

ARMED RESISTANCE TO THE HOLOCAUST

By David B. Kopel

Contrary to myth of Jewish passivity, many Jews did fight back during the Holocaust. They shut down the extermination camp at Sobibor, rose up in the Warsaw Ghetto, and fought in the woods and swamps all over Eastern Europe. Indeed, Jews resisted at a higher rate than did any other population under Nazi rule. The experience of the Holocaust shows why Jews, and all people of good will, should support the right of potential genocide victims to possess defensive arms, and refutes the notion that violence is necessarily immoral.

David B. Kopel is Research Director of the Independence Institute, in Golden, Colorado, and a member of the International Association of Genocide Scholars.

Keywords: Holocaust, Resistance, Firearms, Genocide

This Article examines the record of violent Jewish resistance to the Holocaust. It suggests that Jewish resistance was extensive, and succeeded in saving many lives. The record also explains that a key impediment to even more effective resistance was the lack of firearms, as well as Jewish unfamiliarity with arms during the pre-war years. The article dispels the myth of Jewish passivity during the Holocaust, and the myth that courageous civilians with firearms are helpless against a powerful, genocidal tyranny.

EVIL PEOPLE

When we examine the record of Jews and the Holocaust, it is necessary to tell the story of some people who behaved very wickedly. Although their violations may have been the result of the great stresses and pressures of the time, it cannot be denied that these people performed terrible acts. If you, reader, are a pacifist, then you must not apply these words to the Nazis alone. For a committed pacifist, these words must also apply to the Jews who used violence to resist the Holocaust. If violence—especially deadly violence—is always and everywhere immoral, then the Jews who violently resisted

Hitler acted immorally. Rather than killing the extermination camp guards at Sobibor, the Jews should have allowed themselves to be slaughtered. Rather than waging partisan warfare in the woods of Eastern Europe, the Jews should not have picked up guns.

If you can honestly say that the story of Jewish resistance to Hitler is horrific rather than honorable, if you sincerely believe that the Jews did the wrong thing when they fought back, then you may wear the title of a consistent pacifist. If, on the other hand, you think that the Jews were not blameworthy for what they did, then you are not a complete pacifist. If Jewish violence against Hitler was right, then violence is not always and everywhere wrong.

People may disagree about the prudence or the appropriateness of violence in different circumstance—but the disagreement is about circumstances. The nature of disagreement recognizes that, in at least some circumstances, violence is not wrongful. Indeed, the failure to use violence may itself be wrongful.

Let us now examine the record of defensive Jewish violence during the Holocaust.

SOBIBOR

Despite pleas from Jewish organizations, the Allies never bombed the train tracks leading to the extermination camps. Historians still argue about whether the Allied decision was correct; some argue that the missions were too dangerous, that the bombers were needed elsewhere, or that the tracks could have been quickly repaired. Whatever the merits of the Allied refusal, the fact remains that every extermination camp in Nazi Europe continued operating until Allied ground forces advanced to the general area. There was never any offensive aimed specifically at an extermination camp.

The one extermination camp that was put out of business early was Sobibor, in Poland. As detailed in the book and movie *Escape from Sobibor*, and in memoirs of the survivors, Sobibor was a horribly efficient camp, gassing thousands of people per day.¹ The camp was run by Germans with the assistance of several dozen Ukrainian guards. Much of the day-to-day work of the camp, such as carpentry, sewing uniforms, and processing the dead bodies, was performed by a crew of specially-selected Jews, who performed the work in

exchange for, temporarily, being allowed to live.

When some Soviet Jewish prisoners of war were brought into the camp, the P.O.W.s began organizing an escape. Although there was a constant danger that Jewish spies, in exchange for favored treatment, might reveal the plans to the Nazis, the plan went forward. With crude improvised weapons, the inmates hurriedly killed a few Nazi officers, and obtained the keys to the camp armory.

In the wild battle that ensued, 600 prisoners tried to flee; about 400 of them escaped the camp boundaries, and about half of them survived the land mine field around the camp. More escapees were caught later, but a band of 60 men and women, led by the Soviet officer Alexander Perchersky, made contact with Soviet partisans.² Ten SS troops were killed, and one was wounded. Thirty-eight Ukrainian guards were killed or wounded, while forty Ukrainian guards took the opportunity to desert.³

Four days after the revolt, a special German unit obliterated the Sobibor camp, attempting to keep the revolt a secret.⁴ A death camp which had already murdered six hundred thousand people was put out of operation forever.⁵

“Violence never solves anything” is one of the platitudes which American schoolchildren are told over and over. Sobibor shows that the platitude is a deadly falsehood. Violence solved Sobibor. The solution to Hitler’s Final Solution was violence—the violent destruction of the Nazi regime. The Jews at Sobibor did their part.

Sobibor was the greatest camp revolt, but it was not the only one. Jews rose up at four other extermination camps and eighteen forced labor camps or death camps.⁶ Of these, the August 1943 revolt of 700 inmates at Treblinka was the most successful. The prisoners used improvised explosives to set fires, and home-made knives to kill guards. The huge fire disabled much of Treblinka. About 150 to 200 prisoners escaped, and of them, a dozen survived until the end of the war.⁷ None would have survived had they remained passive, and all seven hundred died with honor.

Of all the German concentration and extermination camps that were built throughout Europe, it was *only* the Jewish camps where there were revolts. (Except for a rebellion by Soviet prisoners of war at the Ebensee camp.)⁸

THE WARSAW GHETTO

Before the war, about ten percent of Poland's population was Jewish. In the middle ages, Poland had been a welcoming, tolerant, and free nation, and many Jews emigrated there. But when Poland regained its independence in 1919 thanks to the Versailles Treaty, the nation quickly degenerated into a military dictatorship which encouraged anti-Semitism.

In Poland, as in other Eastern European areas under Nazi military rule, all the Jews in a city would be ordered to move into a walled ghetto. Movement in and out of the ghetto was very strictly controlled. The Germans would set up a *Judenrät* of collaborationist Jews to run the ghetto, and to punish any attempts at rebellion. The *Judenrät* received special privileges from the Nazis. Often, the *Judenrät* was told that as long as the ghetto worked hard to produce factory goods for the Germans, the ghetto would be allowed to survive.

Eventually, the Germans would begin deporting large numbers of people from the ghetto—ostensibly for resettlement in labor camps, but almost always for extermination. The *Judenrät* would be required to select the Jews to be deported. Eventually, the whole ghetto would be depopulated, and the area would be declared *Judenrein* (Jew-free).

In Warsaw, the large pre-war Jewish population was initially supplemented by large numbers of Jews who were shipped in from other cities. The Jews were forced to live on starvation rations, and many thousands in the ghetto died from starvation or contagious disease. The Germans eventually cut the size of the ghetto in half, consolidating the survivors into extremely crowded conditions. Deportations to the death camps continued to depopulate the ghetto.

In late 1942, Emmanuel Ringelblum, the well-educated author of a diary of life in the Warsaw Ghetto, wrote:

Whomever you talk to, you hear the same cry: The resettlement never should have been permitted. We should have run into the street, set fire to everything in sight, have torn down the walls, and escaped to the Other Side. The Germans would have taken their revenge. It would have cost tens of thousands of lives, but not 300,000. Now we are ashamed of ourselves,

disgraced in our own eyes, and in the eyes of the world, where our docility has earned us nothing. This must not be repeated now. We must put up a resistance, defend ourselves against the enemy, man and child.⁹

On January 18, 1943, the Germans rounded up seven thousand Jews and sent them to the extermination camp at Treblinka; they killed six hundred more Jews right in Warsaw. But on that day, an uprising began. In the beginning, the Jewish Fighting Organization had about 600 volunteers; the Jewish Military Association had about 400, and there were thousands more in spontaneous small groups.¹⁰ The Jews had only ten handguns, but the Germans did not realize how under-armed the Jewish fighters were.

After four days of fighting, the Germans on January 21 pulled back from the ghetto, to organize better. Another diary written in the Warsaw ghetto exulted:

In the four days of fighting we had made up for the same of Jewish passivity in the first extermination action of July, 1942.

Not only the Germans were shocked by the unexpected resistance, Jews too were astonished. They could not imagine until then that the beaten, exhausted victims could rise against a mighty enemy who had conquered all of Europe. Many Jews who were in the streets of Warsaw during the fighting refused to believe that on Zamenhof and Mila Streets Jewish boys and girls had attacked Germans. The large-scale fighting which followed convinced all that it was possible.¹¹

In February 1943, Polish Home Army transferred 50 revolvers (many of them defective), 50 hand grenades, and four pounds of explosives to the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto. The Warsaw Jews also manufactured their own explosives, including Molotov cocktails. But, wrote Ringelblum, “their most potent weapon was their deep sense of national pride and responsibility.”¹²

On February 16, 1943, Heinrich Himmler ordered that the Warsaw ghetto be exterminated on April 19. The plan was to give Hitler a *Judenrein* Warsaw as a present for his April 20 birthday.

On that night of April 19, the Warsaw Jews partook of the Pass-over Seder. Since September 1939, they had eaten the bitter herbs of slavery. Now, they were drinking the wine of freedom.

The Nazi Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, wrote in his diary, “the joke cannot last much longer, but it shows what the Jews are capable of when they have arms in their hands.”¹³

The Nazis brought in tanks. The Jews were ready with explosives. First one tank and then a second were immobilized in the middle of the street, in flames, their crews burned alive. Ringelblum recalled:

Now the fighters as well as the non-combatant Jews who have crawled out of their hiding places have reached the pinnacle of jubilation....According to one eyewitness account, “The faces who only yesterday reflected terror and despair now shone with an unusual joy which is difficult to describe. This was a joy free from all personal motives, a joy imbued with the pride that that ghetto was fighting.”

Another eyewitness describes the confusion in the German ranks: “There runs a German soldier shrieking like an insane one, the helmet on his head on fire. Another one shouts madly ‘Juden...Waffen...Juden...Waffen!’”¹⁴ [Jews...weapons!]

Eventually, the Jewish forces began to run out of ammunition.¹⁵ The Warsaw Jews, like the Jews throughout Europe, were unable to produce their own ammunition. There was hardly any gun culture among European Jews of the 1930s, so few Jews had the equipment for “reloading”—the home manufacture of ammunition.

Stymied in house-to-house fighting, the Germans began to burn the ghetto to the ground on April 22. The Warsaw Ghetto fire was probably the largest urban fire in Europe since Nero’s fire in Rome.¹⁶ On April 23, Himmler ordered SS Major General Jürgen Stroop to finish things quickly, and Stroop promised to complete his job that same day. But he could not.

A poster appeared in Warsaw that day in which the JFO assured the Christian Polish resistance that the Jews would never surrender. The poster promised, “You have seen and will see that every door-

stop in the ghetto is and will continue to be a fortress. We may all perish in the struggle but we shall not surrender....Long live the brotherhood of weapons and the blood of fighting Poland! Long live Freedom! Death to the murderous and criminal occupants."¹⁷

On May 16, Stroop reported that the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw "no longer exists." Himmler ordered a celebratory event: blowing up a beautiful large synagogue which had been built in 1877. The explosion could be felt all over Warsaw. Yet on that very day, Jewish fighters carried out more attacks in Warsaw. Fighting continued until July. Some Jews managed to hide in the ghetto until August 1944, when they joined the Polish uprising that month.¹⁸ The Germans had suffered over a thousand casualties in the first week of fighting alone.¹⁹

The Warsaw Jews knew they had almost no chance of survival. They decided that it was better to die fighting than to die in a gas chamber. It was better to kill at least some of the killers, than to let them massacre Jews with impunity. Ringelblum wrote, "We took stock of our position and saw that this was a struggle between a fly and an elephant. But our national dignity dictated to us that the Jews must offer resistance and not allow themselves to be led wantonly to slaughter."²⁰

Warsaw was the first mass civilian uprising against the Nazis anywhere in Europe. On April 23, the Jewish commander, 25-year-old Mordechai Anielewicz, had written, "I have a feeling that great things are happening, that what we have undertaken is of tremendous significance."²¹ He was right.

As the West learned about the Warsaw Revolt, the Western media began to change its attitude towards Jews. "They concluded that the Jews had earned the right to be regarded not as supplicants, but as allies."²² An article in *Harper's* explained, "As the British press was the first to admit, the Jews now have a new and different claim for consideration, a claim not of passive victims, but of active allies and partners who have fought the common enemy."²³

MORE RESISTANCE

Warsaw was a spectacular battle, but it was not the only ghetto uprising. In the Jewish ghetto in Czestochowa, Poland, a Jewish resis-

tance group manufactured home-made grenades, and escaped into the woods to wage partisan warfare.²⁴ There were five other uprisings in Polish ghettos, and still more in Lithuania and Byelorussia.²⁵

For example, Bialystok, which is now part of modern Belarus, belonged to Poland before the war. The Soviets took the city in 1939, because the Hitler-Stalin Pact entitled them to the eastern third of Poland. The Nazis overran Bialystok in June 1941, when they invaded the U.S.S.R. Some Jews began organizing resistance as soon as the Germans took over. But arms were so difficult to find that even by the winter of 1941, there was not a single firearm in the entire ghetto. Thus, “All the activities and negotiations” for active resistance “came to an end at the weak focal point—arms.”²⁶

Preparing for a German attack on the ghetto, Jewish improvised “cold” weapons, such as a light bulb filled with sulfuric acid or primitive knives created by sharpening rusty iron rods. They also studied judo. But they knew that their cold weapons and martial artistry could only be used in personal self-defense; firearms were essential for the ghetto to be able to repulse a German assault.²⁷ In the summer of 1942, a rifle and two handguns were obtained. There could have been more weapons, since the fleeing Soviet armies had left many rifles lying around. However, the Nazis warned that any Jew found with a gun would be executed, and so many Jews abandoned or destroyed any rifle they found, lest the Nazis discover it during a search.²⁸

Some Jews from the ghetto began slipping into the woods for partisan warfare. There, they received no help from the Allies, but managed to steal some weapons from the Germans, and to manufacture some explosives. The partisans were hampered by a shortage of firearms.²⁹ Of the Jews who escaped to fight in the forest, about forty percent survived the war.³⁰

In August 1943, the Soviet army was rolling the Germans back. Before the Soviets could reach the Jews, the Germans determined to liquidate them. The 40,000 Jews in Bialystok fought the best they could for several days, but they were greatly underarmed, and the Germans received significant intelligence assistance from Jewish “police” collaborators.³¹

Jews in the Marcinkonis, Lithuania, ghetto revolted too. Although the revolt was suppressed, some Jews escaped to the forests,

where they were able to buy three rifles from a friendly peasant. "The possession of firearms made the Jews feel more secure."³² The Jews joined up with the Davidov company, a group of Soviet partisans working in the area. The Jews' knowledge of the region helped the Davidov company carry out many successful acts of sabotage against railroads, spies, and other targets.

The Bialystok/Marcinkonis pattern was more common than the Warsaw pattern; ghetto revolts were usually suppressed in a few days. The most effective Jewish resistance fighters were not those who made a last stand in the ghetto, but those who could flee to the woods to conduct partisan warfare. Partisan warfare was much easier in the thick woods and swamps of eastern Poland, Byelorussia, and Lithuania than in western Poland.

The Jews of Minsk, Belarus, had a survival rate "50 percent greater than in any other section of eastern Europe." The higher survival rate "was due to primarily to early organization of an underground to stand up to the enemy." Approximately 10,000 of the 80,000 Jews in Minsk escaped to the wood to fight as partisans.³³ Half of them survived the war.³⁴

Among the most famous partisans "Uncle Misha" (*Diadia Mishka*). He led 16 other Jews out of the ghetto in Volhynia, Russia. They started with only one gun and five rounds of ammunition, but they grew into a mighty band of one hundred partisans.³⁵

VILNA

Vilna, Lithuania, was a great center of Jewish learning, compared by some visitors to Jerusalem.

Plans for resistance began in January 1942. The Jews' only weapons were smuggled in from nearby German arms factories where the Jews performed slave labor. Hopeful of liberation by the Russian army, many of the Vilna Jews did not support the partisans. Partisan resistance postponed by three weeks the German plans to transport all the inhabitants of the Vilna ghetto to death camps, but the deportation of 40,000 Jews was accomplished by the end of September 1943.³⁶

A young poet named Abba Kovner led the resistance movement, known as the Avengers, in the woods around Vilna. His lieu-

tenants, and bedmates, were teenage girls, Vitka Kempner and Ruzka Korczak.

The Avengers were the first partisans in Nazi Europe to blow up a German train.

Towards the end of the war, the Avengers shepherded huge numbers of Jews to Palestine, in violation of the British blockade.

Before the war, Ruzka had belonged to left-wing Zionist youth group called “The Young Guard” (*HaShomer HaTz’a’ir*) which trained Jews in self-defense, and taught the older boys how to shoot.³⁷ Abba was not religious, but he was a fervent Zionist, loving to read the Bible stories of Jewish warriors, and aiming to emulate the Jewish Bible heroes.³⁸

In the Vilna Ghetto, it was Abba Kovner who first perceived that the tightening of the Nazi oppression was not just a temporary imposition by a local German official; it was a step towards the total destruction of the Jews. The only way out, he argued, was “Revolt and armed defense. This is the only way which promises any dignity for our people.”³⁹

Other Jews countered that revolt was hopeless because the Germans were so strong, and that collective reprisals by the Germans would just lead to more Jewish deaths. Ruzka Korczak retorted that the stories of Jewish heroism could not remain only “a part of our ancient history. They must be part of our real life as well.” The next generation of Jews must have something to admire. “How good will they be if their entire history is one of slaughter and extermination? We cannot allow that. It must also have heroic struggles, self-defense, war, even death with honor.”⁴⁰

LITTLE WANDA WITH THE BRAIDS

Vilna was typical, in that the young people were usually the ones who wanted to fight, and the elders usually counseled against causing trouble. Most of the partisan leaders and fighters were young.

Niuta Teitelbaum was a beautiful 24-year-old Jewish Polish woman who looked like she was sixteen. She was an expert smuggler of people and weapons, and instructed women’s partisan cells. Her units blew up trains, artillery emplacements, and other German targets.

Once, wearing traditional Polish clothing and a kerchief on her hair, she talked her way past a series of Gestapo guards, whispering that she was going to see the SS commander on “private business.” Alone with the commander in his office, she drew a revolver, shot him dead, and calmly left the building.⁴¹ She demonstrated that some Jews still had the spirit of Ehud and Judith.

SURVIVAL RATES

Getting into the woods was no guarantee of survival. Typically, Jews from working-class backgrounds had an easier time adjusting to life in the woods than did the educated elite.⁴² As soon as the Germans took over a city, they tended to kill the Jewish educated class first.⁴³

In the woods and swamps of Eastern Europe, the Jewish partisans were often attacked by local civilians, or by non-Jewish partisan groups, including remnants of the Russian or Polish armies. For Jews who joined Soviet partisan units, the death rate was as high as 80 percent—compared to an overall death rate for non-Jewish Soviet partisans of 33-52 percent.⁴⁴

The most amazing survival rate was in the Bielski Brothers Jewish partisan force. Unlike other partisan units, the three Bielski Brothers took in the elderly, women, and children. Eventually, the Bielski partisans grew to over 1,200 people. Ninety-five percent of them survived.⁴⁵ Although the Bielskis fought hard, they decided that saving Jews was more important than killing Germans. Tuvia Bielski remarked, “I would rather save one old Jewish woman than kill ten German soldiers.”⁴⁶ He did plenty of both. The Bielski Brothers were the largest Jewish partisan force anywhere in Europe. On the day the Bielski unit was disbanded, it comprised 1,140 Jews, including 149 armed combatants.⁴⁷ Just in the period from the fall of 1943 to the summer of 1944, the Bielski fighters carried out 38 combat missions, destroying two locomotives, 23 train cars, 32 telegraph poles, and four bridges.⁴⁸ Over the course of the war, the Bielski unit killed 381 enemy fighters, as well as collaborators.⁴⁹

PASSIVE JEWS?

In 1942-43, Jews constituted half of all the partisans in Poland.⁵⁰ Overall, about thirty thousand Jewish partisans fought in Eastern Europe. There were armed revolts in over forty different ghettos, mostly in Eastern Poland.⁵¹

In other parts of Europe, Jews likewise joined the resistance at much higher rates than the rest of the population. Unlike in Eastern Europe, Jews were generally able to participate as individuals in the national resistance, rather than having to fight in separate units.

For example, in France, Jews amounted to less than one percent of French population, but comprised about 15-20 percent of the French Resistance.⁵²

In Greece too, Jews were disproportionately involved in the resistance. In Thessaly, a Jewish partisan unit in the mountains was led by the septuagenarian Rabbi Moshe Pesah, who carried his own rifle. The Athenian Jew Jacques Costis commanded the team which demolished the Gorgopotoma Bridge, thereby breaking the link between the mainland and Peloponnesian Peninsula, and interfering with the delivery of supplies to Rommel's *Afrika Korps*—which was aiming to capture Egypt, and then sweep into British Palestine, there to carry out the wishes of Hitler's ally the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem that all the Jews be exterminated.

ARMS ARE FOR LIVING

Although Jews resisted Hitler more so than any other group behind Nazi lines, the majority of Jews did not engage in armed resistance. Many Jews failed to realize until too late that Hitler was different from their previous enemies. Hitler had been telling the truth when he said he meant to wipe out all the Jews; unlike almost all prior enemies of the Jews, Hitler did not intend merely to exploit them economically, to move them to new locations, or to kill only some of them.

Another huge barrier to resistance was that the Jews were unarmed. Except in the Zionist self-defense units, there was no gun culture among most of Europe's Jews. Pre-war Poland, the home of the largest number of Jews who were murdered, was a poorly armed

nation. The anti-Semitic government was hostile to gun ownership by workers.⁵³

Unlike all the other undergrounds in Europe, the Jewish partisans received no weapons from the Allies.⁵⁴ Holocaust scholar Nechama Tec summarizes: “As regards resistance, in practical terms, the Allies had virtually no interest in the Jews. This indifference translated into a rejection of all known Jewish pleas, including those requesting arms and ammunition. It goes without saying that the Jews experienced a chronic arms shortage.”⁵⁵ (The U.S. and Britain did supply arms to the French Resistance, which had a large number of Jews. The Americans and British also supplied arms to the Soviet Union, which in turn supplied some arms to Soviet partisan units, and some of the Soviet units included Jews.)

According to Emmanuel Ringlebaum’s history of the Warsaw Ghetto, “We state firmly that had the responsible Polish authorities extended moral support and helped us with arms, the Germans would have had to pay for the sea of Jewish blood shed in July, August, and September 1942,” as Jews were deported to Treblinka.⁵⁶

Writes the Holocaust historian Abram L. Sachar:

The indispensable need, of course, was arms. As soon as some Jews, even in the camps themselves, obtained possession of a weapon, however pathetically inadequate—a rifle, an ax, a sewer cover, a homemade bomb—they used it and often took Nazis with them to death.⁵⁷

Thus, writes Sachar, “the difference between resistance and submission depended very largely upon who was in possession of the arms that back up the will to do or die.”⁵⁸

The Warsaw ghetto commander, Mordechai Anielewicz, believed that:

We should have trained the youth in use of live and cold ammunition. We should have raised them in a spirit of revenge against the greatest enemy of the Jews, of all mankind, and of all times....⁵⁹

In 1967, the International Society for the Prevention of Crime held a Congress in Paris on the prevention of genocide. The Con-

gress concluded that

defensive measures are the most effective means for the prevention of genocide. Not all aggression is criminal. A defense reaction is for the human race what the wind is for navigation—the result depends on the direction. The most moral violence is that used in legitimate self-defense, the most sacred judicial institution.⁶⁰

NO MORE GENOCIDE

Today, almost every religious group in the world has deplored the Holocaust. The only significant exceptions are in the Muslim world; Hitler's admirers at the time included the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem (the mentor of Yassir Arafat) and the 1943 founders of the Ba'ath Party in Iraq and Syria.

There is a difference, though, between retrospectively deploring the Holocaust, and taking action to prevent future genocides. It is nice for human rights groups to encourage democracy and a free press, but neither are guarantees against genocide. Adolf Hitler obtained power legally in Weimar Germany, a democratic nation with a free press. It is also nice for religious groups to encourage war crimes trials for people who perpetrate genocide. The trials of Serbian and Rwandan mass murderers may have some deterrent effect.

The historical record shows that, almost without exception, genocide is preceded by a very careful government program that disarms the future victims of genocide. Genocide is almost never attempted against an armed population. Armenia, Bosnia, Cambodia, China, Guatemala, Rwanda, the Soviet Union, Sudan, Uganda, Zimbabwe and Nazi Europe are among the places where genocidal tyrants made very sure that the victim populations were as disarmed as possible; only after disarmament did genocide begin.⁶¹ However much gun prohibition activists may scoff at the idea of civilian resistance to genocide, the governments which carry out genocide take the idea of armed civilians quite seriously.

Armed Jews (or armed Cambodians, or Chinese, or other genocide victims) would not necessarily be able to fight open-field battles against standing armies. But to deter genocide, an armed population

does not have to fight such battles.

The kind of people who specialize in perpetrating genocide are bullies. How many bullies are willing to take a chance of getting shot by the intended victim? If potential massacre victims can plausibly threaten to harm at least a few of their attackers, then the calculus of the attackers may change dramatically.

Besides directly facilitating the ability of armed soldiers to control unarmed civilian genocide victims, there is a second way in which disarmament promotes genocide. As the American Founder Joel Barlow wrote, “Disarmament palsies the hand and brutalizes the mind: an habitual disuse of physical force totally destroys the moral; and men lose at once the power of protecting themselves, and of discerning the cause of their oppression.”⁶²

If every family in the world owned a good-quality rifle and an ample supply of ammunition, genocide would be greatly reduced, and perhaps eliminated. Not all countries with severe gun controls perpetrate genocide; but no genocidal governments allow any but the most politically reliable segments of the population to own guns. Because every government which in the last hundred years which has engaged in genocide has first disarmed its victim population, there is reason to believe that those governments see a relationship between gun control and the maintenance of the government’s murderous power.

Today, the United Nations and gun prohibition lobbies are attempting to outlaw civilian gun ownership, especially by “non-state actors”—persons who are not approved by the government. Only the intransigence of the U.S. delegation at the 2001 and 2006 U.N. gun control conferences prevented the creation of binding international law to forbid firearms transfer to “non-state actors”—an international law which would have prohibited the supplying of firearms to the American revolutionaries in 1776 and to the Jews in British Palestine in 1945-48, and to the resistance movements in every nation whose government formally surrendered to Hitler. The victims of contemporary genocides have the same moral right to fight for their lives as did the Jews in the Holocaust. Accordingly, Israel and all other freedom-loving nations should be in the forefront of opposition to international efforts to prohibit gun ownership by groups which are targeted for genocide or are at risk of being targeted.

ENDNOTES

1. Richard Rashke, *Escape from Sobibor* (Urbana, Illinois: Univ. of Illinois Pr., 1995). The movie was produced by CBS Television, and is available on DVD and VHS.
2. Alexander Perchersky, "Revolt in Sobibor," in *They Fought Back*, ed., Yuri Suhl (N.Y.: Paperback Library, 1968; 1st pub. 1967), p. 56.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
6. Nechama Tec, *Jewish Resistance: Facts, Omissions, Distortions* (Washington, D.C.: United States Holocaust Museum, Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, 1997), p. 1; Yehuda Bauer, *The Jewish Emergence from Powerlessness* (Toronto, Canada: Univ. of Toronto Pr., 1979), p. 31 (reporting five other extermination camp revolts).
7. Samuel Rajzman, "Uprising in Treblinka," in *They Fought Back*, pp. 146-47.
8. Bauer, p. 31.
9. Emmanuel Ringelblum *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto: The Journal of Emmanuel Ringelblum*, ed. & transl., Jacob Solan (N.Y.: Schocken Books, 1958), p. 326.
10. Ber Mark, "The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising," in Suhl, pp. 104-06.
11. Tuvia Borzykowski, *Between Tumbling Walls*, transl., Mendel Kohansky (Western Galilee, Israel: Ghetto Fighters' House, 2d ed. 1976), pp. 29-30.
12. Yuri Suhl, Introduction to *They Fought Back*, p. 15.
13. Suhl, p. 15.
14. Ringelblum in *They Fought Back*, p. 110.
15. Mark, p. 104.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 120-21.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 128-29.
19. *They Fought Back*, p. 129.
20. Quoted in Suhl, p. 15.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
22. Abram L. Sachar, *The Redemption of the Unwanted: From the Liberation of the*

- Death Camps to the Founding of Israel* (N.Y. St. Martin's Pr., 1983), p. 54.
23. William Zukerman, "The Revolt in the Ghetto," *Harper's Magazine*, vol. 187 (no. 1120, Sept. 1943), p. 355.
24. William Glicksman, "The Story of Jewish Resistance in the Ghetto of Czestochowa," in *They Fought Back*, pp. 81-89.
25. Bauer, pp. 31-32.
26. Chaika Grossman, *The Underground Army: Fighters of Bialystok Ghetto*, transl., Schmuel Beeri (N.Y.: Holocaust Library, 1987)(1st pub. in Israel 1965), pp. 29, 47.
27. Grossman, pp. 96-98.
28. Grossman, pp. 122-23.
29. Nechama Tec, *Resilience and Courage: Women, Men, and the Holocaust* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Pr., 2003), p. 257.
30. Tec, *Resilience*, p. 257.
31. Reuben Ainsztein, "Bialystok Ghetto Revolt," in Suhl, pp. 151-59; Tec, *Resilience*, pp. 256-57; Sachar, pp. 55-56.
32. Leby Koniuchowski, "The Revolt of the Jews of Marcinkonis," in Suhl, p. 178.
33. Sachar, p. 56.
34. Yuri Suhl, "The Resistance Movement in the Ghetto of Minsk," in *They Fought Back*, p. 256.
35. Suhl, pp. 11, 278-99.
36. Abraham H. Foxman, "The Resistance Movement in the Vilna Ghetto," in Suhl, pp. 163-74.
37. Cohen, pp. 14-15.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-68.
41. Sachar, p. 50.
42. Tec, *Resilience*, p. 287.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 287.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 353-54; Tec, *Jewish Resistance*, p. 11; Yechiel Granatstein, *The War of a Jewish Partisan: A Youth Imperiled by his Russian Comrades and Nazi Conquerors*, transl., Charles Wengrov (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Mesorah Pubs., 1986).

45. Tec, *Resilience*, p. 354.

The Bielski Brothers saved even more Jews than Oskar Schindler, the German industrialist hero of the movie *Schindler's List*. Although it is well known in Hollywood that the movie's producer, Steven Spielberg, owns an enormous and expensive gun collection, Spielberg, apparently in search of an Academy Award, deferred to Hollywood sensibilities and omitted an important fact from the movie. As reported by Schindler's widow, when Schindler liberated the Jews, he gave them battlefield rifles.

46. Peter Duffy, *The Bielski Brothers* (HarperCollins: N.Y., 2002), p. x. During the war, Asael Bielski married Haya Dziencielski. He had no ring to give her, so he instead presented her a small German Mauser handgun. Duffy, p. 67.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 259.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 265.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 282. Tuvia Bielski argued that "size in itself offered safety, and history was proving him right. Scattered, small groups of Jewish runaways, even if armed, were at a disadvantage. Most were attacked and destroyed as soon as they were formed. Russian, Belorussian, and Polish partisans, while sometimes glad to destroy small Jewish units, were reluctant to attack a large group." Nechama Tec, *Defiance: The Bielski Partisans* (N.Y.: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1993), p. 180.

50. Bauer, p. 28.

51. Holocaust Exhibition, Imperial War Museum, London (viewed by author May 2003).

52. Sachar, p. 66; Suhl, *They Fought Back*, p. 302; Tec, *Jewish Resistance*, p. 2.

53. Grossman, p. 3.

54. Suhl, p. 13.

55. Tec, *Jewish Resistance*, p. 17.

56. Quoted in Suhl, p. 14.

57. Sachar, pp. 47-48.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

59. Emmanuel Ringelblum, "Comrade Mordechai," in *They Fought Back*, pp. 102-03.

60. V.V. Stanciu, "Reflections on the Congress for the Prevention of Genocide," in *Yad Vashem Studies on the European Jewish Catastrophe and Resistance*, vol. 7, ed., Livia Rothkirchen (Jerusalem, Israel: Yad Vashem, 1968), p. 187.

61. Aaron Zelman & Richard W. Stevens, *Death by "Gun Control": The Human Cost of Victim Disarmament* (Milwaukee: Jews for the Preservation of Firearms Ownership, 2001); David B. Kopel, Paul Gallant & Joanne D. Eisen, "Is Resisting Genocide a Human Right?" *Notre Dame Law Review*, vol. 81, no. 4 (2006): 1275-1346, <http://www.davekopel.com/2A/Foreign/genocide.pdf>; David B. Kopel, Paul Gallant & Joanne D. Eisen "Guns Ownership and Human Rights," *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, vol. 9, no. 2 (Winter/Spring 2003): 3-13, <http://www.davekopel.com/2A/Foreign/Brown-Journal-Kopel.pdf>.

62. Joel Barlow, *Advice to the Privileged Orders in the Several States of Europe: Resulting from the Necessity and Propriety of a General Revolution in the Principle of Government* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Pr., 1956)(1st pub. London, 1792), p. 45. Barlow was a prominent Federalist intellectual, and one of the "Connecticut Wits." He wrote extensively about the importance of moral character in sustaining the American republic.