 269.

⁷⁷ 'Rede auf NSDAP-Veranstaltung in Annaberg (17. April 1929)'; in: RSA, Bd. III.2, pp 202–12, esp. 209–10.

delivered on 4 August 1929 stressed the issue of past German migratory waves, which according to him had been nothing but a disastrous drain on the country, and the US legislation to keep out the weak, feeble-minded or racially suspect. It was the combination of the two, Hitler said, that made Washington a 'never-ending threat' to Europe.⁷⁸

The Great Crash of October 1929, as well as the implementation of the Young Plan so loathed by the German Right, should have put a major dent in Hitler's admiration for American society. Quite undaunted by this, he continued to dwell on the general topic of US potential. An article dated 29 January 1930 which he wrote for the *Völkischer Beobachter* had as its topic the Conference on Naval Disarmament, which had started in London a few days previously. However, when he discussed the economic potential behind the naval policy of the great powers, it was the USA that occupied centre stage. That country was blessed with unfathomable resources and populated by 'a racial selection of Europe's best which had grown there over centuries'. That ultimate accolade, however, did not stop him from predicting that 'a dire fate awaited all of Europe if no way could be found to somehow put a stop to the expansionism of America's economy'.⁷⁹ On 1 December 1930, while giving a brief address to Hamburg businessmen, he returned to the theme of US competition. America, he maintained, was both overly rich and engaged in the process of cornering the global market in most, though not (yet) all products.⁸⁰ On 25 June 1931, irrespective of the ravages the Depression had made in America, he continued to reflect on the country's virtually unlimited potential. Demography and geography had created a state that was in the process of elbowing aside European manufacturers in areas of industry they had seen as their own only years before. If some of these industries had been spared so far, it was only because the American competition had not yet found the time to move into them. As a threat to Europe, he went on, the United States rivalled even that *bête noire* of the Right, the USSR and international communism.⁸¹ A speech delivered on 26 January 1932 before a group of Ruhr industrialists appears to have been the last occasion prior to the forming of his government on which he discussed the threat posed by American capitalism.⁸² The speech was weighted to favour themes where National Socialists and

⁷⁸ 'Appell an die deutsche Kraft. Rede auf NSDAP-Reichsparteitag in Nürnberg (4. August 1929)'; in: RSA, Bd. III.2, pp 345–52, esp. p 347–8.

⁷⁹ 'Die Hintergründe der Londoner Flottenkonferenz – Artikel (29.1.1930)'; in: RSA, Bd. IV.1, pp 43–4.

⁸⁰ 'Rede vor dem National-Klub von 1919 in Hamburg (1. Dezember 1930)'; in: RSA, Bd. IV.1, pp 141–4, esp. p 142.

⁸¹ 'Rede auf DSNSStB-Versammlung in Erlangen (25. Juni 1931)'; in: *ibid.*, pp 413–31, esp. pp 416–17.

⁸² 'Rede vor dem Industrie-Club in Düsseldorf (26. Januar 1932)'; in: RSA, Bd. IV.3, pp 74–97.

captains of industry would struggle the least to find common ground, and hence dwelt at length on the internal and external threats posed by Soviet-style communism. Even here, however, he managed to slip in a paragraph on the unique nature of the challenge posed by the *Amerikanische Union*. As he saw it, the unique nature of this phenomenon was defined by two characteristics: first, the economies of scale enjoyed by the USA, which were permanently beyond the reach of any European nation; second, the fact that the sheer size of the American domestic market should really obviate the need for any kind of export-oriented economy, thus strongly suggesting the latter was somehow tied up with a higher aggressive design.⁸³

Hitler's thoughts on the USA during this period are noteworthy for two reasons. First, there is a remarkable coincidence between statements made in private conversation, semi-private musings in his *Second Book* and statements which he made for the record in public speeches. Second, this was before the murderous anti-Semitism of his government (1933–41) and the success of his policy of aggression (1938–41) brought him into increasing conflict with the United States and forced him first to seek to assuage and then to confront an increasingly hostile reaction from the USA.⁸⁴ During this earlier period of the 1920s and early 1930s, he was able to speak with much greater freedom.

1.1.4 *Input from Individuals with Access to Hitler*

Ernst Hanfstaengl was very much the odd man out in the ranks of the *alte Kämpfer* (literally, 'old fighters'), NSDAP militants who had joined the party or the SA well before 1933.⁸⁵ He came from an affluent background, was American on his mother's side and had studied at Harvard from 1905 to 1909, where he made the acquaintance of the young Franklin Delano Roosevelt, among others. Even more strikingly – in view of the premium placed by the National Socialists on the *Fronterlebnis* ('fraternity of the

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp 86–7.

⁸⁴ Especially in the early years of his regime (1933–6) Hitler was still capable of marshalling considerable charm and wit when meeting American visitors. For a typical example, see the conversation with William Randolph Hearst in 1934: David Nasaw, *The Chief: The Life of William Randolph Hearst* (Boston and New York: Houghton & Mifflin Company 2001), pp 496–7.

⁸⁵ In view of the rather minor and transient role which Hanfstaengl played on the stage of the Third Reich, he has been remarkably well served by the scholarly attention invested in him. See David G. Marwell, *Unwanted Exile: a Biography of Dr. Ernst 'Putzi' Hanfstaengl* (State University of New York PhD 1988); David G. Marwell, 'Ernst Hanfstaengl – des "Führers" Klavierspieler'; in: Ronald Smelser et al (eds.): *Die braune Elite II. 21 weitere biographische Skizzen* (Darmstadt: WBG 1993) pp 137–49; Peter Conradi, *Hitler's Piano Player: The Rise and Fall of Ernst Hanfstaengl, Confidant of Hitler, Ally of FDR* (London: Duckworth 2005). Marwell's PhD is mainly concerned with Hanfstaengl's time in exile in the USA.

trenches') – he then sat out World War I in New York, where he managed the family's art gallery from 1911 to 1920. On his return to Munich he attended a speech by Hitler for the first time in November 1922 and emerged mesmerised. Over the following year he found himself increasingly drawn into the orbit of Hitler's social circle. Though a gifted piano player whose renditions of Wagner appeared to touch a chord in Hitler, other reasons seem to have played a part too. At the time, the fledgling NSDAP had barely any other members who could boast the affluence or cosmopolitan background of Hanfstaengl. The former, his affluence, would pay for a new printing press for the *Völkischer Beobachter*; his cosmopolitan background turned him into a sort of unofficial spokesman capable of handling occasional interview requests by foreign media representatives. At the same time, he introduced Hitler to a small but growing number of individuals from Munich's high society, who would be the beginning of a network of sympathisers in high places. By the spring and summer of 1923, irrespective of the fact that Hanfstaengl was not even a party member, the two men were meeting almost daily.⁸⁶

The collapse of the November 1923 coup against the Weimar Republic revealed his commitment to the Nazi cause as somewhat lukewarm, however. After returning from a brief exile in Austria, he devoted himself to academic studies, gaining a history PhD in the process. Even though his villa continued to be a popular meeting point for Hitler and a select few of the NSDAP's leadership in the late 1920s, it took the NSDAP's landslide victory in the September 1930 elections to revive Hanfstaengl's interest in politics. The party's change in fortunes brought a sudden surge in interest from foreign journalists. Since most party VIPs lacked the language skills – or for that matter, charm or manners – to be trusted with an interview situation, Hitler himself decided that somebody of Hanfstaengl's background was needed as a go-between and coach.⁸⁷ This position he fulfilled in an informal fashion from September 1930. By the end of 1931, the decision was made to turn it into an official full-time position; he was given a salary, an office staff and the mission to 'sell' the idea of a National Socialist Germany to the outside world. From then onwards he became the point of contact for eminent foreign journalists like Louis P. Lochner, Sefton Delmer, John Gunther, Karl von Wiegand, Djuna Barnes and Dorothy Thompson, who were trying to secure an interview with Hitler or some other party bigwig.⁸⁸ By far his greatest coup

⁸⁶ On the relationship between Hitler and Hanfstaengl during that period see Marvell, *Klavierspieler*, pp 140–3, as well as Conradi, *Piano Player*, pp 43–64.

⁸⁷ For this decision see *ibid.*, pp 79–80.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 83–131. On the experience of US journalists in the Germany of the 1930s, see Carmen Müller, *Weimar im Blick der USA: Amerikanische Auslandskorrespondenten und öffentliche Meinung zwischen Perception und Realität* (Münster: LIT 1997) as well as Michaela Hoenicke Moore, 'Know your Enemy': *The American Debate on Nazism, 1933–1945* (Cambridge: CUP 2010), esp. pp 41–60.

involved a reversal of roles: he secured an interview with William Randolph Hearst, who was taking a cure at a southern German spa in August 1934. This was followed by a much-publicised audience for the American newspaper baron at Hitler's Reichskanzlei.⁸⁹ The triumph proved to be short-lived, however: in trying to ensure tolerable working conditions for foreign journalists – if nothing else – he emerged as a voice of moderation and this made him increasingly vulnerable at Hitler's court. In October 1934, Hanfstaengl fell from grace after losing out to a rival in an intrigue.⁹⁰ He was banished from Hitler's circle and fled Germany in February 1937.

While there is no doubt that Hanfstaengl threw himself heart and soul into the task of presenting an acceptable face of the NSDAP and its Führer to foreign journalists, we know much less about the extent to which he managed to influence Hitler with his particular views on the USA. According to his post-war memoirs, he did try to impress upon him the need for a 'rational' relationship with the United States, which would preclude a repeat of the gratuitous clash of 1917–18. But he freely concedes that he only stirred Hitler's interest when talk turned to subjects of a very specific, rather than fundamental nature.⁹¹ In the absence of other sources, it is thus impossible to assert that Hanfstaengl was a major influence on Hitler's views on the USA.⁹² The extent and success of his attempts in that direction must remain speculative.

From February 1933 to January 1938 Hitler's most senior and influential military advisor was his war minister (*Reichswehrminister*), *General der Infanterie* Werner von Blomberg.⁹³ He has gone down in history as the man instrumental in 'handing the Wehrmacht to Hitler' as well as for his ignominious fall after marrying a young lady of ill repute in January 1938.⁹⁴ Military historians know him as an open-minded individual who was keen to integrate civilian agencies and ideas into the war of the future. Until the eve of Blomberg's dismissal, Hitler showed an unprecedented degree of trust in

⁸⁹ Conradi, *Piano Player*, pp 172–5. See Nasaw, *The Chief*, pp 488–99, for a depiction of these events based on sources close to Hearst.

⁹⁰ For slightly different interpretations of what may have transpired prior to Hanfstaengl's fall from grace see Marvell, *Klavierspieler*, pp 145–6 and Conradi, *Piano Player*, pp 176–82.

⁹¹ Hanfstaengl, *Weißem und Braunem Haus*, pp 45–7. According to Hanfstaengl, Hitler kept probing him on disparate subjects like the quality of American-built cars, on what it felt like to live in a high-rise building and how the American public was disposed towards the Jewish minority.

⁹² Conradi comes closest to making a strong case for this, but provides no supporting source note. Conradi, *Piano Player*, pp 48–9.

⁹³ He was promoted to the rank of *Generaloberst* on 30 August 1933 and elevated to *Generalfeldmarschall* (the first of the newly minted Wehrmacht) on 20 April 1936.

⁹⁴ For an extensive discussion of these issues the reader is referred to the biography by Schäfer. Kirstin A. Schäfer, *Werner von Blomberg – Hitlers erster Feldmarschall. Eine Biographie* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh 2006).

him, which at times seems to have bordered on genuine friendship; even after the general's retirement, he continued to speak highly of him.⁹⁵ This ensured that Blomberg enjoyed a truly privileged position among the most senior Wehrmacht officers of the early Third Reich. An often overlooked fact is his role in acquainting Hitler with the military past of the United States. Blomberg spoke excellent English,⁹⁶ and he took a keen interest in the history of the American Civil War, which he felt was a subject unduly neglected at German military academies.⁹⁷ While a *Generalleutnant*, he had carried out an extensive tour of various bases and training establishments of the US Army between 24 September and 3 December 1930.⁹⁸ He was unimpressed by what he saw at West Point, where so far as he was able to tell the syllabus placed greater stress on spit and polish than on modern tactics.⁹⁹ While he levelled similar criticism at the National Guard units organised at state level, he nonetheless judged them to be valuable as an institution, because of the pro-military attitude they fostered.¹⁰⁰ He singled out for particular praise the work done at the War College and within the reserve units attached to learning institutions, like the

⁹⁵ It appears that this relationship stemmed in part from the gratitude Hitler felt towards Blomberg for having checked (vastly exaggerated) army opposition to the NSDAP's seizure of power in 1933. For an example of this, see Hildegard von Kotze (ed.), *Heeresadjutant bei Hitler* (Stuttgart: DVA 1974), pp 20–1 (entry for 20 April 1938) and p 61 (entry for 10 September 1939). Once safely ensconced in power, Hitler went on record as contrasting Blomberg's smooth running of his ministry with affairs at the *Auswärtiges Amt*, where relatively minor functionaries were allowed to obstruct the new government's policies at every turn. See Jürgen Matthäus and Frank Bajohr (eds.), *Alfred Rosenberg. Die Tagebücher von 1934 bis 1944* (Frankfurt a. Main: S. Fischer Verlag 2015), pp 120–1 (entry for 14 May 1934). See also IfZ, ZS 285/1–4 'Protokoll zur im Auftrag des Deutschen Insituts f. Zeitgeschichte durchgeführten Befragung Herrn K.J. v. Puttkamers am 12.3.1952' and Nicolaus von Below, *Als Hitlers Adjutant 1937–1945* (Selent: Pour le Merite 1999 rp), p 51.

⁹⁶ We have it on the authority of *Hauptmann* Karl Boehm-Tettelbach, Blomberg's Luftwaffe adjutant and himself a native speaker, that the general's English was 'first rate' (*ausgezeichnet*). Karl Boehm-Tettelbach, *Als Flieger in der Hexenküche* (Mainz: Hase & Koehler 1981), p 29.

⁹⁷ Schäfer, *Blomberg*, p 237 (Fn 453).

⁹⁸ BA/MA, RH 2/1825 'Generalleutnant von Blomberg. Bericht über mein Kommando zu der Armee der Vereinigten Staaten (1.1.1931)'. For an analysis of his trip and the agendas driving it, see Paul Fröhlich, "Meine Reise ergab in dieser Beziehung sehr gute Aufklärung für unsere Belange." *Die militärische Zusammenarbeit der Reichswehr mit der U.S. Army 1918–1933* (unpublished MA thesis, Universität Potsdam 2009), pp 85–90. My thanks to Paul Fröhlich for providing me with a copy of his thesis.

⁹⁹ BA/MA, RH 2/1825 'Generalleutnant von Blomberg. Bericht über mein Kommando zu der Armee der Vereinigten Staaten (1.1.1931)', pp 79–80. Blomberg's companion on this trip, *Oberst* Kühnental, judged West Point to be 'horrifyingly antediluvian' (*erschreckend vorsintflutlich*). See RH 2/1825 'Bericht des Oberst Kühnental über seinen Aufenthalt in den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika (n.d.)', p 31.

¹⁰⁰ BA/MA, RH 2/1825 'Generalleutnant von Blomberg. Bericht über mein Kommando zu der Armee der Vereinigten Staaten (1.1.1931)', pp 95–9. Blomberg and Kühnental visited a unit of the New York National Guard.

Reserve Officer Training Corps embedded in 325 colleges all over the country.¹⁰¹ If there was one factor still limiting US military effectiveness in Blomberg's view, it was the fact that too many of its officers had to hone their skills in theoretical exercises rather than by being in command of men, an inevitable consequence of the ratio between officers and enlisted men then prevailing. Of course, only a standing army could change that, but as matters stood around the turn of the years 1930–1, such a sea change – advantageous though it would be to the country's role in world affairs – appeared unlikely.¹⁰² In more general terms, Blomberg admired the unique way in which American society had coalesced around the idea of technical progress and economic prosperity. Irrespective of differences in ethnic background and economic income, Americans were remarkably homogenous in their outlook on life and their concerns. More importantly, as Blomberg put it, 'it is possible to conclude that such a people will lend itself to be led'.¹⁰³



Figure 1.1 Werner von Blomberg (far left) and the service chiefs reporting to Hitler (right). Blomberg's assessment of American military potential tended to complement the opinion Adolf Hitler had already formed in his mind. (ullstein bild/ullstein bild via Getty Images)

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp 99–102.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pp 112–13.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp 121–5.

The general was prone to exaggerate the extent of his influence on Hitler. Even so, it is fair to assume that throughout his time as minister for the armed forces, he must on average have met Hitler on a near-weekly basis. The extent to which he used this opportunity to widen the Führer's horizons with regard to US military affairs would probably be a matter for speculation were it not for a casual aside made by a US journalist in a 1942 publication. Frederick Oechsner was head of the United Press International's Berlin office from 1932 to 1941 and in this capacity managed to interview Hitler on four occasions. On one of these he gained access (whether because he was left unsupervised or through the good offices of a sympathetic adjutant remains open to speculation) to the library of the new German chancellor. In the 1942 book *This Is the Enemy* he gives one of the better descriptions of its holdings, even allowing for a couple of polemical asides calculated to cast America's enemy no. 1 in a poor light.¹⁰⁴ He estimated the number of books on military history as nearing 7,000.¹⁰⁵ Though the majority of these dealt with the lives and campaigns of one of 'the German and Prussian potentates', other subjects were covered too. Of particular noteworthiness was the fact that 'there is Theodore Roosevelt's work on the Spanish-American War, also a book by General von Steuben, who drilled our troops during the American Revolution. Blomberg, when he was war minister, presented Hitler with 400 books, pamphlets and monographs on the United States armed forces and he has read many of these'.¹⁰⁶ He also added that Hitler had no hesitations in having books in a foreign language translated if they caught his interest.

Another potential influence was Fritz Wiedemann, who had served together with Hitler on the staff of the regimental HQ of 16. Bavarian *Reserve-Infanterieregiment* throughout much of World War I. Back then, Wiedemann had been the regimental adjutant and as such one of Hitler's superiors.¹⁰⁷ By all accounts, they got on well, though a bit of mischief may also have played a part when Hitler offered Wiedemann a position as his adjutant in 1921. At the time, Wiedemann was fully engaged running a successful dairy factory and he politely declined. When his business ran into trouble in the early 1930s, however, he remembered the offer and asked his old runner for a job. After spending most of 1934 as the adjutant of Rudolf Heß, he moved on to become Hitler's *Persönlicher Adjutant* in January 1935. His role is of some relevance to this account because in November and December 1937 together

¹⁰⁴ 'Some 800 to 1,000 books are simple, popular fiction, many of them pure trash in anybody's language.' Frederick Oechsner, *This Is the Enemy* (London: William Heinemann 1942), p 81.

¹⁰⁵ A fairly accurate estimate, if one allows for the fact that Oechsner would only have been able to take in the holdings of one of the two main libraries (either at the Reichskanzlei or the one in the Berghof at Berchtesgaden).

¹⁰⁶ Oechsner, *Enemy*, pp 79–80.

¹⁰⁷ For an account of Hitler's and Wiedemann's time on the Western Front, see Thomas Weber, *Hitler's First War* (Oxford: OUP 2010), esp. pp 96–234.

with his wife he undertook a four-week long trip through the United States which saw him visit (among other places) New York, Washington, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles.¹⁰⁸ In his 1964 memoirs, he alleged that on the subject of the United States, Hitler 'was inclined to believe any nonsense which was put to him'; accordingly he was determined to collect evidence on his travels to enlighten the dictator on his return.¹⁰⁹ Seeing that this statement comes from a member of Hitler's close entourage writing after the war, it would normally have to be taken with a fistful of salt. However, Wiedemann's growing estrangement from the regime in general and his concern over the underestimation of US power in particular can be corroborated from independent sources of the time.¹¹⁰

Knowing that Hitler took a serious interest in architecture, he gifted him thirty richly illustrated books on recent feats of the US building industry, like the Empire State Building and the Hoover Dam. The recipient of this generous gift appears to have taken an interest, but only to the extent that he instructed Speer to plan his next projects with the specific aim of topping these structures. Wiedemann was also able to report at length about his impressions, when Hitler gave him an afternoon to do so in early 1938.¹¹¹ A few weeks later, however, the Führer refused to sign up to the 1939 World Exhibition in New York over a perceived slight, at which point Wiedemann seems to have given up on further attempts to get Hitler acquainted with the USA. A year later he was sacked over his increasingly obvious lack of enthusiasm for Hitler's war course and posted as consul general to San Francisco.¹¹²

Hans-Heinrich Dieckhoff was Germany's ambassador in Washington from mid-May 1937 to late November 1938,¹¹³ and as such oversaw bilateral relations between the two countries during the crucial period when they first reached crisis point. He was ideally suited to the task since he had already served with the embassy in Washington as a *Botschaftsrat* (counsellor) from November 1922 to December 1926. Back then, Dieckhoff had acquired a reputation for familiarising himself with the politics of the country and the forces underpinning it to a remarkable degree – a trait that would stand him in good stead on his return to

¹⁰⁸ Wiedemann, *Feldherr*, pp 215–18.

¹⁰⁹ Wiedemann, *Feldherr*, p 215.

¹¹⁰ 'Botschafter Dieckhoff an Ministerialdirektor Weizsäcker (20.12.1937)'; in: ADAP, Serie D, Bd. I, pp 537–9. Also Weber, *Hitler's First War*, pp 322–5 and Heike B. Görtemaker, *Hitlers Hofstaat. Der innere Kreis im Dritten Reich und danach* (München: C.H. Beck 2019), pp 259–65.

¹¹¹ Wiedemann, *Feldherr*, pp 220–2.

¹¹² Wiedemann, *Feldherr*, pp 234–5.

¹¹³ For much of what follows, the author is indebted to the author of the excellent biography on Dieckhoff: Sylvia Taschka, *Hans-Heinrich Dieckhoff, Diplomat ohne Eigenschaften? Die Karriere des Hans-Heinrich Dieckhoff, 1884–1952* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner 2006) [= *Transatlantische Historische Studien*, Vol. 25].

the USA in 1937.¹¹⁴ Even more remarkably, his cables from the 1920s had reflected a pro-Weimar attitude not commonly found among the elite reared under the old empire.¹¹⁵ This manifested itself in scathing criticism of the political Right at home in Germany, in particular its agitation against the endeavour of the *Auswärtiges Amt* to get the USA to intervene as an 'honest broker' in its attempts to restructure Germany's reparations payments. Dieckhoff saw the agitation as counterproductive, on one noteworthy occasion referring to the activities of the NSDAP as 'that Hitler-rubbish', which he deemed to be 'more dangerous than commonly assumed'.¹¹⁶

It is impossible to say whether Hitler at any point learned of this unflattering assessment. In any case, Dieckhoff was informed in March 1937 that he was to take over from his predecessor Hans Luther to retrieve a deteriorating situation. Taking up his post on 15 May, he was able to draw on the good will he and his wife had accumulated in the previous decade. Even journalists known to be highly critical of the new Germany were at first inclined to give the new envoy the benefit of the doubt.¹¹⁷ For his part, Dieckhoff appears to have seen his main task as carrying out some provisional damage control in order to stop relations from worsening even further. In his eighteen months as German ambassador he bombarded his superiors with dire warnings about the USA's potential and that the outbreak of a new European war would see America siding with Britain either straightaway or after a brief period of transition. Initiatives virtually guaranteed to enrage the Americans were those that appeared to indicate a spread of National Socialism by way of alliance (with Italy or Japan) or by spreading political sedition. As history showed, Dieckhoff was powerless to prevent the alliances, but scored a success of sorts when he managed to convince his government to cut most ties with the *Amerikadeutscher Volksbund*, a party of Nazi sympathisers made up of German-Americans attempting to square their American nationality with the ideology and trappings of National Socialism.¹¹⁸

Beyond this, it is difficult to assess to what extent Dieckhoff was able to form Hitler's view of the United States. We have anecdotal evidence that by May 1938 Hitler was getting sorely exasperated by the tone and content of Dieckhoff's cables. In Hitler's view, they did not reflect the manifest reluctance in US government circles to get involved in any kind of European conflict and were much too 'pessimistic' in tone.¹¹⁹ This appears to be confirmed by an

¹¹⁴ Taschka, *Diplomat*, pp 72–3.

¹¹⁵ Dieckhoff had joined the *Auswärtiges Amt* in 1912.

¹¹⁶ Taschka, *Diplomat*, p 85. The fact that he offered this assessment nine months before Hitler's coup attempt of November 1923 makes it even more prescient.

¹¹⁷ On Dieckhoff's arrival in Washington, Taschka, *Diplomat*, pp 166–9.

¹¹⁸ Taschka, *Diplomat*, pp 174–91.

¹¹⁹ Theo Sommer, *Deutschland und Japan zwischen den Mächten* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr 1962) p 122, fn 29. The exchange in question took place in May 1938 between Hitler and

event that occurred a few months later. While spending his summer holidays in Germany, Dieckhoff repeatedly tried – and failed – to get an audience with Hitler; when an interview finally came about through the intercession of Wiedemann, he found himself dismissed after a conversation of five minutes.¹²⁰ What little influence he may have had around that time dwindled fast after his recall to Germany following the events of the *Reichskristallnacht* of November 1938. Technically, he remained ambassador to the USA until December 1941. He seems to have been copied into most or even all of the communications between the embassy and Berlin.¹²¹ He also intervened on occasions when he felt that the caretaker envoy, Hans Thomsen, and the military attaché, Friedrich von Boetticher, were diverging ever so slightly from the line he had set, especially as regards America's political will to intervene in the war.¹²² His opinion was still sought whenever German–American relations had reached yet another impasse or when a propaganda ploy had to be found to counter yet another pro-British move by the Roosevelt administration. Even so, it was inevitable that his influence would wane with every passing month.

It may have been with a view to counter this development that on 9 January 1941 he composed a memo for Ribbentrop that is remarkable for the insight it gives into the workings of the mind of a German 'appeaser' in early 1941.¹²³ He stressed that he was setting out to disprove the theory that in view of the current US help for beleaguered Britain, a 'proper' state of war between Berlin and Washington was unlikely to constitute much of a change. He went into considerable detail to explain that this would give heart to the other enemies of the Axis, virtually rule out a separate peace with Britain and grant the US President sweeping war powers, which would allow him to multiply many times over his country's already considerable military potential. In the face of such a menace, Germany, he went on, could not but 'keep cool' and refuse all challenges and provocations that might come its way. However, in the last paragraph he conceded that there was one conceivable American transgression that would make a German–American clash 'inevitable'. Should the US government dismantle its neutrality legislation prohibiting the sailing of US merchantmen into British waters and cap this by escorting American

Eugen Ott, ambassador in Tokyo, and concerned the influence US power in the Pacific region might have on Japanese decision making. It has to be stressed that this account was not recorded on the day, but passed on to Sommer by Ott in a 1955 interview.

¹²⁰ Taschka, *Diplomat*, pp 178–9.

¹²¹ Even most of the reports that the SD intelligence service compiled on US affairs in 1940–1 found their way into his in tray, as the distribution lists appended to these documents prove. They can be found under PA/AA, Inland II g, 337–341.

¹²² For examples of this, see Taschka, *Diplomat*, pp 194–5, 201–2.

¹²³ 'Aufzeichnung des Botschafters Dieckhoff (9.1.1941)'; in: ADAP, Serie D, Bd. XI.2, pp 883–5.

convoys straight into British ports, 'a completely new situation would be created'.¹²⁴ It is quite possible that he decided to end his paper on this bellicose note because such a development seemed a very long way off and because a wholly uncompromising peace stance would have consigned his memo to Ribbentrop's waste basket. On the other hand, it may also have reflected his innermost thinking. Either way, it gives us an interesting insight into what level of US involvement in the Anglo-German war was regarded unacceptable both by Kriegsmarine admirals and diplomats.

On 19 April 1933 *Generalleutnant* Friedrich von Boetticher took over as the first German military attaché in Washington since 1917.¹²⁵ He proved to be an excellent choice, who established cordial working relations with the relatively small circle of senior US army officers who in those days worked for the US Army chief of staff in Washington DC's Munitions Building. He was conscious of the fact that fourteen years after Versailles, he was likely to be regarded as a 'Hun' and worked hard to overcome prejudices among his hosts. He was aided in this by two strengths. For one thing, he had already established cordial relations with a small number of US army officers who travelled to Germany in the 1920s to research German assessments of the AEF's war in 1917–18. In his capacity as head of the Reichswehr's *Heerestatistische Abteilung* (Department for Army Statistics), it fell to Boetticher to assist them in this task and smooth over any frictions.¹²⁶ In addition, he had a keen interest in and remarkable knowledge of the military history of the US Civil War which never ceased to impress American friends with whom he toured the sites of battlefields in nearby Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania. We do not know when Hitler got into the habit of having Boetticher's reports presented to him in raw form; a statement recorded by his army adjutant in June 1939 strongly implies that by then he had been reading them for at least a few months.¹²⁷

By that stage a bizarre decision Ribbentrop had taken in early January to boycott invitations to official occasions hosted by Americans put the attaché in a unique position. German army officers posted abroad as attachés continued to be subordinate to *Oberkommando des Heeres* (OKH),¹²⁸ and not the *Auswärtiges Amt*. This allowed Boetticher unfettered access to his old sources

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p 885.

¹²⁵ Recently Boetticher has been the subject of an excellent biography. See Alfred M. Beck, *Hitler's Ambivalent Attaché: Lt. Gen. Friedrich von Boetticher in America, 1933–1941* (Washington DC: Potomac Books 2005).

¹²⁶ Beck, *Ambivalent Attaché*, pp 23–33.

¹²⁷ Kotze (ed.), *Heeresadjutant*, pp 46–7, n.d. (June 1939): 'Of all political reports, those by Boetticher pleased him the most; he was capable of looking behind the scenes, knew how to judge the Americans and their views and was also capable of assessing what to weigh and how to judge the latter.'

¹²⁸ As of 8 April 1940 the *Attachegruppe* was turned into a department of the *Oberquartiermeister IV* section of the general staff of the Army. In November 1939, Ribbentrop relaxed the original prohibition, but it proved difficult to recover the ground

and circle of acquaintances, which virtually turned him into a substitute ambassador. Dieckhoff's successor Thomsen more or less resigned himself to this state of affairs and even willingly co-signed cables that covered both political and military affairs but were clearly authored only by Boetticher, since he kept referring to himself in the singular.

This quirk alone would have made it impossible to disguise from Hitler or any of his senior military advisers who was actually running things in Washington. Accordingly, it greatly exasperated both Ribbentrop and Ernst von Weizsäcker, the permanent secretary (*Staatssekretär*) at the Auswärtiges Amt, in Berlin. Finally, when in late May 1941 the coverage of an important Roosevelt speech was yet again hijacked by the general, Ribbentrop succeeded in enforcing a division of labour which ensured that Thomsen reported on key political events by himself.¹²⁹ If this new arrangement caused any friction between Thomsen and Boetticher, it has not been recorded; it is perfectly possible that a change in the general's personal circumstances in the months before Pearl Harbor encouraged his silent acquiescence in losing his *de facto* ambassadorship.¹³⁰

Together with his assistant air attaché, Hauptmann Peter Riedel, who from July 1938 kept an eye on the growth of American air power, Boetticher filed reports which were by and large accurate within a certain time frame. What set the general apart from Dieckhoff was the tone of his cables. To the ambassador a clash with the USA was something to be avoided at almost any price; Boetticher, while not denying the human and industrial potential of the country, began to shift his focus to the myriad of problems that confronted the Americans after Roosevelt announced a massive mobilisation in May 1940. This was justified insofar as most historians would agree that throughout 1940–1 US strategy was crippled by a major mismatch between ends and means. This manifested itself most clearly in the struggle to turn funds – which were available – into an adequate number of shipyards, factories, barracks, tanks, planes and, most importantly, trained men – which were not available. Boetticher also stressed time and again that these problems would be multiplied many times over by the need to support Great Britain and the increasing likelihood of conflict not just with Germany, but Japan too. As

lost in the meantime. See 'Thomsen an Unterstaatssekretär Woermann (21.10.1939)', esp. fn 4; in: ADAP, Serie D, Bd. VIII, p 260.

¹²⁹ PA/AA, StS USA, Bd. 6, 'Thomsen an den Herrn Staatssekretär. Geheime Reichssache (23.5.1941)'. Finding himself upbraided yet again by his superiors for the manner in which he had allowed Boetticher to routinely report on non-military matters, Thomsen pointed out that the general was being encouraged in this by the 'repeated praise' which he kept receiving from the 'highest quarters' (*von höchster Stelle*). In the bureaucratic language of the Third Reich, this term generally referred to Adolf Hitler.

¹³⁰ At the time, Boetticher's twenty-three-year old son was hospitalised with depression in a Maryland hospital. See Beck, *Ambivalent Attaché*, pp 192.

a result of this, too many of his cables placed rather too much stress on problems that were likely to be remedied in the mid-term, with only a handful giving the US Army its full due as a potential enemy endowed with considerable human and material resources.¹³¹ As for the big picture, it can safely be described as the general's blind spot. Only once did he dwell at length on the stage when the US armed forces were likely to be able seize a limited strategic initiative and the possible consequences this might have for the Axis.¹³² The simple fact that the United States by dint of its size and location on the globe was practically invulnerable to any strategic threat Germany might be capable of marshalling in the early 1940s was not once brought up. Taken together, these sins of omission and commission undoubtedly produced a rather skewed intelligence picture of a potential enemy caught in a phase of uniquely transient vulnerability.

On Dieckhoff's departure from Washington in November 1938, forty-seven-year-old career diplomat Hans Thomsen took over as caretaker envoy. Any attempt to determine the actual impact he had in shaping Hitler's view of the United States should really be impossible, in view of the way in which he allowed himself to be elbowed aside by the attaché in 1939–41. Although he was still co-signing the cables from Washington, their diction and the persistent use of the first person singular made it clear they had been authored by Boetticher. While this exasperated Ribbentrop, it did not apparently do so with Hitler, who was full of praise for Boetticher's work in the American capital. It is thus a stroke of luck for the historian that by early June 1941 Ribbentrop temporarily enforced the new routine on the Washington embassy that finally forced Thomsen to write and sign his own cables.¹³³ For the first time Hitler would be given the opportunity of passing comment on two different reporting styles. Failure to do so might imply that he no longer took the time to read a fair number of the reports himself, an understandable assumption in view of the time that running the Russian campaign would demand of him in the summer and autumn of 1941. Proof to the contrary is provided by an August entry in the Seekriegsleitung's war diary: 'The Führer has noted with approval that reports of the envoy in Washington have proved to be unerring in their assessment of US political affairs and the political

¹³¹ PA/AA, StS USA, Bd. 9, 'Boetticher und Thomsen an Auswärtiges Amt. Betreffend amerikanisches Heer (5.11.1941)'.

¹³² PA/AA, StS USA, Bd. 7, 'Boetticher & Thomsen an Auswärtiges Amt (30.7.1941)'.

¹³³ 'Ribbentrop an die Botschaft in Washington. Für Geschäftsträger persönlich (26.5.1941)' as well as 'Ribbentrop an die Botschaft in Washington. Für Geschäftsträger persönlich (27.5.1941)' and 'Ribbentrop an die Botschaft in Washington. Für Geschäftsträger persönlich. (1.6.1941)' all in: PA/AA, StS USA, Bd. 6. By September, cables written in the old 'Boetticher style' were beginning to reappear, though not to the same extent as had been the case before.

intentions of the President.¹³⁴ The entry also recorded the intention to copy the Japanese foreign ministry into some of these reports to help it reach a realistic appraisal of America's strengths and weaknesses. When compared to Boetticher's communications, Thomsen's, though almost never substantially different in content, tend to be briefer and less burdened by the liberal use of invectives ('Jews', 'warmongers', 'busybodies'). Post-war allegations that Thomsen allowed himself to be turned by the Americans into an agent of influence who in early December 1941 spoon-fed Hitler tainted intelligence to encourage a declaration of war have yet to be corroborated by contemporary US sources. Since these telegrams covered the same ground as the reports that he, Boetticher and Dieckhoff had repeatedly submitted over the last year, this allegation cannot be taken at face value.¹³⁵

In the spring of 1942, Hitler reminisced over lunch on the work done by the two men who had been his eyes and ears in Washington in 1939–41. He praised them both as observers who had never allowed themselves to be 'bluffed' and who had been unerring in their judgements. It is noteworthy that Thomsen's contribution did not vanish behind the larger role played by Boetticher. Hitler stated that he intended to single Thomsen out for a particularly challenging position after the war.¹³⁶

All the individuals listed so far had regular access to Hitler either from a distance (Dieckhoff, Boetticher, Thomsen), through frequent personal contact (Hanfstaengl, Blomberg) or both (Wiedemann) over a prolonged period of time. Other personalities with an informed opinion on the USA only had fleeting opportunities to catch a moment or two of the Führer's time, with many such visits undoubtedly going by unrecorded.

¹³⁴ Werner Rahn and Gerhard Schreiber (eds.), *Kriegstagebuch der Seekriegsleitung 1939–1945. Teil A*, Bd. 24 (Herford: Mittler & Sohn 1991), p 165 (entry for 20 August 1941) The term used in the entry is *Geschäftsträger*, i.e. the correct term to describe Thomsen's position, thus clearly setting him apart from Boetticher.

¹³⁵ Thomas Toughill, *A World to Gain: The Battle for Global Dominance and Why America Entered WW II* (Forest Row: Clairview 2003), pp 118–22.

¹³⁶ '18.5.1942 mittags (Wolfsschanze)'; in Henry Picker (ed.), *Hitlers Tischgespräche im Führerhauptquartier* (München: Propyläen 2003), pp 442–3. It is important to stress that the editions of Hitler's musings published in the English-speaking world as 'table talk' or 'monologues' are not word-by-word recordings of his spoken words, but a summary of key points of a conversation which struck one of the NSDAP functionaries (Henry Picker or Heinrich Heim) detailed for the task of recording them as particularly important. While the content is usually accurate, comparisons with other sources have revealed discrepancies in wording, nuance and context. For a thorough analysis of this source, see the excellent Mikael Nilsson, 'Hitler redivivus.' *Hitlers Tischgespräche* und 'Monologe im Führerhauptquartier' – eine kritische Untersuchung; in: *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* Bd. 67 (2019), Nr. 1, pp 105–45.

One of the more famous journalists and travel writers of the Germany of the inter-war years was the Austrian-born Colin Ross (1885–1945). Even though he studied engineering and economics between 1905 and 1910, he took to journalism, becoming a war correspondent before World War I, a profession he stuck to once the war broke out. In the inter-war years he travelled widely to most continents of the world and wrote a number of bestselling books about his exploits, three of which had the United States as their subject.¹³⁷ A witness statement from the main Nürnberg War Crimes Trial suggests that in October 1939 the Hitler Youth leader, Baldur von Schirach, came up with the idea of introducing him to Hitler in the hope that he would impress upon the Führer the hopelessness of ever challenging the USA. If this really was the idea behind the scheme, it produced ambivalent results.¹³⁸ Hitler met Ross in the Reichskanzlei for one hour around noon on 12 March, 1940. The chemistry between the two appears to have been quite good, because Ross was asked to return in two days' time to have lunch with Hitler. The contents of their talk were recorded by Walther Hewel, Ribbentrop's liaison at Führer's Headquarters.¹³⁹ Some of what Ross said reflected the common wisdom of most contemporary observers, such as the predominant role played in US political affairs by a relatively small, near-aristocratic clique centred on the East Coast and mostly descended from seventeenth-century English and Dutch settlers. They tended to be willing to cooperate with Britain but were distrustful of Germany. Americans of German descent were highly regarded by their countrymen and well integrated, but also rather anxious to be seen as such.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Bodo-Michael Baumunk, *Colin Ross: Ein deutscher Revolutionär und Reisender 1885–1945* (unpublished MA thesis, Tübingen University 1991). *Unser Amerika* had as its subject the story of the German-Americans and their contribution to the rise of America as a great power. Two further titles discussed extensive trips through Canada and Mexico, respectively.

¹³⁸ 'The Nizkor Project'. The Trial of the German Major War Criminals. Sitting at Nuremberg, Germany 27 May to 6 June 1946: www.nizkor.org/trials-of-german-major-war-criminals (accessed 26 April 2014). The statement was made by Hartmann Lauterbacher, a witness for the defence of Schirach. The chronology (the witness specifically refers to Ross still being away on travels outside Germany in October 1939 and not returning for a number of months which would account for his not meeting Hitler until mid-March) supports the story, but it needs to be kept in mind that the account was no doubt somewhat embellished for effect.

¹³⁹ 'Aufzeichnung des Vortragenden Legationsrats Hewel, Persönlicher Stab RAM. Unterredung des Führers mit Herrn Colin Ross am 12. März 1940 von 12–13 Uhr (12.3.1940)'; in: ADAP, Serie D, Bd. VIII.1, pp 714–17.

¹⁴⁰ A direct consequence of the social marginalisation and occasional mob violence many of them had found themselves subjected to in 1917–18. For an analysis of the precarious position of German-Americans during World War I, the reader is referred to Katja Wüstenbecker, *Deutsch-Amerikaner im Ersten Weltkrieg. US-Politik und nationale Identitäten im Mittleren Westen* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner 2007), esp. pp 214–44.

This accounted for the futility of trying to instrumentalise them in any capacity on behalf of the new Germany.

In other areas, the views Ross put forward bordered on the bizarre and beg the question whether he had been coached to present them in this fashion with a view to pleasing the Führer. He seriously suggested bringing about an entente with the USA by illustrating to the Americans – with the help of a map drawn by himself – the fact that existing British ‘spheres of influence’ constituted a greater threat to the US position in the Western Hemisphere than anything Germany might have in store. As far as the fate of European Jews was concerned, he proposed to increase the rate of forced Jewish migration to the USA, with a view to deliberately increasing anti-Semitism there. Once this had occurred, the Americans would gladly agree to a ‘constructive’ solution put forward by the German government, preferably in the form of an overseas territory set aside for the purpose of creating a Jewish state. The possibility of a US–German clash in the near future does not appear to have been the prevailing theme of the discussion. Only when the conversation turned to the sitting US President and his re-election prospects was this subject touched on in an almost offhand manner. According to Ross, Roosevelt had come to power in the same year as Hitler and with a similar agenda, but had so far met with only a modicum of success due to the level of domestic opposition to some of his New Deal–connected schemes. His hostility towards Hitler was thus mainly motivated ‘by jealousy’. Ross apparently would not be drawn on Roosevelt’s prospects in November but unhesitatingly predicted that in the case of his re-election, he would be in a position to take the country to war should he choose to do so (*‘dass er dann das amerikanische Volk in den Krieg führen könne, wenn er es wolle’*).¹⁴¹

1.2 Japan

In contrast to the embarrassment of riches facing the historian researching Hitler’s views on the United States, references to Japan are much thinner on the ground. Insofar as the Far Eastern country features at all in his early

¹⁴¹ ‘Aufzeichnung des Vortragenden Legationsrats Hewel, Persönlicher Stab RAM. Unterredung des Führers mit Herrn Colin Ross am 12. März von 12–13 Uhr (12.3.1940)’, in: ADAP, Serie D, Bd. VIII.1, p 717. According to a visitor who was present at the lunch of 14 March, Ross also shared his thoughts on the Sino-Japanese War with Hitler. The way he saw it, Japan was hopelessly stuck, while Chiang-Kai-Chek, whom he held in high regard, could afford to fight a long war of attrition. There was no question of the Japanese having the means of intervening in another conflict. The fact that Hitler chose to quiz his well-travelled guest first on the United States and then on the crisis in the Far East seems unlikely to have been a coincidence. Elke Fröhlich (ed.), *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels. Bd. I.7: Juli 1939–März 1940* (München: K.G. Saur 1998), pp 349–50 (entry for 15 March 1940).

utterances, the remarkable thing is a complete absence of resentment or bitterness. After all, Japan had unexpectedly sided with the Entente in 1914 and had joined British Empire forces in rolling up Germany's colonial possessions in the South Pacific and on the Chinese mainland. The fact that the German state had expended copious amounts of 'soft power' in previous decades by sending numerous academic delegations and military missions to assist with the modernisation of the Nipponese empire should have made this particularly irksome.

Factors aiding reconciliation may have been the brevity of the only campaign involving a sizeable body of troops on each side (the siege of Tsingtao, 28 September–7 November 1914),¹⁴² as well as the regal treatment afforded German and Austrian POWs held in Japan between 1914 and 1919.¹⁴³ To a German politician looking to split the alliance of the victors of 1918, however, another event would have carried greater weight. In 1915, Japan had run into firm opposition from its allies when it tried to impose the so-called Twenty-One Demands on a militarily impotent China. Had Japan managed to enforce this agenda, it would have gone a long way towards turning the newborn Chinese Republic into a Japanese satellite state in all but name. British and particularly American pressure forced Japan to withdraw the demands in their original form, but any discerning observer would have been able to register the beginnings of a rift between Japan and the other 1918 victors.

1.2.1 *First Impressions (1904–1920)*

The outcome of the Russo–Japanese War (1904–5) had a major impact on Western perceptions of the Nipponese empire, and it appears that young Adolf Hitler was no exception to the rule. In *Mein Kampf*,¹⁴⁴ as well as in numerous private conversations during the war,¹⁴⁵ he claimed that he had rooted for the Asian power right from the start. This reflected a divide between Austrian–German and Czech students in his class, the latter being left disconsolate when the news of the Russian defeat was confirmed. He had a certain penchant for the Imperial Japanese Navy, and some comments from the 1940s suggest that this

¹⁴² The German and Austrian defenders numbered around 5,000 men; 60,000 Japanese besiegers were supported by 15,000 British soldiers.

¹⁴³ Gerhard Krebs, "Die etwas andere Kriegsgefangenschaft"; in: Rüdiger Overmanns (ed.): *In der Hand des Feindes. Kriegsgefangenschaft von der Antike bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Köln: Böhlau 1999), pp 323–37.

¹⁴⁴ Hartmann et al (eds.), *Mein Kampf*, p 445.

¹⁴⁵ 'Führerhauptquartier 21.9.1941, mittags. H/Fu.:' in: Werner Jochmann (ed.), *Adolf Hitler. Monologe im Führerhauptquartier 1941–1944* (München: Bertelsmann 2000 rp), p 64. His press spokesman Otto Dietrich wrote after the war that Hitler spoke repeatedly of the key role that the Russo–Japanese War had played in forming his early image of Japan. Otto Dietrich, *12 Jahre mit Hitler* (Köln: Atlas 1955), p 84.

was tied to the latter's 'birthday' at the battle of Tsushima in 1905.¹⁴⁶ In *Mein Kampf* he would even lambast Imperial Germany's supposedly half-hearted shipbuilding policies by contrasting them with the Japanese approach, which had made the difference between victory and defeat in 1905.¹⁴⁷ Japan joining the Entente powers does not seem to have affected his feelings towards the country one way or another. In a speech he delivered on 26 May 1920 he implied that he was happy to let bygones be bygones by asserting that Japan had been forced into arraying itself on the enemy side by its agenda of checking European expansion in the Far East.¹⁴⁸ Thereafter, he did not return to the topic.

1.2.2 Reading Matter

The fact that Hitler ever bothered to read a more or less scholarly book on Japan would probably be lost to history were it not for Rudolf Heß's assiduous work as a court chronicler in Landsberg gaol. In a letter written in May 1924 to his fiancée, he mentioned in passing that Hitler was reading Professor Karl Haushofer's 'book on Japan' (*Er liest zur Zeit des Generals Japan-Buch*).¹⁴⁹ Since by then the highly prolific Haushofer already had five monographs dealing with Japanese subjects to his name,¹⁵⁰ identifying the title would pose a problem were it not for two clues. It stands to reason that a matter-of-fact, almost offhand reference to '*das Japan-Buch*' implies a degree of familiarity, which the recipient of the letter would be able to pick up on. Only a few months before, Heß had received a gift copy of *Japan und die Japaner* from his friend Haushofer and began reading it more or less immediately.¹⁵¹ Heß also

¹⁴⁶ 'Wolfsschanze 4./5.1.1942, nachts. Gast: Sepp Dietrich H/Fu' as well as 'Führerhauptquartier 19.6.1943 Mü/Ad'; both in: Jochmann (ed.), *Monologe*, pp 177, 402.

¹⁴⁷ Hartmann et al (eds.), *Mein Kampf*, p 290. According to Hitler's interpretation, the defensive mindset of the German admiralty had led it to favour ship designs mounting smaller gun calibres, despite alternatives being available.

¹⁴⁸ 'Die Macher am Weltkrieg. Rede auf einer Versammlung des Deutschvölkischen Schutz- und Trutzbundes (Stuttgart, 26.5.1920)'; in: Jäckel/Kuhn (eds.), *Aufzeichnungen*, pp 135–6.

¹⁴⁹ 'Heß an Ilse Pröhl (18./19.5.1924)'; in: Heß/Bavendamm (eds.), *Briefe*, p 328.

¹⁵⁰ *Dai Nihon. Betrachtungen über Groß-Japans Wehrkraft, Weltstellung und Zukunft* (Berlin 1913); *Der deutsche Anteil an der geographischen Erschließung Japans und des japanischen Erdrums, und deren Förderung durch den Einfluß von Krieg und Wehrpolitik* (Erlangen PhD 1914); *Grundrichtungen in der geographischen Entwicklung des japanischen Reiches* (University of Munich Habilitation 1919); *Das japanische Reich in seiner geographischen Entwicklung* (Wien 1921); *Japan und die Japaner. Eine Landeskunde* (Leipzig 1923).

¹⁵¹ 'Rudolf Heß an Karl Haushofer (13.9.1923)' and 'Rudolf Heß an Karl Haushofer (6.10.1923)'; both in: Hans-Adolf Jacobsen (ed.), *Karl Haushofer. Leben und Werk, Bd. II. Ausgewählter Schriftwechsel 1917–1946* (Boppard a. Rhein: Haraldt Boldt 1979) [= Schriften des Bundesarchivs, Bd. 24/II], pp 20–1, 22–6. Though Heß does not allude to the title, the first letter describes the cover art of the original edition in such detail that an error can be safely ruled out.

refers to the special interest Hitler had shown in chapters discussing Japanese architecture. None of the monographs about Japan Haushofer had so far published included dedicated chapters to architecture, but *Japan und die Japaner* does discuss the subject over a total of five pages.¹⁵²

Japan und die Japaner is a relatively short (160-page) introduction to Japanese affairs divided into chapters on geography, topography, climate, economy, society and history. Haushofer wrote it with the stated intent of giving German readers an insight unburdened by 'the selfish agendas of foreign powers'.¹⁵³ Haushofer's love for tortuous and overlong sentences makes it a tiresome read. At the same time, an uninitiated reader would have been left more confused than enlightened by the extreme brevity with which he narrates some phases of Japanese history – hardly a topic many Germans of the time would have had an even passing acquaintance with. Assessing the impact this book may have had on Hitler is speculative at best, but a few salient points that would have been of greater interest to him than others can be suggested. The most important would have been the book's mantra that Japan is a country without 'living space'. This forced the government to permit the migration of up to 600,000 of its people per year, either to colonies or protectorates like Korea or farther afield to California and Hawaii.¹⁵⁴ According to Haushofer, this migratory wave was unique insofar as the government made it its priority that expatriate subjects, irrespective of where they settled, retain a high degree of loyalty towards the Land of the Rising Sun.¹⁵⁵ Haushofer describes the Japanese people as a hardy race remarkably inured to suffering, whether their own or other people's.¹⁵⁶ He is full of praise throughout the book for the manner in which they have mastered the unprecedented challenge of engineering in two generations the transition from an early modern society to being an industrial power. According to him, the main reason this has been achieved with so little friction is that a country untouched by invasion or mass immigration for more than 2,000 years can boast supreme 'racial homogeneity', a theme he returns to time and again in the text.¹⁵⁷ He describes the country as currently finding itself at a crossroads, with further expansion to the north (China and/or the USSR) or the south (Southeast Asia) by peaceful or other means as the two major options. The author is candid in stating his belief that Japan's future lies to the north, but stops well short of making a prediction.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵² Haushofer, *Japan*, pp 47–50, 56.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p 3.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp 13.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 157–8.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 44, 50, 72.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 10, 41–2, 103, 127, 137–8.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 157–60.

1.2.3 *Public and Private Statements, Mein Kampf and the Second Book*

Hitler's references to Japan before his chancellorship are not only few in number but also brief in nature, more often than not serving as a foil or contrast. Moreover, they offer little clue as to whether he saw in Japan a future rival or ally. On 2 December 1921 he referred to the country as the 'one remaining independent state' which 'international Jewdom' was attempting to strangulate.¹⁵⁹ In the late summer of 1923, he impressed upon a visiting US journalist that the NSDAP's attitude to Jews bore a resemblance to that shown by the Federal government to Japanese migrants reaching American shores. The Japanese, according to Hitler, 'have ruined no state. They are not carriers of Bolshevism.' Nonetheless, he continues, 'We look upon the Jews as you look upon the Japanese.'¹⁶⁰

There is some evidence that on Hitler's release from Landsberg prison, Haushofer's influence had left a mark on his thinking. In a conversation with Hanfstaengl which took place in December 1924, Hitler waxed lyrical about the 'racial purity' and 'soldierly virtues' of the Japanese people engaged in a struggle for living space, making them natural partners for Germany in a future alliance against Russia.¹⁶¹ With the exception of a couple of very brief comments, however, there are few references of substance to Japan in *Mein Kampf*, first published the following year. The theme from the 1921 speech surfaced again in the second volume of *Mein Kampf*. There, he spoke of Japan as an obstacle to the spread of international Jewry across the globe. He took up this theme again in the preface he wrote to a programmatic pamphlet published by the party two months later; he basically rationalised Britain's recent refusal to extend the alliance treaty with Japan by referring to the inevitable Jewish plotting. This was virtually a foregone conclusion, he said, because for racial reasons Jews were incapable of infiltrating Japanese society as they were allegedly doing with any number of European countries. Hence, ways had to be found to isolate Japan and leave her surrounded by a coalition of hostile powers.¹⁶² By Hitler's standards, this was an accolade, and together with some of the other statements discussed, it appears to suggest that the idea of Imperial Japan as his favourite coalition partner had formed in his mind by 1925–6 at the latest.

¹⁵⁹ 'Der Jude als Menschenfreund. Rede auf einer NSDAP-Versammlung' (2 December 1921); in: Jäckel/Kuhn (eds.), *Aufzeichnungen*, p 528.

¹⁶⁰ 'Interview mit George Sylvester Viereck'; in: *ibid.*, 1023–6. The exact date on which the interview took place is lost to history, but it appears to have been before October 1923.

¹⁶¹ Hanfstaengl, *Weissem und Braunem Haus*, p 168.

¹⁶² Hartmann et al (eds.), *Mein Kampf*, p 1621. 'Die Südtiroler Frage und das Deutsche Bündnisproblem'. Aufsatz (12 February 1926); in: RSA, Bd. I, pp 269–93, esp. pp 292–3.

However, such a judgement needs to be qualified. Both in *Mein Kampf* and a public speech delivered in April 1928, Hitler stressed that the Japanese were not a people capable of 'creating' culture (his use of the term implied that he meant scientific progress rather than the arts), but only of adapting or using it.¹⁶³ The fact that the Japan of the 1920s was still to a large extent dependent on imports of Western high-end technology would have made such a comment doubly hurtful to any Japanese observer of German politics. Around the same time, Hitler had started to bracket Japan with China and India as a group of nations that the West was well advised to exclude from access to technological secrets. While incapable of unassisted innovative thinking, these countries boasted unlimited reserves of cheap labour that could put them in a position to produce the same goods as the West, but at much cheaper retail prices.¹⁶⁴

Following this rather contradictory pattern of praise and condescension, in a public speech in May 1928 he elevated the previously patronised Asian nation to the lofty status of 'troublemaker' being hounded by the Western (read: Jewish) media. Here, he was in all likelihood referring to criticism aroused by a recent deployment of Japanese troops to the Shandong peninsula which resulted in a serious clash with Chinese Kuomintang forces near the city of Jinan (3–10 May 1928).¹⁶⁵ It needs to be kept in mind, however, that this was little more than a casual aside in a long-winded speech dealing with the alleged power of Jewish-controlled media rather than Far Eastern affairs.¹⁶⁶ The fact that two references to Japan in two months did not mark a sea change in his perception of the Far Eastern empire can be gleaned from his *Second Book*, which he produced that summer. In a manuscript running to more than 200 pages and boasting an extensive chapter dealing with the long-term threat posed by the USA, Japan barely featured. Passing reference had been made in *Mein Kampf* to the re-emerging of US–Japanese irritations after the end of World War I,¹⁶⁷ and given the *Second Book's* clear focus on foreign policy,

¹⁶³ Hartmann et al (eds.), *Mein Kampf*, p 757. See also 'Freiheit und Brot. Rede auf NSDAP-Versammlung in Bayreuth (14 April 1928)'; in: RSA, Bd. II.2, pp 773–8, esp. p 776. The Japanese were not the only people alluded to in this context, but seeing that Hitler placed them in the same bracket as 'kaffirs', 'negroes' and 'hottentots' this would not have afforded them much comfort.

¹⁶⁴ 'Die deutsche Not und unser Weg. Rede auf NSDAP-Versammlung in Neustadt a.d. Aisch (15.1.1928)'; in: RSA, Bd. II.2, p 616; 'Rede auf NSDAP-Veranstaltung in Annaberg (17.4.1929)'; in: RSA, Bd. III.2., p 210; 'Rede auf NSDAP-Versammlung in Weimar (8.2.1931)'; in: RSA, Bd. IV.1, p 193; 'Interview mit Universal Service (18.8.1932)'; in: RSA, Bd. V.1, p 313 f.

¹⁶⁵ On the second Shandong expedition, see Edward J. Drea, *Japan's Imperial Army: Its Rise and Fall, 1853–1945* (Lawrence: Kansas UP 2009), pp 163–5.

¹⁶⁶ 'Adolf Hitler entlarvt. Rede auf NSDAP-Versammlung in München (23 May 1928)'; in: RSA, Bd. II.2, p 851.

¹⁶⁷ Hartmann et al (eds.), *Mein Kampf*, p 1617.

expanding on this theme would have seemed like a natural choice. The point has been made that any discussion of Japan was dropped from *Mein Kampf* in order to avoid irritating the British, whom Hitler was still trying to woo at the time.¹⁶⁸ However, in light of the fact that the *Second Book* never even got as far as the pre-publishing stage, the omission of even a sidebar on Japan is striking, all the more so since US–Japanese relations had just suffered a major blow with the passing of openly anti-Asian immigration legislation in the USA in 1924.

Following the attention he briefly gave Japan in 1924, Hitler's next reference to the empire was rather long in coming and highlights what can be described as plain lack of interest. In a November 1930 speech, he denigrated a proposal for a multilateral treaty of disarmament by pointing out the need to keep the USSR in check. The way he saw it, nothing short of a defence treaty encompassing all non-communist nations on the planet 'including the USA and even Japan' – an utterly fanciful notion clearly beyond the means of 1930s diplomacy – would be needed to make this viable. It turned the entire matter under discussion into a moot point.¹⁶⁹ Again, Hitler was using a reference to the Japanese Empire as a means to make a point barely connected to Far Eastern affairs.

The first step towards a fundamental reassessment of Japan's potential as an ally appears to have come about as a result of the Japanese Army's occupation of Manchuria (September 1931). This brought a diplomatic crisis in its train, culminating in Japan's decision to quit the League of Nations in March 1933. Both Gregor Straßer in a December 1931 speech and Hitler himself in an interview with a Japanese daily the following month expressed their pleasure that somebody was finally challenging the existing balance of power as represented by the League of Nations.¹⁷⁰ By themselves, these public statements may not have meant much, especially since Hitler's statement to the Japanese journalists ('the NSDAP's posture towards Japan is exclusively defined by the degree of support which it can receive from Japan in its struggle for revision of the Versailles treaty'¹⁷¹) fell somewhat short of a passionate endorsement of German–Japanese amity. However, a contemporary observer in the guise of German diplomat Erich Kordt would later – in 1950 – point to the immediate aftermath of the Manchurian Crisis as the point when Hitler first began to take notice of Japan in a serious way. The invasion and annexation of Manchuria attracted his attention, but what really sold him on Japan was the fact that the country's government decided to cut the Gordian knot by walking out on

¹⁶⁸ Spang, *Haushofer und Japan*, p 390.

¹⁶⁹ 'Deutschland und Frankreichs Abrüstung. Erklärung (7 November 1930)'; in: RSA, Bd. IV.1, pp 65–73, esp. p 73.

¹⁷⁰ For both documents, see 'Interview mit Tokio Asahi Shimbun (3 January 1932)'; in: RSA, Bd. IV.3, p 12–13.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

the League. Only from that point on did Hitler, according to Kordt, begin to think of Japan as a 'potential ally, especially against the Soviet Union'.¹⁷²

1.2.4 *Input from Individuals with Access to Hitler*¹⁷³

Professor Albrecht Haushofer has been a person of interest to historians of the Third Reich for some time. A career officer of the Bavarian Army, he had spent a year in Japan in 1909–10 and returned to Germany having formed a highly positive impression of Japanese society.¹⁷⁴ He served in World War I, retiring as a *Generalmajor* in 1919, and went on to become an unsalaried lecturer at Munich University in the same year. In the 1920s, he managed to reach a considerable audience through his highly prolific output and a monthly radio feature – a first in the young history of German broadcasting.¹⁷⁵ His chosen subject was *Geopolitik*, a field of research seeking to establish the extent to which geography and climate determined a country's historical evolution and future policy options.¹⁷⁶ This included thoughts on the concept of *Lebensraum* (living space) and the possible need to expand borders deemed to be detrimental to a nation's natural evolution, though he remained vague about whether wars of conquest were a legitimate

¹⁷² Erich Kordt, *Nicht aus den Akten* (Stuttgart: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft 1950), p 122. German political and military elites continued to be rather tepid on the idea of an alliance with Japan until at least 1935–6. See Spang, *Haushofer und Japan*, p 385.

¹⁷³ A former officer of the Austro-Hungarian Army, who according to one of Hitler's adjutants played a major role in forming the Führer's exalted image of the warrior spirit of Japan's armed forces could not be identified before going to print. See Wiedemann, *Feldherr*, p 225. Of Friedrich Wilhelm Hack and Hermann vom Raumer, who for a few years advised the Auswärtiges Amt on Far Eastern affairs, no proof exists that they were ever in a position to directly submit reports to Hitler, much less brief him in person. Accordingly, their names have not been included in this line-up. On Hack and Raumer, see Christian W. Spang, 'Wer waren Hitlers Ostasienspezialisten? Teil I & II'; in: OAG Notizen 4/2003, pp 10–16, and OAG-Notizen 5/2003, pp 12–24.

¹⁷⁴ Haushofer's life has been the subject of many books and articles. As far as the Japanese dimension of his work is concerned, the best is Christian W. Spang, *Karl Haushofer und Japan. Die Rezeption seiner geopolitischen Theorien in der deutschen und japanischen Politik* (München: IUDICUM 2013) [= Monographien aus dem Deutschen Institut für Japanstudien, Bd. 52].

¹⁷⁵ On Haushofer's career as a writer and commentator in those years, see Spang, *Haushofer und Japan*, pp 146–208 and Herwig, *Demon*, pp 111–68.

¹⁷⁶ A pithy definition of *Geopolitik* as understood by Haushofer is extremely difficult to arrive at on account of its multi-faceted nature and numerous built-in ambiguities and contradictions. The definition proposed by Holger Herwig ('a study of the influence of such factors as geography, economics and demography on the politics and esp. the foreign policy of a state') is as good as any other and a lot more intelligible than anything put forward by Haushofer himself. See Holger Herwig, 'Geopolitik: Haushofer, Hitler and Lebensraum'; in: *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 22, Nos. 2/3 (June–September 1999), pp 218–41.

tool to achieve this.¹⁷⁷ As far as the options open to German foreign policy were concerned, he advocated alliances or at least close cooperation with Japan and the USSR; the one country against which he consistently harboured feelings of hostility was the United States.¹⁷⁸ Haushofer was introduced to Hitler by his student Rudolf Heß in July 1921. When Heß found himself imprisoned in Landsberg gaol after the failed coup of 1923, Haushofer paid him at least eight extensive visits. On most (possibly all) of these visits he also met Hitler.¹⁷⁹ He developed a habit of bringing the two men books and journals and discussing their contents during his next visit. Visits by a minor celebrity such as he was did not go unnoticed, attracting the attention both of the Allied leadership in the 1940s and of many historians afterwards. The latter felt justified in making the assumption that Haushofer's thoughts on 'living space' must to some degree have influenced Hitler's thinking on the subject;¹⁸⁰ from there to inferring that Haushofer had a major role in the writing of *Mein Kampf* hardly required a leap of faith.¹⁸¹

For the purposes of this study, the extent to which Haushofer moulded Hitler's views on Japan is far more important. Again it is thanks to Hanfstaengl that we have a record of Hitler's frame of mind on the subject post-Landsberg. On two separate occasions in his memoirs, Hanfstaengl bemoaned how Heß and Haushofer were filling Hitler's mind with all kinds of 'nonsense' regarding the alleged military potential of Japan; to the cosmopolitan Hanfstaengl such infatuation could not but lead to a gratuitous confrontation with the USA.¹⁸² Hitler and Haushofer continued to meet at irregular intervals throughout the 1920s and 1930s, even though in the majority of cases the backdrop would be

¹⁷⁷ On Haushofer's notion of *Lebensraum*, see Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, *Karl Haushofer. Leben und Werk. Band I. Lebensweg 1869–1946 und ausgewählte Texte zur Geopolitik* (Boppard am Rhein: Haraldt Boldt 1979) [= Schriften des Bundesarchivs, Bd. 24/1], pp 245–58.

¹⁷⁸ Spang, *Haushofer und Japan*, pp 291, 360–1, 398. Also Herwig, *Demon*, p 156.

¹⁷⁹ Post-war, Haushofer and some of his supporters alleged that he had actually tried to keep a certain distance between himself and Hitler during this period. On this see Spang, *Haushofer und Japan*, pp 366–9, 386 and Herwig, *Demon*, pp 92–3. The circumstantial evidence still indicates that he is almost certain to have met Hitler as well as Heß during most of his prison visits, especially since their respective cells were just feet apart and kept open throughout the day. In addition, the inmates also shared a furnished common room. That the prisoners routinely received visitors in their quarters is proven by a letter written by Rudolf Heß. See 'Machinenschriftlicher Brief Rudolf Heß an Ilse Pröhl, München (11.6.1924)'; in: Heß/Bavendamm (eds.), *Briefe*, pp 332–3. Fleischmann, *Landsberg* only engages with the subject of visitors entered in the Landsberg log as having come to see Hitler, rather than Heß.

¹⁸⁰ For an overview of these early interpretations of Haushofer's work see the excellent summary provided by Spang, *Haushofer und Japan*, pp 33–52, 463–79.

¹⁸¹ Recent research has tended to discredit this notion. See Plöckinger, *Adolf Hitler's 'Mein Kampf'*, pp 143–6.

¹⁸² Hanfstaengl, *Weissem und Braunem Haus*, p 93, 168, 211.

an event involving a number of other people, such as a dinner party or a wedding. Hitler and Ribbentrop put Haushofer's reputation in Japan to good use when they employed him as a go-between during the process of gradual rapprochement with Tokyo in 1934–6.¹⁸³ Whether Haushofer was able to reverse the process by influencing the regime is more difficult to assess, especially if one considers that his last meeting with Hitler took place in November 1938 and appears to have ended acrimoniously.¹⁸⁴ His idea of a 'continental bloc' involving a German–Soviet–Japanese alliance appeared to take shape when Hitler and Stalin signed a non-aggression pact in August 1939; the Tripartite Pact of September 1940 seemed like the next logical step on this road. However, there is no record of the Führer having sought the professor's advice in the months before, and by December 1940 he had become thoroughly disenchanted with the idea of continuing to cooperate with the USSR. Even if – against all the evidence – Haushofer at that stage still had the means of reaching out to Hitler and imparting advice, it does not seem like the latter was bothering to listen. Thus, the invasion of the Soviet empire by the Wehrmacht in June 1941 would appear like a natural parting of ways between Haushofer and the regime.

As it happened, this had already been presaged by a wholly unconnected event. On 10 May, the professor's protégé Heß departed for Scotland in the hope that he might be able to broker a peace deal; on learning of this, Hitler was beside himself with rage and blamed Haushofer and his son Albrecht for putting the Deputy Führer up to such a nonsensical scheme.¹⁸⁵ Although Haushofer retained all his honours and his position, he lost much of the ready access he had previously enjoyed to the high and mighty of the Third Reich.¹⁸⁶ The idea that either Hitler or anybody close to him would have sought or heeded his advice on the subject of joining Japan in a war with the USA at some point over the next seven months can thus be safely discounted.

¹⁸³ Spang, *Haushofer und Japan*, pp 409–38.

¹⁸⁴ Herwig, *Demon*, pp 162–3. According to Herwig, 'Geopolitik', p 233, a further meeting took place in February 1939, though he neglects to give a source for this.

¹⁸⁵ Kotze (ed.), *Aufzeichnungen Engel*, pp 104–5 (entries for 12 and 13 May 1941); TB Goebbels, Bd. I.9, pp 310–18 (entries for 13–16 May 1941); Matthäus/Bajohr (eds.), *Rosenberg Tagebücher*, p 386 (entry for 14 May 1941). The idea that Hitler was play-acting because he had originally supported the idea of the flight continues to enjoy some currency to this day among a minority of historians. The little-noticed John Harris and Richard Wilbourn, *Rudolf Hess: A New Technical Analysis of the Hess Flight, May 1941* (Stroud: Spellmount 2014), actually puts forward genuinely new evidence that appears to support this possibility.

¹⁸⁶ This may have been as a consequence of Hitler issuing instructions to shut him out or due to the actions of medium-level party officials adept at anticipating their masters' presumed wishes. According to Spang, *Haushofer*, pp 373–81, the latter seems the more likely of the two. A diary entry by Joseph Goebbels could suggest either. TB Goebbels, Bd. I.9, p 416 (entry for 1 July 1941).

Generalmajor Eugen Ott was a Swabian army officer who, after a transition from the artillery arm to the prestigious general staff in 1917, was invited to join the Reichswehr of the Weimar Republic after the war – a privilege he shared with only 4,000 officers.¹⁸⁷ After spending most of 1933 as an exchange officer with Japanese artillery units in Nagoya and Manchuria, he was sent back to the Far East as military attaché in Tokyo, a position he held from April 1934 to April 1938. Rather than leave Japan on completion of his tour of duty, he was promoted on the spot to fill the vacancy left by the ailing ambassador Herbert von Dirksen and went on to serve four and a half years as the senior representative of the *Auswärtiges Amt* in the Japanese capital.

Ott was burdened with some political baggage, since he had been a close collaborator of the then *Oberst* Kurt von Schleicher from 1923 to 1929. During his time as the Weimar Republic's last head of government (December 1932–January 1933), Schleicher found himself at the centre of an initiative by various establishment players that could potentially have grown into a major check on Hitler's rise to power.¹⁸⁸ As a result, he and a number of his associates were on the death list that formed the script of the Night of the Long Knives on 30 June 1934. The existing documentary record does not indicate whether or not Ott's name ever featured in this document, and he would in any case have been safely out of the henchmen's reach by then. Nor is there any conclusive evidence that his name was tainted by association afterwards. Hitler spoke favourably of him once or twice before the war, while Göring for unknown reasons appears to have held a grudge of sorts against him.¹⁸⁹

The extent to which Ott's reports from Tokyo during the critical phase of 1941 shaped Hitler's assessment of Japan's potential as a military ally is difficult to answer. As the year progressed, the tone of the ambassador's cables grew increasingly weary whenever the subject of Japan's willingness to align with the Axis came up – a clear reflection of the futility of trying to discern the direction of Japanese government politics. While the German leader's satisfaction with the tone and content of the reports emanating from the Washington embassy

¹⁸⁷ There is at present no biography of Ott. A lot of useful information can be found in Jürgen W. Schmidt, 'Eugen Ott – Freund und Quelle von Richard Sorge'; in: Heiner Timmermann et al (eds.), *Spionage, Ideologie, Mythos – der Fall Richard Sorge* (Münster: LIT 2005) [= *Dokumente und Schriften der Europäischen Akademie Otzenhausen*, Bd. 113], pp 88–104.

¹⁸⁸ This scheme involved inciting the NSDAP's *Reichsorganisationsleiter*, Gregor Straßer, and his followers of the left wing of the party to cooperate with the Schleicher government. Together with other issues plaguing the party at the time (especially a scarcity of funds) this plan might have brought about a challenge to Hitler's leadership or even a split within the NSDAP. See Udo Kissenkoetter, *Gregor Straßer und die NSDAP* (Stuttgart: DVA 1978), pp 162–77, 181–90, and Benjamin Carter Hett, *The Death of Democracy: The Rise of Hitler* (London: Heinemann 2018), pp 164–70.

¹⁸⁹ Schmidt, 'Eugen Ott', pp 92, 94.



Figure 1.2 Ambassador Eugen Ott (centre): the constant shifts and turns of Tokyo politics left the ambassador as exasperated and confused as any other Western envoy. (ullstein bild/ullstein bild via Getty Images)

is a matter of record, no such echoes have survived of Ott's reporting. What is a fact is that when the Japanese in early November first approached the Tokyo embassy, with a view to convincing the Germans to join them in their imminent war against the USA, Ott's credibility had just taken a serious blow with the arrest in Tokyo of the German journalist and GRU spy Richard Sorge.¹⁹⁰ Sorge was a gregarious and charismatic personality who had befriended Ott

¹⁹⁰ The story of the Sorge spy ring has enjoyed abundant historiographical attention. Chalmers Johnson, *An Instance of Treason: Ozaki Hotsumi and the Sorge Spy Ring* (Stanford: Stanford UP 1964); Frederick William Deakin and G. R. Storry, *The Case of Richard Sorge* (New York: Harper & Row 1966); Gordon W. Prange, *Target Tokyo: The Story of the Sorge Spy Ring* (New York: McGraw-Hill 1984); Robert Whyman, *Stalin's Spy: Richard Sorge and the Tokyo Espionage Ring* (London and New York: Tauris 1997) and Owen Matthews, *An Impeccable Spy: Richard Sorge, Stalin's Master Agent* (London: Bloomsbury 2019) are the most important monographs on the subject. The allegation that Stalin routinely disregarded Sorge's warnings has recently been challenged. See David Glantz, 'The Impact of Intelligence Provided to the Soviet Union by Richard Sorge on Soviet Force Deployments from the Far East to the West in 1941 and 1942'; in: *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 30 (2017), No. 3, pp 453–81.

and some of the attachés from 1934 onwards.¹⁹¹ On a number of occasions when surprises sprung by the erratic and unfathomable nature of Japanese politics had left the embassy staff dumbfounded Sorge, assisted by a Japanese asset close to government circles, had made predictions that turned out to be remarkably accurate.¹⁹² In this manner, he managed to become a permanent fixture at the embassy and personal counsellor to Ott and his attachés in all but name. At the peak of his influence, he was repeatedly given access to sensitive documents and invited to join regular evaluation meetings looking into Japanese military affairs with Ott in the presiding chair;¹⁹³ by 1940 he and the ambassador had adopted the habit of ushering in the day with a working breakfast.¹⁹⁴ The revelation that a man who had had the run of the embassy for years had been a Soviet asset all along sent shockwaves through the German foreign ministry, Japanese attempts at keeping the matter under wraps notwithstanding. However, it does not seem that the combined weight of these events, along with Ott's association with Schleicher, cowed him into following the party line to a greater degree than he would otherwise have done. The reports he sent in the last weeks of peace if anything indicate a certain willingness to remind Berlin that entering the US–Japanese conflict constituted a move that warranted substantial concessions from the Japanese, which had not been forthcoming.¹⁹⁵

1.3 Conclusion

Over the years, historians attempting to make sense of Hitler's assessment of the USA have divided into two schools: one tends to see him as a leader, who while cunning, was limited in his capability to assess a country like the United States by his ignorance of the world beyond Germany's borders and by his

¹⁹¹ For a vivid description of Sorge's outgoing nature, see Kordt, *Akten*, pp 425–9. The extent to which some of the diplomats allowed feelings of friendship to violate security protocol is difficult to gauge in individual cases. According to Prange, *Target Tokyo*, p 198, Sorge established a particularly good rapport with Ott, *Oberstleutnant* Friedrich von Scholl (assistant military attaché) and *Oberstleutnant* Wolfgang Nehmitz (assistant air attaché); Whymant, *Stalin's Spy*, p 305, broadly agrees with this assessment, but sees naval attaché Wenneker playing a more important role than Nehmitz.

¹⁹² Especially with regards to the insurrection by Imperial Japanese Army officers (February 1936) and the likely course of events after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident (July 1937). Prange, *Target Tokyo*, pp 120–6, 177–9.

¹⁹³ Whymant, *Stalin's Spy*, pp 104–5, 111–14.

¹⁹⁴ Prange, *Target Tokyo*, p 261; Matthews, *Impeccable Spy*, pp 189, 202–3, 229–31. After the war, Ott waged a minor campaign to refute allegations by the West German media that he had routinely allowed Sorge access to confidential information. Some of the correspondence from that period can be found in IfZ, Nachlass Ott, ZS/A 32, Bd. 8.

¹⁹⁵ For a more detailed discussion of Ott's reporting in those weeks, see the chapter on German–Japanese relations.

deeply ingrained racial prejudices.¹⁹⁶ The other sees him unduly influenced by Washington's gradual shift from neutrality in 1933 to open hostility by 1938–9. Hitler's 'positive' or at least non-committal view of America thus gave way to a 'negative' one as relations between the two countries gradually deteriorated.¹⁹⁷ Based on the evidence presented here, a third model seems to be more likely: of a Hitler who by virtue of his Social Darwinist view of world affairs became convinced that the further rise of the USA, given its sheer size, ethnic make-up and economic potential, was probably unstoppable. At some point between the early to mid-1920s, he concluded that a major clash (its exact nature and timing as yet undetermined) would almost certainly be inevitable between the United States and a Europe under German leadership. Some of the features of this view of the future, such as the expectation that the process would result in the Anglo-Saxon powers falling out with each other and London ultimately taking Germany's side, were clearly delusional. In other ways, it could be said to have been a remarkably prescient foretelling of the United States' rise to superpower status and what the post-war world would look like. The notion that a long-held racist conceit led him to chronically underestimate American power and that this in turn coloured his strategic estimates is untenable.¹⁹⁸ If anything, the exact opposite was the case.

The fact that some of the people who attempted to educate him on American potential were rebuffed, while he appeared to be more receptive to the opinions of others, is not inconsistent with this interpretation. On the evidence available, it can be safely stated that Hanfstaengl, Wiedemann and Dieckhoff did their best to impress on him that confrontation with the USA was something to be avoided at almost any cost. This clashed with a view he had formed at some point in the 1920s, from which he would not budge and which Colin Ross may have unwittingly encouraged. Accordingly, he disregarded their opinions on the matter. Blomberg and Boetticher, on the other hand, were different. For one thing, it is possible to make a compelling case that Blomberg returned from the USA in late 1930 with a view of that country's potential that was eerily similar to the assessment Hitler himself had arrived at by the late 1920s. Even more importantly, as professional officers, neither Blomberg nor Boetticher

¹⁹⁶ An interpretation most recently espoused by Wolfram Pyta, *Hitler. Der Künstler als Politiker und Feldherr. Eine Herrschaftsanalyse* (München: Siedler 2015), p 494.

¹⁹⁷ A theory most recently proposed in Klaus P. Fischer, *Hitler and America* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania UP 2011), p 37.

¹⁹⁸ A view held among others by Gerhard Weinberg, 'Germany's Declaration of War on the United States: A New Look'; in: Hans L. Trefousse (ed.), *Germany and America: Essays and Problems of International Relations and Immigration* (NY: Columbia UP 1980) [= Brooklyn College Studies on Societies in change, Vol. 21], pp 54–70. Also Williamson Murray and Alan Millet, *A War to Be Won: Fighting the Second World War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP 2000), pp 135–6 and David Reynolds, *America: Empire of Liberty* (London: Allen Lane 2009), p 362.

presumed to engage their commander-in-chief in a debate over matters of state policy. Instead, they just provided him with data on the military strengths and weaknesses of a power that appeared more and more likely with every passing day to confront the new Germany in the near future. This was the sort of advice Hitler found practical and helpful.

With regards to Japan, there is little evidence available that indicates that Hitler had given serious and consistent thought to the Far Eastern country's potential as a possible ally before 1933. Hanfstaengl may have been exasperated by Haushofer's apparent success in filling Hitler's head with ideas about Japanese martial prowess, but the dearth of substantial references to Japan in the speeches and writings of the 1920s is nothing short of striking and stands in contrast to the consistence and substance of references to the USA. Almost without fail, whenever Japan is introduced into the narrative, it is to serve as a foil to help Hitler make a point barely connected to Asian affairs. Most telling is the absence of Japan in the *Second Book*. In a manuscript which goes to great lengths to describe the threat hanging over Europe's future on account of the economic preponderance of the *Amerikanische Union*, the seemingly obvious idea of bringing Japan into play as a possible counterweight is not even mooted. Thus, the conclusion to be drawn is that at least until 1932, and in contrast to the United States, Japan barely featured in Hitler's thoughts. His interest grew in an opportunistic fashion and in synchronicity with every step Japan took that appeared to guarantee a lasting antagonism between it and its former allies. By early 1941, with all hopes of peace with Britain dashed and Italy a major disappointment as an ally, Japan finally became the focus of German alliance politics. Even then, Hitler would occasionally be overwhelmed with unease at plotting the downfall of European dominance in the Far East together with an Asian power.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹ Matthäus/Bajohr (eds.), *Rosenberg Tagebücher*, p 400 (entry for 20 July 1941); 'Führerhauptquartier 18.12.1941, mittags. Gast: Reichsführer SS Himmler' and 'Wolfsschanze 5.1.1942 mittags. Gäste Reichsminister Dr. Todt, Sepp Dietrich, General Gause, Oberst Zeitler H/Fu.'; both in: Jochmann (ed.), *Monologe*, pp 156, 179. Also Anton Joachimsthaler (ed.), *Christa Schroeder, Er war mein Chef. Aus dem Nachlaß der Sekretärin von Adolf Hitler* (Coburg: Nation Europa 1985), pp 131–2.