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A Deal with the Nazi Dictatorship?: Himmler's Alleged Peace Emissaries in Autumn 1943

During the second world war, Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union declared that Nazi Germany had to surrender unconditionally. For his part, Hitler was determined to fight on to complete victory or defeat, but not everyone on the German side was so rigid. Unofficially, some subordinate Nazi officials sought to explore the possibilities of a compromise peace. Reliable evidence of what ensued is hard to come by, however, because of gaps in the documentary record, wartime disinformation by intelligence officials and postwar fictions.

In selections from his (alleged) wartime diaries first published in 1947, Felix Kersten, physician and masseur to Heinrich Himmler, presented a detailed and dramatic account of his initiative to bring about a separate peace between Nazi Germany and the West in late 1943. Kersten met in Stockholm an American named Abram Stevens Hewitt, described as President Roosevelt's personal representative. The two men worked out terms of a peace settlement that involved German surrender of conquered territories, abolition of the Nazi Party, and elimination of Hitler as dictator, among other things. According to Kersten, he and Reich Security Main Office foreign intelligence chief Walter Schellenberg (who also talked to Hewitt) subsequently laboured to persuade Himmler to talk to Hewitt on this basis, but by the time Himmler agreed to negotiate, it was too late: Hewitt had already left Stockholm.¹ Schellenberg's short account of the episode in *his* postwar memoirs, however, had a different ending; Himmler became enraged at Schellenberg, and he was lucky not to be arrested. Nothing could break Hitler's spell over Himmler, Schellenberg wrote.²

This curious tale with conflicting outcomes bears on questions about the longevity and degree of Himmler's loyalty to Adolf

Hitler and the consistency of nazi military/diplomatic strategy. The claim that Himmler was willing to break with Hitler or even overthrow the Führer as early as the end of 1942 has appeared in a number of popular works, and some scholars have endorsed it.³ Kersten's account of his bargain with Hewitt is consistent with this depiction of Himmler, yet Kersten wrote up his 'diary' entries after the war when he was seeking to enhance his reputation.⁴ Schellenberg's passage contradicts Kersten and the disloyal image of Himmler. A recent biography of Himmler summarizes both Kersten's and Schellenberg's versions, without choosing between them. The biographer vacillates as much as the subject he describes: Himmler perhaps committed treason in his head but not in his heart, but this must all be speculation.⁵

In the most detailed study of separate peace feelers in Stockholm, Ingeborg Fleischhauer devoted most of her attention to alleged nazi-Soviet contacts during 1942-3, but she included Kersten's and Schellenberg's efforts to reach the West as well. Fleischhauer claimed more for Kersten than he had claimed himself; the Reichsführer SS had given his doctor the mission of checking out a separate peace with the West. Reversing previous research which had indicated that the Soviets had initiated separate peace feelers, Fleischhauer generally presented many high nazi officials and resistance emissaries eager to reach a compromise peace, with only Hitler an obstacle. It is not at all clear, however, if the quality of her sources on internal deliberations within the nazi government justifies confident conclusions.⁶

Kersten's and Schellenberg's trips to Stockholm can serve as something of a test case both for Himmler and for nazi 'separate peace' diplomacy. There are a number of previously unexplored sources available. On the German side, Allied interrogations of Schellenberg in 1945 elicited considerably more details about Hewitt and Himmler than were presented in Schellenberg's memoirs, which were heavily condensed and edited by a ghost writer.⁷ Himmler's appointment book, telephone notes, and log of correspondence make it possible to confirm or refute some claims about dates of meetings. Other intelligence officials around Schellenberg supplied useful evidence. On the Allied side, American and British intelligence documents cast useful light on the story, filling in gaps on the German side and beyond that, demonstrating how much (or little) interest the Western Allies had in testing

potential divisions within the nazi élite described initially by Kersten.

Of German descent, Felix Kersten was born in Estonia in 1898 and in 1920 became a citizen of Finland, where he started his medical career. By his own account, after developing what he called manual therapy treatment for nerve problems, he acquired a great many socially and politically prominent European patients, including the Prince Consort of Holland. Eventually (1939) Himmler sought him out and found him a saviour for his own severe stomach pains, and the Gestapo supposedly induced him to move to Berlin. In any case, Kersten acquired property in Germany, as well as a healthy income from the SS, and his family lived there for a time. During the war, Kersten spent much time with Himmler at his various headquarters, and he did not hesitate to use his influence with Himmler to extract favours. Kersten's inquisitiveness, loquaciousness, and manipulative tendencies contributed much to the sequence of events in Stockholm.⁸

In 1942 Kersten met Walter Schellenberg, fifteen years his junior. Schellenberg was a law graduate of the University of Bonn who joined the Nazi Party and the SS in 1933 after Hitler took power. He was recruited into the SS intelligence service, the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD), where he quickly distinguished himself with a predilection for intrigue. After some time in the counter-espionage section of the Gestapo, Schellenberg was promoted in 1941 to become head of Amt VI, the foreign intelligence division of the Reich Security Main Office, a key component of Himmler's SS empire. Seriously ill, Schellenberg had also become Kersten's patient, and by 1943 both men had come to doubt whether Germany could survive the war without a major change of course.⁹

Kersten and Schellenberg both had a Swedish connection. Both men had interceded with Himmler to prevent the execution of four Swedish business executives and engineers convicted of espionage in Warsaw, four among seven Warsaw-based Swedes connected with the Swedish Match Company arrested for involvement in the Polish underground movement.¹⁰ Kersten's and Schellenberg's motives were perhaps partly humanitarian, but other considerations were involved. According to Schellenberg, Kersten wanted to set up practice in Stockholm and needed Swedish permission to reside there. Schellenberg was apparently convinced that executions of the Warsaw Swedes would terminate useful economic and intelligence links between Sweden and Germany.¹¹ In

any case, contemporary documentation supports Schellenberg's claim that the two men worked upon Himmler to delay the executions.¹²

After promising to return to Germany every few months to continue Himmler's treatments, Kersten was able to secure permission to accept an invitation to go to Stockholm and to take his family as well. By Kersten's account, a few days after his arrival in Stockholm on 30 September 1943, Kersten visited a Swedish friend named Graffman, and Abram Stevens Hewitt came to coffee. According to Kersten, he was Roosevelt's special representative doing a study of the German problem. Hewitt arranged to consult Kersten for a vertebrae problem, and Kersten actually began to treat Hewitt with massages designed to 'get blood into the nerves'. The two men began to meet for about an hour each day, except on Sundays.¹³

Abram Stevens Hewitt was named after his grandfather, a former mayor of New York City, United States Representative, co-organizer of the Cooper Union for the advancement of science and art, and trustee of Columbia University. The grandson went to Oxford and Harvard, studied and practised law, and moved in the best-connected circles in New York.¹⁴ It is certainly likely that Hewitt told Kersten something of his contacts as he lay on the massage table. What Hewitt did not say was that he had come to Stockholm to work on economic warfare matters for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the American intelligence agency. Hewitt's first written report, dated 20 December 1943, stressed that he was purely a private person and in no way a representative of the government. Nonetheless, he may not have stuck to that line with Kersten, and he must have at least given Kersten the impression that he knew President Roosevelt personally.¹⁵ Kersten apparently drew the conclusion that he was FDR's man.

Some differences in the accounts may be due to difficulties of communication. Kersten spoke no English, and Hewitt had a limited command of German, the language of their conversations. But it is clear that Kersten's postwar account is misleading in some respects. Hewitt and Kersten did not link up by accident. Swedish banker Jacob Wallenberg, who had taken control of the Swedish Match Company, had asked Hewitt in August 1943 if he was willing to meet representatives of resistance cells in Germany. A couple of months later Wallenberg, questioned by Hewitt, declared that the resistance had been liquidated, and that the

only alternatives to Hitler were Himmler or the army. Shortly afterwards, a friend in Wallenberg's corporate organization (presumably Graffman) gave Hewitt Kersten's card and some background on him.¹⁶

While Kersten started to work on Hewitt, Schellenberg arrived in Stockholm to sound out Wallenberg, using the danger of the Bolshevization of Europe as an argument in favour of a compromise peace between Germany and the West.¹⁷ Schellenberg actually claimed (postwar) that he had come for further discussion of the situation of the seven Warsaw Swedes and negotiation of the return of some Norwegian students arrested in Germany. Still, he knew that the Swedish government and prominent Swedish interests could facilitate his efforts to contact the West.¹⁸ Kersten, Schellenberg, and their wives met from time to time socially, and in the course of these meetings Kersten urged Schellenberg to start efforts with Himmler to exploit the Hewitt connection,¹⁹ which was moving along nicely in his view.²⁰

Ever talkative about himself and about Himmler, Kersten gave Hewitt some reason to take an interest in the Reichsführer SS.²¹ Kersten described Himmler (accurately) as intensely interested in agriculture and race heredity, fanatically anti-Russian, and sympathetic to the Anglo-Saxon races. Unlike many nazi officials, Himmler was said to be personally scrupulous in financial matters (more or less true), and faithful to his wife. Kersten neglected to mention Himmler's mistress and two illegitimate children. Himmler's relations with Goebbels and Ribbentrop, Kersten continued, were very bad, and Göring was no longer of primary importance. Bormann was said to be still a Himmler man. Kersten pressed Hewitt to come to Germany to talk to Himmler, who realized that Germany could no longer win the war and was anxious to salvage something from the wreck. Himmler was prepared under certain circumstances to overthrow Hitler.

After showing Hewitt the 'reasonable' Himmler, Kersten sought to frighten him with the monster. Lacking a compromise peace, Himmler was prepared to shoot twenty or thirty million Germans to keep order and to do away with private property in Germany and occupied countries, creating a wave of communism which he would leap onto. With their superior technical ability and organizing talent, the German leaders would eventually come to dominate the more populous Russians anyway. Kersten said that Himmler was organizing his own government within the SS and described

Schellenberg and one Braun as his two chief advisers on foreign affairs, either of whom could confirm his story.

Schellenberg had by this time returned to Berlin. He had not yet taken part in any discussions with Hewitt, and Himmler had given him express instructions not to use Kersten in intelligence work.²² Not trusting Kersten's intelligence acumen, and unable to figure out how to use the 'tempting' information about Hewitt's link with Roosevelt,²³ Schellenberg had to restrict himself to other signs, among them the presence in Stockholm of David McEwan, Churchill's special plenipotentiary for economic issues, that the West might be ready to discuss a compromise peace.²⁴ Schellenberg's immediate superior was Ernst Kaltenbrunner, head of the Reich Security Main Office, who did not get on with Schellenberg and certainly was less pessimistic than Schellenberg about Germany's fortunes in the continuing war.²⁵ Kaltenbrunner suggested to Hitler that the British might be feigning interest in discussions with the nazis to gain leverage against the Soviets at the forthcoming conference of foreign ministers in Moscow. That was enough to set Hitler off; on 19 October he issued an order not to pursue the 'British feelers'.²⁶

On 22 October, Schellenberg telephoned Himmler, mentioned an unidentified report he had received from Switzerland,²⁷ discussed his past (or forthcoming?) trip to Stockholm, and complained about his inability to meet McEwan.²⁸ There is no sign that Schellenberg told Himmler anything about Hewitt, and in his postwar interrogation Schellenberg made it explicit that he had been leery of associating himself at first with Kersten and Hewitt.²⁹ We do not know how Himmler reacted to the limited information Schellenberg gave him, but nothing he said prevented Schellenberg from heading back to Stockholm, this time to provide support for Kersten's claims.

Schellenberg was taking a considerable risk. In a postwar statement he specified:

1. I had no authorization whatsoever for entering into conversation with a representative of a hostile power;
2. I had no actual authority for saying anything of Germany's peace plans; in general there were strict instructions to the contrary;
3. I did not know Mr Hewitt, had no reason to believe that Kersten had any experience in these matters, and so had to reckon with the possibility of his being an agent provocateur and a Press campaign ensuing;
4. I did not know how Hewitt himself was placed;

5. However [the] conversation went[,], I was unable to predict Himmler's possible reaction.³⁰

But Schellenberg contacted Hewitt in a manner arranged by Kersten, and the three men met on 2 and 3 November (though Kersten gave the date as 9 November), apparently in Kersten's office in the Plaza Hotel. Schellenberg supposedly introduced himself as a colonel in the army(!) who had been wounded in North Africa.³¹ For this segment of the story we have three versions – Kersten's, Schellenberg's, and Hewitt's.

Kersten claimed to have written a detailed letter to Himmler on 24 October, spelling out both the opportunity to strike a deal with Hewitt and a programme that could serve as the basis for a compromise peace: evacuation of all German-occupied territories, abolition of the Nazi Party and the holding of democratic elections, preservation of Germany's 1914 boundaries, reduction of the German army so that it posed no danger of aggression, control of the German armaments industry by the West, and removal of leading nazis and their trial for war crimes. He also asked Himmler to send Schellenberg to Stockholm.³² There are certain problems with Kersten's version – there is no contemporary record of Kersten's letter (no surviving letter and no entry in Himmler's log of correspondence), and Hewitt and Schellenberg both deviate from it but roughly agree with each other. Though Kersten's letter to Himmler is probably a postwar fiction, Kersten and Hewitt may conceivably have talked along these lines.

Schellenberg's version describes Kersten's role as slight; the physician did nothing but establish the contact. (Given that Kersten talked to Hewitt over six weeks and Schellenberg spoke with him on two days for a few hours, that seems a little harsh, but not inaccurate.) Schellenberg described the bleak situation in Germany to Hewitt and suggested an end of the war on the western front. Both men sought some kind of Western-German understanding to prevent the Bolshevization of Germany and Europe. To accomplish this, Hewitt suggested replacing German army troops in the West with Waffen-SS troops and sending the regular troops to the East. Himmler would have to guarantee an agreement with the West, and the boundaries of Germany still needed to be worked out. Schellenberg said explicitly: 'In this connection no elaborate views were expressed. We were both in

the same position, neither of us knew what would be said about these matters in our respective countries.³³

Hewitt gave Kersten some credit; all of what he had discussed with Schellenberg was familiar ground from the meetings with Kersten, and Hewitt regarded Schellenberg's appearance as confirmation of Kersten's influence with Himmler.³⁴ But he supported Schellenberg on the key point: there was no specific list of peace terms.³⁵ Though disclaiming any official function, Hewitt stressed that in his view the US would never negotiate with Hitler. Schellenberg said that this was unnecessary, and that Hewitt ought to come to Germany to meet with Himmler. That comment coincides nicely with Schellenberg's own claim that he had been deliberately vague as to whether a compromise peace with the West would come with or without Hitler's consent.³⁶

Hewitt replied that it would be pointless for him to go to Germany just then; he had no knowledge of American policies. Perhaps if he could return to Washington and raise some interest, he could come later. Schellenberg urged him to act fast, on the grounds that the bombing was devastating so much of Germany that time was short. The two men worked out tentative arrangements for Hewitt, after he had gone to Washington, to go to Germany through Portugal, after some prearranged signals had appeared in the Swedish press.³⁷

So far everything was Kersten's and Schellenberg's effort: would Himmler be receptive? The Reichsführer SS was not so blindly fanatical that he ignored Germany's formidable military difficulties. In a speech he gave to party officials in the Gau of Posen on 24 October, Himmler set out a relatively vague assessment of how the war would end: Germany would retain all the territory it had gained up to 1939 (including Poland); Germany would be a world power; and the process of unifying the Germanic peoples of Europe would continue.³⁸ Perhaps on such an occasion he had to be somewhat realistic and not mention a vast empire in the East. But he was also pessimistic in a private conversation a few days later (apparently in Prague on 28 October) with Prince Max Egon Hohenlohe-Langenburg, a wealthy Liechtenstein national of German ancestry who owned property in the Sudetenland and who mixed occasionally in the world of intelligence as an informant.

Interested in a compromise peace partly for reasons of self-interest (as, of course, were Kersten and Schellenberg), Hohenlohe

had already established contact on one side with Himmler and Schellenberg and on the other in Switzerland with American Minister Leland Harrison and Allen Dulles, the head of the American OSS mission there. As Hohenlohe reported to Dulles in early November, Himmler denied that he would ever take any action to unseat Hitler, but nonetheless foresaw Hitler's disappearance (death). Hohenlohe predicted that Himmler was in the best position to take control afterwards. In contrast to some key officials in the Nazi Party, Himmler would rather deal with the West, Hohenlohe reported.³⁹

An unmistakable sign that the West was not sending out engraved invitations to senior Nazi officials came on 1 November. The conference of Allied foreign ministers in Moscow not only reached agreement to act together on matters regarding surrender, but also released a statement on atrocities signed by Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin, promising the trial and punishment of Nazi Party officials and military men responsible for atrocities, massacres and executions. On 2 November Kaltenbrunner and Himmler discussed on the 'phone the Reuters communiqué on the Moscow conference, and met for many hours on 4 and 5 November.⁴⁰ As hard as they must have tried to find hints of disagreement among the Allies that they could exploit, the West and the Soviets were sticking together.

With atrocious timing, Schellenberg now returned to Germany, hoping to make Himmler enthusiastic about negotiating with the Americans through Hewitt. Schellenberg offered two versions of Himmler's reaction which differ in the details but not in the essentials. The first alleged that Schellenberg flew home from Stockholm, worked all night on his report to Himmler, and saw him about 3 pm the next day (3 or 4 November. The page for 3 November is missing in Himmler's appointment book and Schellenberg's name does not appear on 4 November.) Himmler became confused, aghast, almost gasping for air, finally enraged. All this sounds like Schellenberg's ghost writer.⁴¹

In another version, which Schellenberg described several times to Allied interrogators, he saw Himmler just before, during, or just after the annual festivities in Munich commemorating the Beer Hall Putsch of 1923 (8–9 November) in a room in the Four Seasons Hotel. (Himmler did not keep a careful list of appointments during such times, and Schellenberg's name is not listed.) When Schellenberg spoke about Hewitt, Himmler was unable to

concentrate, and Schellenberg could feel instinctively Himmler's lack of sympathy for his proposal. He kept interrupting with nervous questions. After an hour the plan was shattered. Himmler did not reject it absolutely, but said he would have to discuss it with Kaltenbrunner, and Schellenberg knew what that meant. Afterwards Himmler said Schellenberg had gone much too far – the whole thing amounted to high treason, and might even be a provocation by the enemy. Schellenberg was to do nothing further, and Kersten was to be kept away from intelligence work.⁴² As Schellenberg recognized, his proposal would have forced Himmler to make a stark choice – either to discuss the idea with Hitler and try to respond 'officially' or to go behind Hitler's back and seek co-operation between the SS and the military. Himmler was not prepared to do either.⁴³

The Kersten–Schellenberg initiative would have died but for the lack of alternatives. If the Soviets had been interested earlier in a deal or in feigning interest in a deal with Germany, they showed no such interest after the Moscow conference. Germany's military situation continued to deteriorate. So Kersten, who returned to Germany in December, apparently tried to persuade Himmler.

In his 'diary' entry for 4 December, Kersten wrote that he tried to make Himmler come to a decision about Hewitt; it was time to stop the war. Himmler pleaded that he could not show disloyalty to Hitler. When Kersten responded that Himmler had an even higher responsibility to the German people, Himmler began to quarrel with Hewitt's conditions, especially the war crimes provision, because these crimes were not 'crimes' in his eyes. In the course of the discussion, Himmler took out the letter Kersten had supposedly written in October and went through the conditions one by one, and then he asked for a few days more to think over the situation.

Kersten's account concludes with persuasive detail:

This talk between the Reichsführer SS, Heinrich Himmler, and myself took place on the 4th of December, 1943, at Hochwald, the [Himmler] Field Headquarters in East Prussia. The talk began early in the morning at a quarter past nine and finished at ten minutes to eleven.⁴⁴

A nice writer's touch! But on 4 December Himmler woke up

in Berlin, and during the day went to Weimar to give a speech. He had not been at Hochwald for several days.

No meetings between Himmler and Kersten are indicated until 9 and 10 December.⁴⁵ At this point contemporary records finally come to Kersten's support, though they are only suggestive, not conclusive. On the afternoon of 9 December Himmler also met Kaltenbrunner, and Himmler's correspondence log shows a letter from Kersten on 10 December, even though Kersten saw him that same morning.⁴⁶ Kersten or Himmler saw the need to have the doctor put something in writing. Unfortunately, the letter itself apparently has not survived, but we may conjecture that it had something to do with Hewitt, even if we cannot trust Kersten's diary descriptions.

On 11 December Himmler met Hitler, with no surviving record or indication of the subject. Two days later,⁴⁷ at least according to information received by the British Minister in Stockholm, Himmler met a Swedish businessman described as pro-nazi. (Identified only as Mr X in the British document, this man was probably Birger Dahlerus, a Swede close to Göring who had taken part in diplomatic negotiations before the outbreak of the second world war and who owned an estate in Germany.) According to Mr X, Himmler said he had consulted Göring, Milch, and Rommel, and that Hitler had now authorized him to seek clandestine contact between Germany and Britain. Ribbentrop had not been consulted, but Bormann was present during most of the meeting. Himmler said he wanted above all to clarify what was meant by unconditional surrender. He and Hitler realized that some change in the political system was necessary, but that would only cause anarchy at the present time. Himmler suggested that he name one army representative and one party representative to meet British counterparts. The British cabinet's suggested response to this feeler was that it had nothing to say to Hitler or Himmler. London so notified the United States and the Soviet Union, both of which concurred.⁴⁸

Schellenberg reported in his memoirs that shortly before Christmas 1943, out of the blue Himmler suddenly told him that he now realized something had to happen. Schellenberg could hardly believe it when Himmler urged him: 'For God's sake, don't let your contact with Hewitt be broken off. Could you not let him be told that I am ready to have a conversation with him?' In less dramatic fashion, Schellenberg also reported, during an interro-

gation, that Himmler later changed his view of Hewitt, but that the right moment for discussions had passed.⁴⁹

It turned out that Hewitt's path was also strewn with obstacles. Hewitt (code-numbered 610) had gathered information about nazi Germany through Kersten and perhaps other sources that was sent on to London. In late November, an OSS official in London wrote to OSS Stockholm chief Wilho Tikander: '610's material was quite general on the whole and not too useful, but I can appreciate your point that it should be accepted with a "grain of salt".'⁵⁰ In fact, Kersten had only given Hewitt information designed to drive home the need for negotiations with Himmler, not much of real intelligence value, and not all of it accurate. Schellenberg had offered a little intelligence gift, the information that the Germans had broken an OSS code in Bern, but for reasons which are too complicated to go into here, OSS chief in Bern, Allen Dulles, had already perceived a nazi ruse to raise doubts about his codes in order to scare off anti-nazi German informants. Hewitt would not receive any credit for sending this story from Schellenberg.⁵¹

Hewitt summarized his interaction with Kersten and Schellenberg for his OSS superiors in Stockholm, who feared it was a nazi trap. But Hewitt persisted, wrote a report in mid-December, and submitted it to the OSS chief of station, Tikander, with his request to go to Washington. Tikander then sent a sharp critique to American Minister Herschel Johnson: even if everything Hewitt said was true, it did not add up to anything positive. Tikander questioned Kersten's ancestry and loyalty, his greedy acceptance of a paltry 2,000 kroner for medical treatment provided as a cover, and Hewitt's ability to converse effectively and accurately in German. Above all, why would Himmler, one of the principal figures responsible for war crimes, think he could ever accomplish anything constructive by sending a person such as Kersten to Stockholm? (This was sound logic; Himmler had not sent Kersten on such a mission.) Since Germany continued to try to drive a wedge between the Soviets and the West, Hewitt's proposed trip to Germany represented a danger, not an opportunity. Tikander also noted confidentially that Hewitt's brother-in-law, an OSS officer in Sicily, had been captured by the Germans and was presumed executed, information withheld from Hewitt on instructions from Washington.⁵² His relative's fate only emphasized the danger of Hewitt's proposed mission to Germany.

If Tikander was strongly critical, Minister Johnson was vehement. In his cover memo to Hewitt's summary for Washington, Johnson called Hewitt's contacts dangerous. That he gave Kersten the impression he could send information to the highest quarters in Washington was 'regrettable'. Hewitt should never have been given this assignment. To make sure he was heard, Johnson also wrote a most secret and personal letter to James Dunn ('Dear Jimmy'), political adviser in the State Department, pouring on more of the same. Johnson and Tikander were happy to let Hewitt go to Washington, provided his idea was scuttled, but neither wanted to see him return.⁵³ Red tape in London and transportation difficulties kept Hewitt stuck in Stockholm for some time. After he finally left, a State Department reply came back under Secretary of State Hull's name: Kersten's proposition should not even be considered.⁵⁴

Hewitt's arguments found a somewhat better reception once he reached Washington in February. Hewitt met with OSS Secret Intelligence branch chief William Maddox on 4 February and redrafted his summary of the contacts with Kersten and Schellenberg at the request of General William J. Donovan, chief of OSS. Recognizing that a trip to Germany was 'potential dynamite', Hewitt nonetheless saw two enormous advantages: he might learn about the Germans' frame of mind and relations among prominent nazis, and he might explore the possibilities of provoking a putsch or civil war. Donovan was invited to meet Hewitt; it is not clear whether he accepted.⁵⁵

In any case, Donovan did send the idea on to FDR on 20 March, but with a hedged negative recommendation: he assumed that the president did not want Americans in Germany on such a basis.⁵⁶ This was the kind of language used by someone who appreciated the possibilities (Donovan was not known as Wild Bill for nothing) and the risks, but expected the White House to weigh the latter more heavily. And so it turned out. Roosevelt did not pursue the idea further. Schellenberg heard through Kersten and Graffman that Hewitt had fallen into disfavour in the OSS because of the scheme and had left the agency.⁵⁷ Yet he had done what Kersten and Schellenberg hoped he would do: he had taken the idea to the highest levels in Washington.

In spite of the impurities in postwar testimonies and even possibly in Hewitt's wartime reports, and of the contradictions among the various participants, they are all in agreement on certain basic

matters. From the beginning, Kersten and Schellenberg had no mandate from Himmler, let alone Hitler. They hoped to generate enough of a show of interest by the West to tempt Himmler to take risks with or without Hitler. Hewitt's situation was similar: he had to demonstrate clear opportunities of impairing the nazi war effort for higher American authorities to overlook the risks of compromising the policy of unconditional surrender. Neither side could offer their superiors more than vague possibilities at the end of 1943.

Kersten's and Schellenberg's testimonies offer a glimpse into the nucleus of the nazi regime, where personal conflicts and rivalries, as well as differences in policies and perspectives, were common. Several decades of historical scholarship have confirmed that beneath the shell of the totalitarian state there was a multiplicity of bureaucratic fiefs and political and jurisdictional rivalries. The question is whether such divisions and disagreements went so far as to affect basic decisions on war and peace or to threaten Hitler's control.

As much a racial fanatic as the Führer and directly responsible for most of the racial policies of the nazi regime, Himmler was nonetheless more flexible in foreign policy strategy and less eager to fight on until total victory against all enemies or complete defeat. Himmler did wield effective control over the SS, the most powerful single organization in nazi Germany. In his memoirs, one former OSS Stockholm official expressed doubt whether 'his' decision (ultimately a White House decision) not to send Hewitt to Germany was the correct one. 'If we could have driven a wedge between Himmler and Hitler, the resulting disorganization might have resulted in the collapse of Germany a year before it actually occurred.'⁵⁸

But even if Himmler had been willing to commit himself to a compromise peace and overthrow Hitler, the United States could not possibly have justified to the American public any contact or bargain with the architect of genocide. All of the lofty pronouncements about wartime goals, all the threats to punish those responsible for atrocities and mass executions would immediately have become a mockery in the midst of the war – a serious problem for morale. Any deal, therefore, had to be one in bad faith: get Himmler to seize power or even just to weaken the western front, then not deliver on any American promises.

Such a course of secret diplomacy and betrayal, well trodden

by the nazis themselves, was perilous for the Americans. The nazis could have caused all kinds of difficulties, not just with Western public opinion, but with the ever suspicious Soviets, simply by exposing any of their discussions with Hewitt. If Hewitt had gone to Berlin or Hochwald for talks with Himmler, they would most likely have been taped. If Himmler was double-crossed, or even if he simply decided to remain loyal to Hitler, he could have used the incriminating evidence of Hewitt's discussions to disrupt the alliance by showing the Soviets proof of American perfidy. In a negotiation in which both sides might deal in bad faith, the Americans were bound to lose just by getting too close to the enemy. Opportunities to play off enemy moderates against radicals in nazi Germany existed – they always will in brutal dictatorships – but this was a type of game impossible to play with precision and extremely dangerous to play in a democracy in wartime.

Another intelligence official confirmed after the war that Schellenberg had believed in the prospect of a separate peace with the West, that he had placed high hopes in Hewitt, and that he was distressed by Hewitt's failure to return from Washington.⁵⁹ Schellenberg nonetheless persisted in trying to sway Himmler toward a separate peace, but Himmler had a different way of proceeding in that direction. In September 1944, the Reichsführer SS asked Hitler for permission to conduct secret negotiations with 'England or Russia'.⁶⁰ In other words, in spite of a now disastrous military situation, Himmler *still* could not bring himself to break with his Führer, an obvious precondition for Schellenberg's plan.

That same month Schellenberg recruited a new collaborator, Giselber Wirsing, a nationalist (but non-nazi) author of works on foreign affairs, who had written for the *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* and *Die Tat*. Schellenberg and Wirsing agreed, according to Wirsing's postwar testimony, that Germany's military position was hopeless, and that Hitler had to leave the government to create any chance for German participation in peace negotiations. To that end, Wirsing was to write a series of unvarnished analyses of Germany's military and foreign policy situation which Schellenberg would distribute to a select circle of high nazi officials, among whom the primary audience was Himmler. One specific goal was to destroy the illusion that the nazis could still exploit differences among the Allies. Wirsing sought to bring about the creation of a non-nazi government, but Schellenberg simply envisaged Himmler's ascendancy. In any case, Himmler supposedly agreed with the

thrust of Wirsing's reports, but failed to live up to promises to Schellenberg, because of either Hitler's opposition or lack of support from the extreme wing of the SS.⁶¹

This 1944 sequel reinforces the interpretation that Schellenberg, not Kersten or Himmler, was the driving force behind the idea of negotiations with the West in autumn 1943. Kersten's account of his 1943 initiative is fundamentally flawed, because his diary was manufactured afterwards, because he exaggerated his own role, and because he also exaggerated Himmler's openness toward breaking with Hitler. In spite of some self-serving elements, Schellenberg's interrogations (more than the ghost-written memoirs) seem close to the mark, even though his proposed course of action in retrospect was totally unrealistic. And if there was no way for an insider like Schellenberg to read Himmler's intentions and decisions correctly, it was unlikely that the West could have done anything to drive a wedge between Hitler and Himmler. The American decision not to pursue Hewitt's invitation to meet Himmler did not deprive Hewitt of a historic opportunity to end the war earlier.

Notes

1. Felix Kersten, *The Kersten Memoirs, 1940–1945* (New York 1957, orig. 1947), 188–97.

2. Walter Schellenberg, *Hitler's Secret Service*, trans. Louis Hagen (New York 1971, orig. 1956), 363.

3. See among others: Heinz Höhne, *The Order of Death's Head*, trans. Richard Barry (New York 1971), 584–96; Peter Padfield, *Himmler: Reichsführer SS* (New York 1991), 421–5, 489–91, 545; Andreas Biss, *Der Stopp der Endlösung: Kampf gegen Himmler und Eichmann in Budapest* (Stuttgart 1966) 11, 83–4; Barry Rubin, *Istanbul Intrigues* (New York 1989), 260. Peter Hoffmann, *The History of the German Resistance 1933–1945* (Cambridge 1977), 219, 221, 295, paints a brief portrait of Himmler trying to negotiate with the enemy through Swedish intermediaries from 1942, and with the resistance aware that Himmler was planning a coup against Hitler. But Himmler's vacillations and weakness made him unable to follow through. Yehuda Bauer, *Bartering for Jewish Lives* (New Haven 1994), presents a similar version of Himmler, but has him in addition willing to trade the release of substantial numbers of Jews for concessions from the West.

4. This is implied, but not clearly stated by Raymond Palmer, 'Felix Kersten and Count Bernadotte: A Question of Rescue', *Journal of Contemporary History*,

29, 1 (January 1994), 41. The times, dates, and locations of conversations with Himmler reproduced by Kersten often do not correspond to the locations or times on those dates listed in Himmler's appointment books.

5. Peter Padfield, *Himmler*, 473–4.

6. Ingeborg Fleischhauer, *Die Chance des Sonderfriedens: Deutsch-sowjetische Geheimgespräche 1941–1945* (Berlin 1986), 115–16, 206 (on Kersten and Himmler). Fleischhauer certainly presented important new information, including some solid material drawn from Swedish archives and some original German documentation, but did not, in my view, take sufficient account of wartime disinformation, inaccuracies in hearsay and mendacious postwar testimony, so that her overall picture remains open to challenge. For other separate peace literature, Vojtech Mastny, 'Stalin and the Prospects of a Separate Peace', *American Historical Review*, 77 (1972), 1, 365–88; idem, *Russia's Road to the Cold War: Diplomacy, Warfare and the Politics of Communism, 1941–1945* (New York 1979), 73–84; H. W. Koch, 'The Spectre of a Separate Peace in the East: Russo-German Peace Feelers, 1942–44', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 10, 3 (July 1975), 531–47; Wolfgang Leonhard, *Child of the Revolution* (Chicago 1958), 256–8.

7. Schellenberg, *Hitler's Secret Service*, 14–17 (comments in introduction by Alan Bullock).

8. Biographical information from Kersten, *Memoirs*; Kersten's own autobiographical statements to Abram Hewitt, summarized in Hewitt's report, 'Contact with Himmler', NA RG 226, Entry 180, Roll 28; Interrogation of Schellenberg of 16 July 1945, NA RG 226, Entry 125A, Box 2, Folder 21.

9. Biographical information on Schellenberg from Alan Bullock's introduction to Schellenberg, *Hitler's Secret Service*, 7–17, and Schellenberg's comments to Allied interrogators.

10. See Josef Lewandowski, *Swedish Contribution to the Polish Resistance Movement During World War II, 1939–1942* (Uppsala 1979). Also, Final Report on the Case of Walter Schellenberg, NA RG 319, IRR Schellenberg, XE001752, Box 195, Folder 7, pp. 38, 49.

11. Lewandowski, *Swedish Contribution*, 82–3.

12. Having previously met twice with General Director Brandin of the Swedish Match Company on the matter (see Final Report on Schellenberg, NA RG 319, IRR Schellenberg, 38, 49), Schellenberg and Kersten accompanied Brandin and another Swedish executive to Himmler's headquarters on 27 August 1943, and Himmler again met the men the next day. Himmler's appointment book, NA RG 84, R 26 (no frame numbers).

13. Interrogation of Schellenberg, 16 July 1945, NA RG 226, Entry 125A. Kersten, *Memoirs*, 187. Hewitt's handwritten report, dated 20 Dec. 1943, in NA RG 84, Stockholm Legation Top Secret Correspondence, Box 1, Folder 6 (1943).

14. Dan and Inez Morris, *Who Was Who in American Politics* (New York 1974), 308. Anthony Cave Brown, *Bodyguard of Lies* (New York 1976), 470. Cave Brown gives Hewitt credit for feeding misleading information to Kersten about Allied invasion plans for Scandinavia and the Balkans, but there is no evidence in Hewitt's reports of this, and I have found no other support for it in OSS records.

15. Kersten, *Memoirs*, 187–8. Hewitt's handwritten report, dated 20 Dec. 1943 in NA RG 84, Stockholm Legation Top Secret Correspondence, Box 1, Folder 6 (1943). Schellenberg supports Hewitt more than Kersten on Hewitt's status: Kersten represented him as an emissary of Roosevelt and Stettinius commissioned to

study the German question, but Hewitt himself took pains to make it clear that he had no official function and was not a diplomat. Schellenberg statement of 6 Aug. 1945, NA RG 226, Entry 125A, Box 2, Folder 21. On the other hand, one of Hewitt's OSS superiors in his memoirs wrote that Hewitt (whom he referred to only as 'our agent') presented himself as the secret personal representative of the president and greatly exceeded the instructions given him. Calvin Hoover, *Memoirs of Capitalism, Communism, and Nazism* (Durham 1965), 215–16.

16. In addition to the handwritten report of 20 Dec., Hewitt twice subsequently typed up detailed reports on his conversations with Kersten. The first was cabled to Washington on 10 Jan. 1944 (see *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1944* (hereafter *FRUS*) (Washington, DC 1966), vol. I, 489–93).

17. Fleischhauer, *Die Chance des Sonderfriedens*, 205, 318 n91.

18. In his interrogation of 16 July 1945, NA RG 226, Entry 125A, Box 2, Folder 21, Schellenberg said he used the case to bridge the gap with the Western powers, in other words, that he was looking ahead to launching peace feelers in Stockholm.

19. Interrogation of 16 July 1945, NA RG 226, Entry 125A, Box 2, Folder 21.

20. Kersten, *Memoirs*, 187–8.

21. The following summary of Kersten's comments is drawn from Hewitt's reports (see nn. 8, 13).

22. Interrogation of 16 July 1945, NA RG 226, Entry 125A, Box 2, Folder 21.

23. *Ibid.*

24. Fleischhauer, *Die Chance des Sonderfriedens*, 206–7.

25. On Kaltenbrunner generally, see Peter R. Black, *Ernst Kaltenbrunner: Ideological Soldier of the Third Reich* (Princeton 1984).

26. Fleischhauer, *Die Chance des Sonderfriedens*, 207.

27. In a postwar interrogation, Theodor Paeffgen said that he met Prince Max Egon von Hohenlohe-Lagenburg in Switzerland in 1943. At that time Schellenberg was trying to establish a link with the Americans in Switzerland, and Hohenlohe knew the American Minister Leland Harrison. Hohenlohe was to set up an appointment for a German official named Lindemann, who said he was willing to undertake the job if Himmler gave his approval. Schellenberg took the matter to Himmler, who found that Ribbentrop was opposed, so he declined to act. NA RG 84, Bern Confidential Correspondence, Box 30, 820.02 Hohenlohe.

Himmler's telephone note says only 'report from Switzerland', so we can only conjecture whether Schellenberg asked Himmler for permission to proceed with Hohenlohe and Lindemann.

28. Himmler's notes of telephone conversations, 22 Oct. 1943, NA RG 242, T-84, R 26. The last item reads 'trip by McEwan forbidden'. It is possible that Himmler garbled Schellenberg's message, or that Himmler already knew Schellenberg was barred from going to see McEwan, and that Schellenberg was now reporting that McEwan could not come to Germany. In any case, the thrust was that the two could not meet.

29. Interrogation of 16 July 1945, NA RG 226, Entry 125A, Box 2, Folder 21.

30. Schellenberg statement of 5 Aug. 1945, NA RG 226, Entry 125A, Box 2, Folder 21.

31. Here Fleischhauer, *Die Chance des Sonderfriedens*, 207 and 318 n97 appears to have the most reliable sources. Kersten gives the 9 Nov. date in *Memoirs*, 192. Schellenberg later remembered one meeting taking place in Hewitt's hotel and the other in one of his colleagues' apartment. Interrogation of 16 July 1945. On

Schellenberg as a colonel, see handwritten memo by Abram Hewitt, 20 Dec. 1943, NA RG 84, American Legation Stockholm, Top Secret Correspondence, Box 1, Folder 6 (1943).

32. Kersten, *Memoirs*, 190–1.

33. Interrogation of Schellenberg of 16 July 1945; Schellenberg statement of 6 August 1945, NA RG 226, Entry 125A, Box 2, Folder 21.

34. Memos by Hewitt, 20 Dec. 1943, NA RG 84, Stockholm, Top Secret Corr., Box 1, Folder 6.

35. Interrogation of 16 July 1945, NA RG 226, Entry 125A, Box 2, Folder 21. Final Report on the Case of Schellenberg, NA RG 319, XE 001752, Box 195, Folder 7, 58–9.

36. Schellenberg statement of 6 Aug. 1945, NA RG 226, Entry 125A, Box 2, Folder 21.

37. Memos by Hewitt, 20 Dec. 1943, NA RG 84, Stockholm Top Secret Corr., Box 1, Folder 6. Statement by Schellenberg, 6 Aug. 1945, NA RG 226, Entry 125A, Box 2, Folder 21.

38. Copy of speech in NA RG 242, T-175/R 17/2520805.

39. Bern to OSS, 9 Nov. 1943, NA RG 226, Entry 134, Box 170, Folder 1076. Hohenlohe's code number was 515. Hohenlohe mentioned that he had just been to Vienna, Prague, and Berlin, and that he had spoken at length with Himmler. On Himmler's presence in Prague on 28 Oct. 1943, see Himmler's appointment book, NA RG 242, T-84/R 25. For background on Hohenlohe, see Bern to Secretary of State, 7 April 1943, NA RG 226, Entry 134, Box 171, and a set of appraisals of Hohenlohe in 1945 in NA RG 84, American Legation Bern, Classified Correspondence, Box 23, 820.02 Hohenlohe.

40. Himmler's phone notes, 2 Nov. 1943, NA RG 242, T-84/R 26: 'Reuter Kommuniqué über Moskau'. Himmler's appointment book, 4–5 Nov. 1943, NA RG 242, T-84/R 26.

41. Schellenberg, *Hitler's Secret Service*, 363. Himmler's appointment book, NA RG 242, T-84/R 25.

42. Schellenberg statement of 6 Aug. 1945, NA RG 226, Entry 125A, Box 2, Folder 21. Final Report, NA RG 319, IRR Schellenberg, Box 195, Folder 7, p. 60. Interrogation of 16 July 1945, NA RG 226, Entry 125A, Box 2, Folder 21.

43. Schellenberg statement of 6 Aug. 1945, NA RG 226, Entry 125A, Box 2, Folder 21.

44. Kersten, *Memoirs*, 194.

45. Himmler's appointment book, 4–10 Dec. 1943, NA RG 242, T-84, R 25.

46. NA RG 242, T-581/R 46A.

47. Himmler's meeting with Hitler in Hitler's appointment book, NA RG 242, T-84/R 387, as well as Himmler's book. Himmler's appointment book page for 12 Dec. 1943 is missing. The page for 13 Dec. is largely illegible. Himmler's appointment book, NA RG 242, T-84, R 25.

48. Cordell Hull's Memorandum of Conversation, 27 Dec. 1943, and attached telegram of 25 December from Eden to British ambassadors in Moscow and Washington, reprinted in *FRUS* 1944, vol. I, 484–5.

49. Schellenberg, *Hitler's Secret Service*, 338. Schellenberg statement of 6 Aug. 1945, NA RG 226, Entry 125A, Box 2, Folder 21.

50. Fossel to Tikanker, 24 Nov. 1943, NA RG 226, Entry 190, Box 310, Folder 260.

51. See Bern to OSS, Washington, 1 Nov. 1943, NA RG 226, Entry 134, Box 170 (Nov.–Dec. 1943). Dulles may or may not have been right: one Legation code, sometimes used by OSS, had been broken, but Dulles already knew about that. The OSS codes were not broken.

52. For a somewhat garbled version of OSS Stockholm's immediate response to Hewitt's plan, Hoover, *Memories*, 216. Then Tikander to Johnson, 4 Jan. 1944, NA RG 84, Stockholm Top Secret Correspondence, Box 1, Folder 6 (1943).

53. Johnson to Secretary of State, 11 Jan. 1944, and Johnson to Dunn, 11 Jan. 1944, NA RG 84, Stockholm Top Secret Correspondence, Box 1, Folder 6 (1943), 711.9.

54. Fossel to Tikander, 3 Jan. 1944, RG 226, Entry 190, Box 310, Folder 260. Maddox to Donovan, 20 Feb. 1944, NA RG 226, Entry 180, Roll 28. *FRUS* 1944, vol. I, 496.

55. Maddox to Donovan, 20 Feb. 1944, and Hewitt's 'Contact with Himmler', undated, NA RG 226, Entry 180, Roll 28, marked 'written at the request of General Donovan'.

56. Donovan to FDR, 20 March 1944, OSS Safe File, Box 6, President's Secretary's File, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY, cited by Bradley F. Smith, *The Shadow Warriors: OSS and the Origins of the CIA* (New York 1983), 222.

57. Schellenberg statement of 6 Aug. 1945, NA RG 226, Entry 125A, Box 2, Folder 21.

58. Hoover, *Memories*, 217.

59. Interrogation of Schüddekopf, 13 Nov. 1945, NA RG 226, Entry 125, Box 28, Folder 385.

60. Himmler's agenda notes for meeting with Hitler, 12 Sept. 1944, NA RG 242, T-175/R 94/2615061–62. See also, Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (New York 1994), 719–20.

61. Interrogation summary of Giselber Wirsing, [July 1945], NA RG 226, Entry 109, Box 35.

Richard Breitman
is Professor of History at the American
University in Washington DC, and co-
editor of *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*.
His most recent books are *The Architect of
Genocide: Himmler and the Final Solution*
and, with Walter Laqueur, *Breaking the
Silence: The German who Exposed the
Final Solution*.