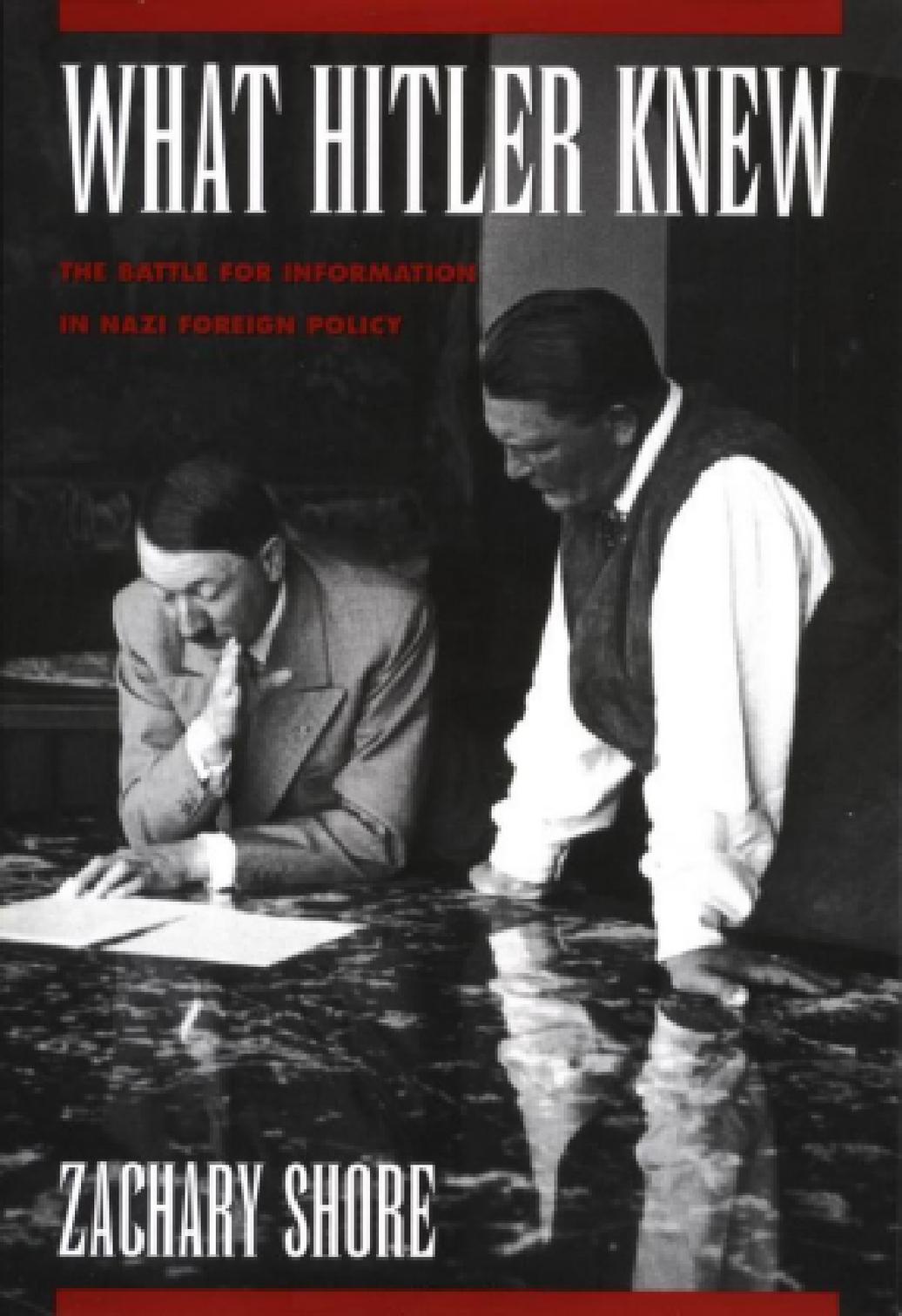




**WE TRIP THE LIGHT
FANTASTIC**

WHAT HITLER KNEW

THE BATTLE FOR INFORMATION
IN NAZI FOREIGN POLICY

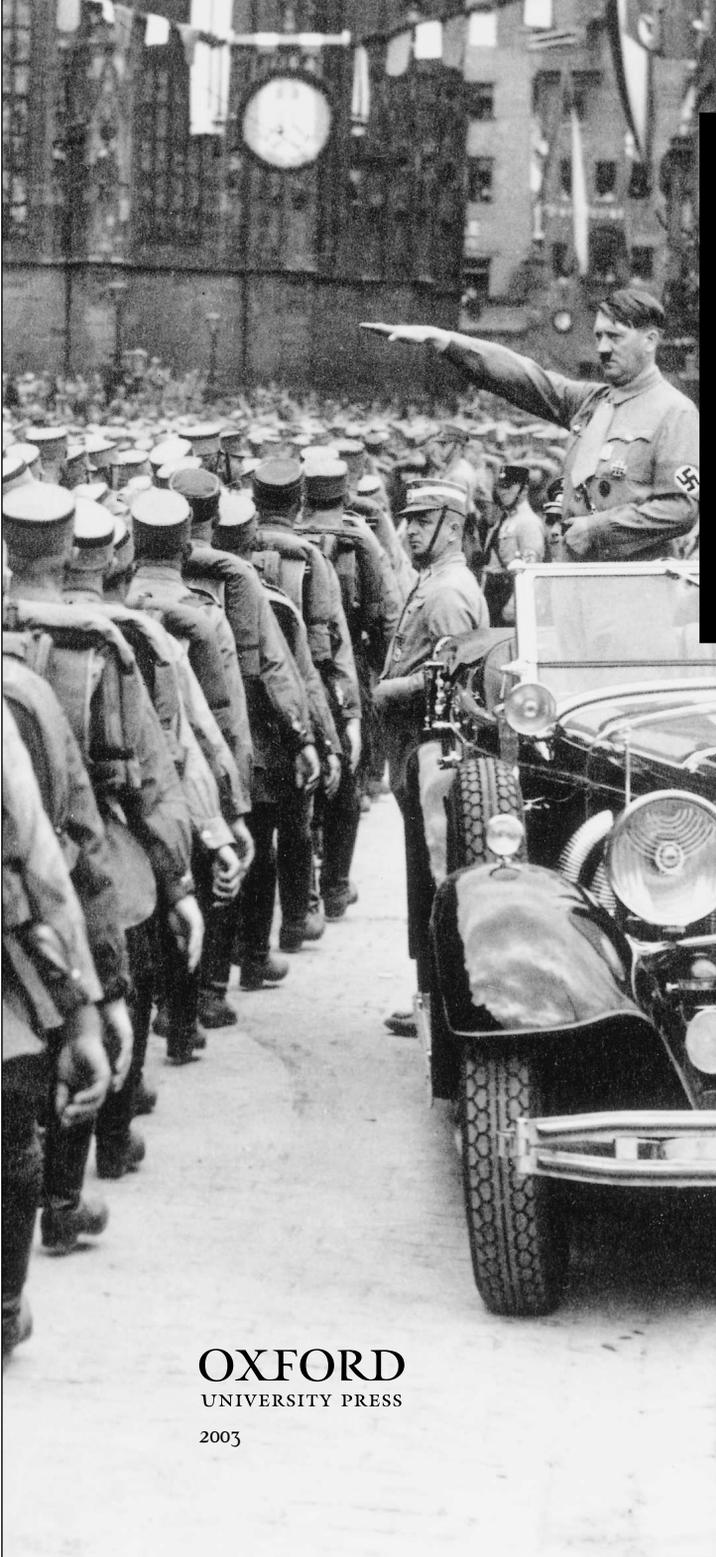


ZACHARY SHORE



What Hitler Knew

Zachary Shore The Battle for Information in Nazi Foreign Policy



What Hitler Knew

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

2003

OXFORD

UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford New York

Auckland Bangkok Buenos Aires Cape Town Chennai
Dar es Salaam Delhi Hong Kong Istanbul Karachi Kolkata
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Mumbai
Nairobi São Paulo Shanghai Taipei Tokyo Toronto

Copyright ©2003 by Oxford University Press, Inc.

Published by Oxford University Press, Inc.
198 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016

www.oup.com

Oxford is a registered trademark of Oxford University Press

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of Oxford University Press.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Shore, Zachary.

What Hitler knew : the battle for information in Nazi foreign policy / Zachary Shore.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-19-515459-2

1. Hitler, Adolf, 1889–1945. 2. Germany—Foreign relations—1933–1945.
3. Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter-Partei. 4. Germany—Politics and government—1933–1945. 5. World politics—1933–1945. I. Title.

DD256.8 .S46 2003

943.086'092—dc21 2002074886

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper.



In Memory of

Michael Aris

March 27, 1946

to March 27, 1999

Research Fellow,

St. Antony's College,

Oxford

and

Kenneth Jernigan

November 13, 1926

to October 12, 1998

Leader of the

National Federation

of the Blind

Acknowledgments

In writing this book, I drew upon the advice of numerous scholars in Great Britain, Germany, and the United States. While I am grateful to each of them, my greatest debt is to Prof. Emeritus Anthony J. Nicholls of St. Antony's College, Oxford. This book is in large part a result of his knowledgeable input and advice.

As I developed this manuscript, the following scholars either advised me along the way or read and critiqued parts of it in various stages: Lord Alan Bullock, Alon Confino, Lord Ralph Dahrendorf, Wilhelm Deist, Robert Evans, Shinju Fujihira, Michael Handel, Talbot Imlay, Robert O'Neill, Alistair Parker, Reinhard Rürup, Avi Shlaim, Harold Shukman, Jill Stephenson, Jonathan Wright, and Michael Zuckerman. President Richard von Weizsäcker a.D. kindly permitted me to view his father's official and private papers housed in the Bundesarchiv Koblenz. I am grateful for this access.

Several colleagues and friends deserve special mention for their tireless proofreading. Samuel Gregg of the Acton Institute and Elizabeth Miles of St. Antony's College consistently offered valuable comments and criticisms. I was blessed to find two principal readers, Maren Jacobs and Irene Ostertag, who came to share both my enthusiasm for this project and the excitement over our discoveries. My editor, Susan Ferber, helped smooth

the manuscript's rough edges, while Dominic Hughes, Jany Keat, David Odo, Lynne Davidson, and Trudy Kuehner (the "bionic editor" at *Orbis*) assisted in the final revisions. One other individual has served as a steadfast supporter over many years. Prof. Stephen Schuker has continued to encourage me—often through the harshest of criticism—to work harder and to "get it right." His devotion to scholarship has inspired me.

I have also benefited from generous financial support from a variety of sources. The University of Oxford supplied me with funds for study and research, including the Scatcherd European Research grant and the Overseas Research Scheme Award. The University's Southern Trust Fund paid for the cost of my readers, without which I would not have been able to undertake this work. The Oxford Faculty of Modern History and the International Studies Centre both provided me with research grants. St. Antony's College provided financial support as well. The Royal Historical Society, the German Academic Exchange Service, and the Gore Family Memorial Trust Fund each contributed magnanimously to my research.

I was especially fortunate to have received assistance from every German archive I visited. The staffs at the Federal Archives in Koblenz and Berlin Lichterfelde were consistently friendly and helpful. Special mention must be made of Dr. Peter Grupp at the Foreign Ministry archives in Bonn, who was subjected to my incessant questions, yet always answered my queries with patience and precision.

Finally, this book could not have been possible without the generous financial and intellectual support from Harvard University's John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies and its outstanding fellows. The institute's directors, Samuel P. Huntington and Stephen P. Rosen, both took an interest in my work and contributed valuable suggestions for its improvement. And to Stanley Hoffmann, for his aid, support, and counsel, I am deeply thankful.

Above all, I have been blessed to have had the support and encouragement of my loving parents. Their moral support has meant more to me than I can express.

August 11, 2002

Z. S.



Contents

	Abbreviations	xi
	Introduction	3
	<i>The Darker World</i>	
1	Hitler's Opening Gambit	9
	<i>Intelligence, Fear, and the German-Polish Agreement</i>	
2	The Longest Knife	31
3	Risk in the Rhineland	48
4	Raising the Stakes	68
	<i>Information Flow and the End of Traditional Decision Making</i>	
5	Betting It All	85
	<i>Disinformation, Deception, and the Anglo-German Talks</i>	
6	Hitler's Trump Card	102
	<i>Information Gaps and the Nazi-Soviet Pact</i>	
	Conclusions	120
	Notes	129
	Bibliography	147
	Index	157
	Photo gallery follows page 72	

Abbreviations

ADAP	Akten zur deutschen Außenpolitik, 1918–1945
Aufz.	Aufzeichnung
BA K	Bundesarchiv Koblenz
BA BL	Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde
DGFP	Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918–1945
TMWC	Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal
PA	Politischesarchiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Bonn
VfZ	Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte

**What
Hitler
Knew**



Introduction

The Darker World

Imagine yourself as one of Hitler's diplomats. From the very beginning of Hitler's rule in 1933, you find yourself serving a violent regime. Each day you read or hear about mass arrests, beatings, and murders. Communists, Socialists, trade unionists, Catholics, Jews, and others are being persecuted by your government. SA thugs in uniforms roam the streets in paramilitary bands, picking fights with those who fail to salute them, beating and sometimes slaying their victims.

You try to convince yourself that you are safe, that you are not an "undesirable." You do not belong to any of the targeted groups. But you are also not a Nazi Party member. And your colleagues at the ministry, all aristocratic, "old school" diplomats, are under increasing pressure from the newly formed state security services.

You can no longer speak freely on the telephone without fear that your line is tapped and your voice recorded. Conversations among colleagues and friends are charged with an undercurrent of tension. Your mail and telegrams are monitored, so you take greater care in choosing your words. The newspapers you read are censored or banned. And after two months of serving this new regime, parliamentary democracy disappears.

If this were not enough, your position and purview are threatened by Party interlopers. Your authority is challenged as rival institutions are

charged with handling aspects of foreign policy previously within your domain. And these ministries and their ministers are aggressively seeking control of the information they need to get ahead—and get you out.

And you face yet another dilemma. Your boss, the *führer*, holds his cards so close to his chest that you often don't know precisely what he wants. Wanting to serve your country and keep your job, you try to overcome this uncertainty by ascertaining the chancellor's will however you can, even circumventing standard operating procedures, withholding and manipulating information, and spying when you must.

In the back of your mind you worry that the Party might one day turn against you. Then, in the summer of 1934, after eighteen months of mounting tension, you witness the end of the rule of law. As thousands are arrested and an unknown number murdered, you soon learn that conservatives of your ilk are among the victims. Of the three most recent chancellors, you hear that one was shot to death in his home along with his wife. Another was placed under house arrest as his staff members were shot to death across their desks or sent to concentration camps. A third, you are told, fled into exile. And within your own ministry, colleagues are arrested and others are sent into hiding, fearing for their lives.

Then the situation worsens. Your government imposes racial purity laws, and some of your most trusted colleagues—the ones you counted on for information and support—are forced to resign, some left to flee the country, others doomed to concentration camps. Gestapo and SS intimidation intensify. By the end of 1938, an extraordinary outburst of violence sweeps across your country leaving thousands of German Jews dead, wounded, or arrested, synagogues and businesses burned to the ground—all under your government's watchful eye. And with each passing day, your country marches ever closer to the abyss of total war.

For much of the 1930s, Hitler enjoyed immense popularity. Torchlight parades, symbols of strength and unity, the restoration of German power and pride, all held tremendous appeal, not simply for the masses, but for the elites as well. Hitler's leading diplomats—the advisers he inherited from the Weimar regime and on whom he depended for continuity, intelligence, and knowledge of foreign capitals—shared many of the *führer's*

broader political aims. They cheered the recapture of the Rhineland; they applauded the dismantling of the Versailles Treaty. They welcomed a return of Germany's rightful place as a great power and basked in Hitler's torchlit glory. This was one world in which the diplomats existed. It was the outer world, the one they could safely share with others. But below the surface of Germany's foreign policy successes lay a darker world, cast in the shadow of torchlight parades. And its climate was one of tension, uncertainty, and fear.

What Hitler Knew examines how governmental officials reached decisions on foreign policy under the stresses and strains of a violent dictatorship. It considers both the regime's domestic political environment and its control of information. Both are critical to understanding why Hitler made some of the key diplomatic and military decisions that have preoccupied historians for more than fifty years. Why did Stalin sign the Nazi-Soviet pact if he knew Hitler planned to invade? Why did Hitler risk a war with France in 1936 when Germany was almost certain to lose? Did British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain actually seek a secret nonaggression pact with Hitler on the eve of war? As important as these questions are for an understanding of the period and the Cold War that followed, they are not the principal subjects of this book. Rather, they are the key moments through which decision making in Nazi Germany is examined.

What Hitler Knew asks upon what information Hitler's decisions were based. It attempts to determine what information his advisers brought him and what they manipulated or withheld altogether. Given that Hitler was not the sole decision maker in his regime, it also focuses on the diplomats who influenced Germany's foreign policy. How Foreign Ministry personnel, from Neurath to Ribbentrop, reached their own decisions is as much the subject of this study as is Hitler. Although at times it will be necessary to assess these men's own personal inclinations to determine how their respective ideologies and psychologies affected their behavior, the primary focus remains the manner in which they received, controlled, and forwarded information.

Information control exists in every regime, and in most bureaucracies information really does equal power. But in Hitler's Reich the near obsessive control of information held consequences for war and peace. Between 1933 and 1939, there was a gradual breakdown of traditional decision-

making processes, yet this never reduced the advisers' influence. In fact, it increased it. Until the outbreak of war in 1939, with the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact and the secret Anglo-German negotiations, Hitler's advisers manipulated policy by limiting what Hitler knew.

6

Ironically, Hitler's power to make informed decisions was limited by the very system he created. By rarely confiding in his advisers and by pitting each against the other, he produced a constant sense of uncertainty within the regime. Uncertainty grew to a climate of fear as state-sponsored violence and intimidation affected even the leading decision makers. Yet instead of making his advisers more cautious, the frenzied environment fostered greater risk. They tightened their grip on information and advocated more dangerous policies.

The reasons why Hitler's advisers exerted unusually strong control over the "information arsenal" (the cache of intelligence reports, sensitive diplomatic traffic, and other vital sources of information) are numerous. Sometimes they reacted to political rivalries, seeking to gain favor with the führer and outshine their colleagues. Sometimes they wanted to affect policy outcomes more in line with their individual worldviews. And sometimes they reacted out of fear. Whatever their motivations, they rose or fell in Hitler's Reich depending on how well they could wield the only weapon at their command—the knowledge they gathered from the documents that crossed their desks.

If the dictum "knowledge is power" contains any truth, then it must be equally true that lack of knowledge limits power. This is a book about power and its limitations. It is a study of how the control of knowledge—or information—affected decision making in Nazi Germany. And it is a portrait of how a dictator's seeming strength can actually be his weakest link.

The common perception of a dictator is of a man who rules with an iron fist. He decides independently what course he will take, he outlines policy, and his orders are obeyed. The actual power of a dictator, of course, is far more limited—limited in part by the information at his disposal. Once a leader ceases to make rational decisions, as was increasingly the case with Hitler during the war, the flow of information becomes far less relevant. So long as a leader operates with a semblance of rational thinking, as Hitler indeed did from 1933 to 1939, he remains constrained in part by what he knows. This is not to suggest that the more in-